



ACT-PROJECT

IMPROVING ACCESS TO
ALTERNATIVE CARE FOR
UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN
AGED 15-18



CEA(R)

Comissió Catalana
d'Ajuda al Refugiat



NIDOS
guardianship for refugees

SITUATION REPORT ITALY



SITUATION REPORT

ITALY



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INTRODUCTION

This report is the result of the ACT project. ACT is a cooperation of IRC Italy with project partners from Bulgaria and Spain, coordinated by Nidos in the Netherlands. The ACT-project aims to improve the access to and increase the quality of alternative care arrangements for unaccompanied children aged 15-18, through providing actors (interested in) developing alternative care arrangements (different from residential care) in countries of project partners and other member states (MS) with training of their staff (guardians and other practitioners that work in alternative care arrangements). It also aims at improving sustainability of offering alternative care in MS.

A situational analysis has been carried out which collected information about the accessibility and quality of alternative care arrangements for UAC aged 15-18 in Sicily. The result of the analysis are summarised in this report, ranging from information on the general context, including the available forms of care, to current good practices, challenges and needs and recommendations. The opinion and advice from the children are crucial and are therefore included in this report. The main stakeholders were consulted and brought together in stakeholder meetings to give their important input as well.

1 DESCRIPTION OF RELEVANT LEGISLATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL

1.1 General context

Between 2014 and 2019, 72,000 unaccompanied children (UAC) arrived in Italy by sea, 90 % of whom were between 15 and 17 years old¹. The significant presence of UAC, 6.054 as of December 2019, and the growing number of UAC who have turned 18 (around 60,000 over the last five years) have highlighted the need to better understand the measures and opportunities for the protection and social inclusion of this specific population group in their transition to adulthood.

1.2 The legal basis for the reception system

The principle of the best interest of the child, established in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified in Italy in 1991, is the basis for the adoption of any decision concerning children, including determining which Member State of the European Union (EU) is responsible for examining applications for international protection or verifying the possibility of family reunification within the Dublin system.

1.3 Legislation on guardianship for unaccompanied children

This process has been strengthened in the Italian legal system by the recent legislation for the protection of UAC, also known as *Legge Zampa* (Law 47/2017). In addition, the Law introduced a number of new elements, including:

- a unique procedure for the identification of UAC: this identification, which must be completed within ten days, requires that qualified staff of the first-level reception facility, with the help of an intercultural mediator, conducts an interview with the child aimed at examining his or her personal and family history, and at drawing out any other element that could be useful for his or her protection;
- an age assessment procedure to be followed when, during the identification, there is a well-founded doubt concerning the age declared by the UAC or whoever is assumed to be an UAC. If it is not possible to ascertain the identity with personal documents, a multidisciplinary approach will be adopted, by conducting socio-medical tests that respect the principle of gradual invasiveness

¹ <https://www.ismu.org/dati-sugli-sbarchi-gennaio-2020/>

for UAC (this method of ascertaining age aims to prevent the risk that UAC approaching the age of 18 are identified as adults);

- the role of the volunteer legal guardian, whose added value has been recognized by law and whose role has been standardized at the national level, regulating the scheduling and the competent authority for his/her appointment, the scope of his/her legal responsibilities and the number of UAC per guardian;
- the compilation of the *cartella sociale* (social file), drawn up by the reception facility staff. This is a key tool in assessing the best interest of the child.

Article 13 of *Legge Zampa* enables the youth court to assign the child to social services, when he or she is undertaking a social inclusion programme but still needs support to become autonomous after reaching the age of majority. Such “administrative follow-up” can also be requested by the social services. In any event, it cannot last beyond 21 years of age.

Refugee and migrant UAC in Italy have access to a type of residence permit granted on the grounds of the child being unaccompanied and/or separated. At the age of 18, the residence permit for UAC may be converted into a residence permit for study, work or job seeking. However, this conversion, by the approval of the Directorate-General for Immigration and Integration Policies of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, depends and is conditional to the situation in which the person concerned finds himself or herself.

Keeping the need to concretely assess each situation in the best interest of the child, the cases for which the request for an opinion to the Directorate General for Immigration and Integration Policies must not be sent are the following:

- for UAC who have been present in Italy for at least three years, benefitting from a social and civil integration project for a period of not less than two years;
- for UAC entrusted to relatives within the fourth degree, even if in possession of a residence permit for minors;
- for UAC for whom the Juvenile Court has ordered the *proseguo amministrativo* beyond the age of 18;
- for UAC who at the age of 18 are in possession of a residence permit for asylum, subsidiary protection or for humanitarian reasons.

