



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

Training of Trainers Program Italy



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Published by: IRC Italy, Giovanni Battista da Soresina16, 20144 Milan, Italy
Stichting Nidos, Maliebaan 99, 3581 CH, Utrecht, the Netherlands

This Train the Trainer programme has been published as part of the ACT project (January 2020-December 2021)

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Co-funded by the
Asylum, Migration and
Integration Fund of
the European Union



INTRODUCTION

There are many reasons behind the arrival of UASC in Italy and the European Union. Regardless of nationality or status, they are children and adolescents and should be treated as such. Their right to specific care and assistance, enshrined in UN instruments and in EU law and policies, should be respected.

According to the preamble of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right of every child to grow up and be educated in a family environment is fundamental to the full and harmonious development of the personality. For boys and girls who are temporarily or permanently deprived of their family environment, appropriate hetero-familial care should be provided to protect their right to necessary care and assistance from the State. There is a general consensus among stakeholders in the EU that **alternative care (such as, foster families or homes for semi-autonomy, and supported independent living arrangements) is the best option for boys and girls who are unaccompanied or separated from their parents**. Despite the fact that these alternative systems have proven to be successful, cost-effective, less harmful, and more beneficial to the development of boys and girls, even today most UASC in the EU live in large government centers.

The ACT project (January 2020 - December 2021) aims to **improve access to and increase the quality of alternative care and reception solutions for MSNA aged 15-18**. The project includes two cycles of targeted training (a train-the-trainer, followed by cascade training) to volunteer mentors, practitioners and other stakeholders, with the aim of helping to develop quality alternative care arrangements and provide holistic support to UASC in project partner countries and other EU member states. The project is a collaboration between the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Italy, Lumos in Bulgaria, Associació Comissió Catalana d'Ajuda al Refugiat (CEAR) in Spain and coordinated by Nidos in the Netherlands.

During the first year of implementation of the ACT project, a situational analysis was conducted that collected information on the accessibility and quality of alternative reception models for unaccompanied boys and girls between the ages of 15 and 18 in Sicily. Specifically:

- Between January-May 2020, the IRC team conducted a desk research about the reception system for UASC in Italy, consulting secondary sources and recent field research conducted by other organizations.
- On July 16 and 17, 2020, two consultation days were organized with a total of 22 participants, including the Ombudsman, cultural mediators, volunteer tutors, operators of reception centers, and psychologists, with the aim of gathering their important input. Subsequently, a focus group was organized to collect the opinions and experiences of a group of boys (3) and girls (1) who arrived in Italy as UASC and who, once they turned 18, had to leave the reception center.

The results of the context analysis conducted in Italy by IRC are summarized in a report published in November 2020. The report contains information on the overall context, including available forms of care, current best practices, challenges, needs, and recommendations. The section on the context and reception of UASC was then updated in July 2021, following changes made by Law No. 173/2020, which converted with amendments the so-called 'Immigration and Security' Decree No. 130/2020.

The information, priorities, and needs gathered during the research and the final recommendations were used to develop the specific content of the two training cycles planned in the second year of the project. This training proposal, developed jointly by IRC in collaboration with the Ombudsman for Childhood and Adolescence, was then revised and consolidated through discussion with a team of experts in the field