On the other hand, a child may apply at the same time for both international protection and for a residence permit for UAC, or have access to other residence permits governed by the law under the same conditions as other third country nationals. When applying for international protection, UAC are granted certain procedural guarantees, including the right to a priority examination of their application, to be heard and to legal assistance. Law Decree 113/2018, converted into Law 132/2018, introduced an important change with the repeal of the residence permit for humanitarian reasons; this measure was widely used by the Territorial Commissions to protect UAC or former UAC asylum seekers who did not meet the conditions for the recognition of international protection in the form of asylum or subsidiary protection. With the same law, the Territorial Commission now has the possibility of recognizing a new residency permit for one year, for special protection – renewable in case of continued eligibility, but not convertible on expiry – for cases in which the foreigner cannot be rejected, expelled or extradited because of serious life threatening conditions who are not included in the refugee definition. With reference to the right to reception, the *Legge Zampa* has set the principle of non-differentiation among UAC on the basis of their legal status. This legislation requires local authorities to give priority to family foster care over placement in a reception facility (Article 7). In

October 2017, the National Integration Plan for holders of international protection also highlighted the measures needed to increase the reception system capacity and improve socio-economic integration through the full application of existing legislative instruments.

By establishing volunteer guardians for foreign unaccompanied children, the Government of Italy wanted to put an end to the diversified judicial practice to deal with children in migration in Italy at the time of the entry into force of the *Legge Zampa*². The fragmented practice, caused also by the number of unaccompanied children present in the different parts of Italy, concerned:

- the nature of guardianship, public/institutional in some parts of Italy and private/volunteer in others;
- the time necessary to appoint a guardian;
- the existence of monitoring mechanisms and their functioning.

The Italian Independent Authority for Children and Adolescents published an overview of the different guardianship practices in Italy in its 2016 Activity Report to the Parliament, illustrating the different approaches. Volunteer guardians are private citizens who need to meet specific criteria to be appointed, and must have received adequate training. Candidates are registered in a list of volunteer guardians for foreign unaccompanied children as soon as they have completed the training and have confirmed their availability. The volunteer guardian is an essential element of the Italian reception system for unaccompanied children. Guardians must be inter-connected and have regular contacts with all other relevant actors: social services, persons in charge of reception centres, regional education offices, youth courts and youth public prosecutors. The volunteer guardian plays a fundamental role to support the integration process in Italy of the unaccompanied child, for whom he or she is responsible. In July 2017, the Italian Independent Authority published a public call for the selection of persons suitable to exercise the role of guardians for unaccompanied children on a volunteer and non-remunerated basis. Article 1 of the public call establishes the requirements for the presentation of a request to become a volunteer guardian, including be “resident and regularly living” in the respective regions of Italy, have completed 25 years of age and:

- to possess Italian citizenship or to be a citizen of another EU Member State, a third country or a stateless person holding a regular residence permit, with adequate and proven knowledge of the Italian language;
- to be entitled to the full enjoyment of civil and political rights;
- to have a clean criminal record and not be subject to criminal proceedings, or the application of security or preventive measures, and
- to be free from impediments as provided for by Article 350 of the Italian Civil Code, in particular or to have free administration of own assets; or not be subject of orders for revocation, limitation or suspension of parental responsibility; or not have been subject to withdrawal of from other guardianship; or not be registered in the bankruptcy register; or have an irreproachable conduct, i.e. suitable from a moral point of view; or have time and energy available to carry out the function; or absence of any conflict of interest with the child.

² https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-it-guardianship-legal-update_en.pdf

1.4 Guardianship in practice

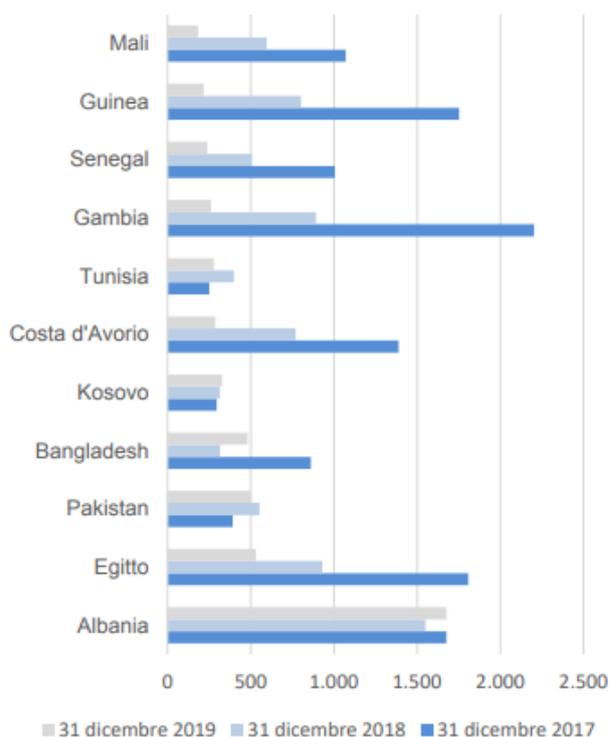
Volunteer guardians for unaccompanied children are to be appointed by the Courts for Minors while in the past, the responsibility to nominate volunteer guardians belonged to ordinary courts. The judicial procedure to appoint a guardian starts with the communication that the police must immediately send to the youth Public Prosecutor, informing him or her about the presence of an unaccompanied child. The President of the youth court or a judge delegated by the President is responsible to appoint the guardian, as well as to take any other measure for the protection of the child. A volunteer guardian, once appointed, can assume guardianship for up to three unaccompanied children at a time, unless there are specific and relevant reasons to depart from this rule. This limitation reflects the underlying logic of the volunteer guardianship model, as guardians must be the point of reference for the child, which requires establishing a relationship of trust. The volunteer guardian does not receive any remuneration for the exercise of his or her guardianship functions, nor the right to special leave from work. The volunteer guardian is also not entitled to a civil liability insurance. The volunteer guardian exercises his or her functions until the child reaches the age of majority. However, given that this arrangement intends to give a message of social solidarity focusing on the care of a person, it is desirable that the relationship between the former volunteer guardian and the child continues also after the child reaches the age of majority. As of 31st December 2019, 3.029 volunteer legal guardians had been selected, trained and appointed by local courts to provide guardianships to UAC in Italy; almost 60% of UAC present in the country to date has been provided with this type of guardianship.³

The *Legge Zampa* assigns the responsibility to monitor the state of implementation of the guardianship provisions to the Italian Independent Authority for Children and Adolescents. The relevant provision also requires that for this purpose the Ombudsman in the regions and the autonomous provinces cooperate regularly with the Italian Independent Authority for Children and Adolescents to whom they have to present a report on their activities every two months. Conclusions Law No. 47/2017 on “Provisions on protective measures for unaccompanied foreign children in Italy” adopts an innovative approach. Article 11, which institutionalises the volunteer guardian, addresses private citizens and relies on people’s willingness to guarantee a better future to the boys and girls who arrive in Italy without any adult responsible for them. By establishing a relationship of trust with the child, the volunteer guardian plays a fundamental role for the protection of children in migration. This in two ways: from the point of view of the individual child, the guardian provides support for his or her inclusion in the Italian society; from an institutional point of view, volunteer guardians are an essential instrument, a pillar for the management of children in migration.

³ <http://www.vita.it/it/article/2019/11/28/i-tutori-volontari-per-minori-stranieri-non-accompagnati-sono-3029/153428/>

2 PROFILE OF THE CHILDREN, RECEPTION & KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The total number of unaccompanied refugee and migrant children present in Italy as of 31st December 2019 was 6.054, out of which 5.737 boys and 317 girls. The main nationalities are: Albania (1.676), Egypt (531) and Pakistan (501). The graphs below, taken from the biannual Monitoring Report on UAC by the Italian Ministry of Labour⁴, shows the full breakdown per nationality. As of 31st December 2019 Sicily, hosted 1.1642 migrant UAC while Palermo hosted approximately 100. Between 2014 and 2018, 625,009 refugees and migrants arrived in Italy by sea, of whom 70,547 were UAC. Although the trend of arrivals by sea is declining, in 2018, a total of 3,536 UAC arrived in Italy.



CITTADINANZA		31 dic. 2017	31 dic. 2018	31 dic. 2019
Albania	N	1.677	1.550	1.676
	%	9,2	14,4	27,7
Egitto	N	1.807	930	531
	%	9,9	8,6	8,8
Pakistan	N	392	552	501
	%	2,1	5,1	8,3
Bangladesh	N	860	316	482
	%	4,7	2,9	8,0
Kosovo	N	296	315	328
	%	1,6	2,9	5,4
Costa d'Avorio	N	1.388	769	286
	%	7,6	7,1	4,7
Tunisia	N	251	398	278
	%	1,4	3,7	4,6
Gambia	N	2.202	892	260
	%	12,0	8,3	4,3
Senegal	N	1.006	505	239
	%	5,5	4,7	4,0
Guinea	N	1.752	802	217
	%	9,6	7,4	3,6
Mali	N	1.071	596	184
	%	5,9	5,5	3,0
Altre	N	5.601	3.162	1.072
	%	30,6	29,3	17,7
Totale	N	18.303	10.787	6.054
	%	100	100	100

In the first half of 2019, the proportion of UASC alone was still significant: 365 out of 2,779 UAC, or 13 %, arrived by sea.

Since 2015 most children arriving are 17 followed by 16-year-olds. Most UAC who came between 2013 and 2015 were Egyptians, yet in recent years their number has decreased, while simultaneously there has been an increased trend (20%) of children arriving from West African countries, reaching 41% of the total presence of UAC in 2018.

Despite the aim of the Italian authorities to achieve a more equitable geographical distribution of reception facilities for UAC across the country, to date, the Region of Sicily continues to host the largest number of UAC. At the end of 2018, it hosted 38% of the total number of UAC registered in Italy which decreased to 28.4% in June 2019, as a result of the decline of arrivals by sea. Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna and Lazio follow Sicily, with Egyptian and Albanian nationalities being the majority. Between 2013 and 2017, there was a steady increase in the issuance of residence permits for UAC, followed by a slight drop in 2017, at 30% of those present that year. In addition to the residence permits for UAC, there are also permits for foster care, family reasons and the integration of UAC. However, these

⁴ <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/minori-stranieri/Documents/Report-di-monitoraggio-MSNA-31-dicembre-2019.pdf>

permits have not been consistently recorded over the years and therefore do not allow to determine the trends. After the progressive increase in asylum applications from 2014, with a peak in 2017 of 9,782 applications, there was a sudden decline in 2018. With the decrease in applications, there was also a 62.4% decrease in 2017 in absolute terms of UAC asylum seekers, (from more than 9,700 in 2017 to 3,676 in 2018). The 377 UAC who applied for asylum in January and June 2019 make up only 2% of the total number of applicants. During 2018, 8,554 UAC asylum applications were examined, of which 5.8 % obtained refugee status; 2.6%, subsidiary protection; and 61 %, humanitarian protection, a reduction of 10 % compared to 2017 (Ministry of the Interior, 2018), but three times higher than the 20.9 % of foreign adults to whom it was granted. In 2018, more than a third of the examined paperwork concerned young Gambians and Nigerians, with the recognition of refugee status for 2 % and 17 % of applications, respectively, and humanitarian protection for 67 % and 52 % (Ministry of the Interior, National Commission for Asylum).

2.1 Key stakeholders

STAKEHOLDER	RESPONSIBILITIES / ROLE
State authorities	
Police stations (Questura)	Registering UAC and asylum applications or applications for residence permits and renewals
Territorial Commissions and Appeal Courts	Evaluate asylum claims and appeals
Ombudsman (National, Regional, Municipal)	Monitoring and safeguarding role, to ensure that the rights of individuals are upheld. In charge of the selection of legal guardians for unaccompanied children, as well as their training and follow up during their duties.
Special Court for children	Appointment of volunteer legal guardians
Local Social Services	Respond to child protection issues and provide individualized support to children
Ministry of Labour and Social Policies	Legislation including on child protection
Legal Guardians (volunteer)	Provide legal guardianship for unaccompanied children and follow up on their well-being in coordination with the other services
UN Agencies and NGOs	
UNHCR	Monitoring of the respect of rights of refugees and asylum seekers, including UAC. Provide the Territorial Commissions with advice on asylum applications
UNICEF	Supporting children including UAC, providing staff working with children with capacity building and monitoring.
Local NGOs	Running of shelters for adults/UAC, including alternative care arrangements for children in the different regions, supporting UAC in accessing basic needs and integration services such as legal documents, education and job placement.

3 AVAILABLE FORMS OF RECEPTION

3.1 Description of the reception system

Upon the arrival of an UAC on Italian territory, the standard procedure begins with identification and age assessment and placement in a reception center where he or she can be granted some kind of protection such as the possibility to seek for asylum or to submit a request for a residence permit and, again, the request for family reunification. Subsequently, the UAC is transferred to a second reception center where he or she can benefit from additional support such as enrollment in school, and individual follow up. Throughout all these steps, a volunteer legal guardian is appointed by the local court for minors to protect the UAC against possible violations of rights and effectively represent the best interest of the child.

There are different types of facilities for UAC, within a complex two-level reception system:

- a) first-line reception centers, where first aid is given to the child including legal assistance, and identification procedures carried out - the stay in the first reception centers should not exceed 30 days;
- b) second-line reception centers, offering long-term stay, psychosocial support services and individualized socio-educational follow-up.

In the second-line reception system, there are different types of accommodation facilities: from SPRAR structures to apartments where migrant UAC are mixed with Italian UAC and have the chance to better integrate with the local population. The legislation exclusively provide possibility for migrant UAC to be housed in the so-called Siproimi centers (formerly called SPRAR) where they have the right to stay up to the age of 18.

When reaching the age of 18, where necessary, the new adult can still stay at the Siproimi for a further 6 months. Even those who have not completed the international protection procedure or who are waiting for a response to a judicial measure or for justified reasons – to be evaluated by the central service of the Ministry of the Interior - can remain in the Siproimi after having turned 18. UAC turning 18 can also benefit from the *prosieguo amministrativo* up to the age of 21, if the local court for minors grants it upon submission of the individual plan and request by the legal guardian. The individual plan needs to include a clear path to social inclusion (education, professional training, etc.).

The volunteer legal guardian is the only person external to the reception system with whom the child establishes a relationship of trust, and he/she becomes a key actor in the otherwise fragmented monitoring system of reception facilities for UAC.

3.2 An overview of the reception possibilities and routing

To date, the reception system includes:

1. Governmental first-level reception facilities: these are meant to provide for the urgent needs and immediate protection of all UASC (known as AMIF or FAMI), in which UASC are received for the time strictly necessary (30 days) for identification, age assessment, the provision of information on his or her rights, including that of applying for international protection;
2. SIPROIMI second-level reception facilities: where all UASC, regardless of their legal status, are entitled to stay. UASC who have applied for international protection can remain until the conclusion of the procedure on status determination, even after turning 18. UASC who benefit from continued protection until the age of 21 can also remain within the SIPROIMI system;

3. Other types of reception facilities: these are managed by municipal authorities or the Prefecture where the child is located, and is used for UASC when the other two types of accommodations listed above are unavailable. Depending on where the research was carried out, these forms of reception have a different name (e.g. educational communities, community housing, CAS), but they all meet the accreditation criteria defined at the regional or municipal levels.
4. Foster family provisions are present in Italian legislation but not as practiced as the other types of care mainly because of very little numbers of UAC of younger age.

As of December 2019, 94.5% of the 6,054 minors present in Italy are accommodated in Government funded reception facilities, while 5.4% of the minors are hosted by private citizens. In particular, the UACs in second reception facilities are 5,150 and represent 85% of the minors present in Italy, while 9.4% of minors are in first reception facilities. First reception facilities included centers financed with resources from the FAMI fund (Asylum Migration and Integration Fund), temporary accommodation facilities activated by the Prefects, first reception facilities accredited/authorized by the Municipalities or Regions and, finally, emergency and temporary ones. The second reception includes the structures belonging to the SIPROIMI network, the second reception facilities financed by the FAMI fund and all second level facilities accredited/authorized at regional or municipal level. As of December 2019, there are a total of 4,003 SIPROIMI places dedicated to UAC, including 226 places in second reception financed by the FAMI fund.

For UAC who have been identified as victims of trafficking, the *Legge Zampa* establishes that special protection must be guaranteed to them and provides a specific program of assistance that ensures unaccompanied and separated children in their transition to adulthood in Italy adequate reception conditions and psychosocial, health and legal assistance, providing for their continued protection even after they turn 18. On living conditions in Italy and recognized rights, the new law has further consolidated the recognition of the right to health and education to UAC (Article 14).

3.3 Recent developments and opportunities

In practice in the past year, Italian and migrant UAC have been accommodated in the same alternative care facilities (mainly Supported Independent Living (SIL) comprised of 4/5 apartments in Palermo as of February 2020) but this arrangement will change in the future and they will probably be accommodated in separated housing because of the different sources of funding for SIL for Italians and for migrants UAC.

The possibility of accessing SIL for UAC is very limited and it is not linked with their legal status, since all UAC in Italy are able to obtain a residence permit on the grounds of being unaccompanied and without an adult. The availability of SIL arrangements vary significantly from city to region, thus the number of UAC that are able to benefit from such an alternative care system is still not widespread in Italy, living UAC mostly in the above four types of care arrangements.

3.3.1 Italian UAC in Sicily

The Ombudsman in collaboration with relevant local actors in charge of accommodation services is piloting a government funded project targeting UAC who are care-leavers. The project includes establishing a youth conference at local level to voice the situation of UAC and ensure their effective participation and introducing the presence of the so called "*tutor per l'autonomia*" (tutors for independence). Small groups of Italian UAC (4 to 6) will be sharing the same apartment in SIL and will benefit from an apprenticeship called *Borsa per l'Autonomia* for 3 years that can run until they reach 21 years of age. The support through *Borsa per l'Autonomia* is of 780 EUR per month, but if a minor is

staying in a center he/she is only entitled to receive half of it. After the support through *Borsa per l'Autonomia* ends the new adult can continue being supported, should it be necessary, by applying to receive the *Reddito di cittadinanza*, which is an unemployment benefit introduced by the Italian GVT in 2018.

3.3.2 Migrant/refugee UAC in Sicily

The Ombudsman, in collaboration with relevant local actors in charge of accommodation services is applying to receive funding from the government to establish SIPROIMI type of apartments to host migrant UAC in semi-independent living facilities. Around 200 places are expected to become available for UAC and new adults younger than 21 years of age in Palermo. The SIPROIMI represents a special project they can access until they turn 21 and if they are able to renew their residency permit. Funding for alternative care through the SIPROIMI project cover both basic services and more comprehensive support for UAC including: housing (apartments in SIL), services related to job readiness and ethno-psychology services, which is particularly important for migrant UAC who have traumas from past migration journey.

4 GOOD PRACTICES, CHALLENGES AND NEEDS ON PROVIDING ALTERNATIVE CARE TO UAC AGED 15-18

4.1 From the perspective of the children

As part of the ACT project, the IRC involved a small group of former unaccompanied children in a focus group discussion to understand better her point of view with regards to the reception they received while minors. Two males aged 18, one from Benin and one from Nigeria, and one 18 years old girl from Guinea attended the FGD. What emerged from their feedback on the current reception system concerns positive aspects including in particular:

- The supporting relationship that is built between the UAC and the operators who work in the reception centers
- The Possibility of learning the Italian language outside of formal school by interacting with them

Negative aspects of the current reception systems mentioned included:

- Limited training of the operators of the reception structures who are unable to read the needs and wishes of the young guests
- Presence of rules that are too restrictive, not shared, and do not take into consideration the specific needs and level of independence reached by the adolescent UAC
- Lack of a cross-cultural lenses to be able to understand habits, customs and cultures of UAC who have a different ethnic background, including preparing food that is closer to UAC's culinary habits
- Challenges linked with obtaining legal documentation: lengthy, complex and difficult processes, difficulties in orienting themselves in such a bureaucratic system, need for accompaniment
- Education and training: The compulsory basic education (learning the Italian language) is often not accompanied by a job training perspective

4.2 From the perspective stakeholders

4.2.1 Good practices

Alternative care systems for UAC can be declined in projects aimed at fostering independence through smaller scale housing, SIL, complete autonomy (through financial contribution to housing for new adults and/or foster care or family adoption).

Before placing a child in alternative care, the child goes through a preparatory phase during which he/she is usually accommodated in a second-line reception center. It is necessary to verify that the child has acquired sufficient skills and competence to be able to be placed in alternative care, and become a so called "care leaver".

The "Child for Child" project aims specifically at producing and documenting good practices to be applied in reception facilities for preparing UAC at becoming independent. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policies has launched forms of economic support aimed at young Italians while, at the level of the municipality of Palermo and some neighboring municipalities, a series of measures are being activated which can also be accessed by young migrants and refugees who just turned 18, in particular aimed at housing autonomy in various forms (housing contribution, Housing first, Housing led)

4.2.2 Possible challenges

Main challenges include:

- Difficulties in finding available foster families for UAC aged 15 to 18 as potential families are often oriented towards minors belonging to a younger age group.
- Granting stability of operators in reception facilities as there is a high turnover also due to short-term contracts, financial instability and delays in payments of salaries. This is often caused by the unstable timeline for transferring funds to NGOs operating alternative care by local authorities, varying from a few months to about a year of delay
- Individual projects for UAC are limited in time and often follow up is not funded by local authorities
- Difficulties in ensuring support to care leavers (semi-independent, independent) once they turn 18
- Still limited practice to make available for alternative care projects properties belonging to organized crime that have been repossessed by local authorities
- Need for institutional recognition and inclusion of individualized projects for UAC by the municipal social services
- Need to promote and fund awareness raising campaigns to recruit new foster families

4.2.3 Needs

During the consultation meetings, the actors involved were asked to identify which training needs are the most acute and the most urgent for operators and tutors. The topics of greatest interest are listed below:

- UAC have to cope with major language and cultural barriers and need specific courses and adequate accompaniment that can facilitate their entry into the world of work - it is necessary to equip the actors who work with UAC with these skills
- Provide operators with regular supervision that helps them to have a multi-cultural approach and to be able to understand UAC's behaviors
- Strengthen the presence and skills of cultural mediators in reception structures

- Deepen the knowledge of alternative care operators and volunteer legal guardians on the relevant legislation protecting UAC in order to be able to provide UAC with adequate support and accompaniment
- Document a mapping of services in the area, share it with the actors and keep it updated
- Provide training to operators and guardians on active listening, mediation, and on how to build a relationship of trust with the child
- Work on the motivation of the actors who support UAC, select motivated operators and keep them so.
- Strengthen the presence and role of volunteer legal guardians and recognize their key role in building a meaningful relationship with the child
- Define protocols with the institutional actors (social services, local courts) and with reception centers in recognizing the role of legal guardians even for the UAC who turned 18 and are benefitting from the *prosieguo amministrativo*
- Enhance the support to foster families in the individualized educational project for minors
- Build a safe space where the UAC can express his/her wishes and concerns and define clear and practical plans for his/her future

Establish a monitoring system of alternative and regular care by an independent party to evaluate the impact of individual projects activated for fostering independence so that corrective actions can be put in place in a timely manner if needed.

4.3 SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SIPROIMI with its holistic approach and the range of services offered to UASCs • the fact that the System that is currently implemented has a series of rules that help UASCs to grow and become responsible • the presence of voluntary guardians in alternative reception systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor motivation and training of foster families • Lack of accompaniment for foster families • The rules present in alternative reception systems can be misunderstood by UASCs also for reasons related to different cultural backgrounds • Lack of a supervisor in the semi-independent living arrangements can be hard to find a place that matches all the wishes and requirements of the child and the guardian. This specifically applies when finding a family for children aged 15-18.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus all efforts on facilitating autonomy paths for UASCs that make them independent under the guidance of an adult who helps them move around the territorial system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of job placement opportunities for UASCs in Sicily, and presence of language barriers • Uncertainty in the documentation that causes anxiety • Needs that change in the transition to adulthood

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- Creation of a support network that exploits the large social capital present in the reception context

- Possible political change at the national level which could negatively influence the measures implemented to date to support UASCs
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5 RECOMMENDATIONS

As an outcome of the stakeholders meeting held in Sicily, which included the Ombudsman for children and adolescents, reception center managers and staff, psychologists, cultural mediators and volunteer tutors, a series of actions have been identified as a key to improving the aforementioned system both from the point of view of better access for UAC and from the point of view of the offer of services within the courses. The main areas for improvement identified are summarized below:

- Change the procedures of the reception system: work immediately for planning in the direction of autonomy, enhance the Siproimi and the holistic approach;
- Provide more specific training of operators with respect to this new project;
- Strengthen the accompaniment in the search for work and placement of UAC in internships through the activism of operators and institutional support as fundamental elements for entering the labor market;
- Support a cultural transformation of services in the area so that they are equipped to be able to treat the foreign child as an interlocutor; at the moment, one-to-one accompaniment is required to ensure access to the services;
- Ongoing training of guardians on issues such as legal procedures and types of residence permits. Improve the way information is shared with guardians, and make sure that information is actually valid and up to date;
- Culturally appropriate psychosocial support made available for children, but also for tutors and operators;
- Redevelop the empty spaces available to create new apartments and alternative hospitality communities and autonomy paths.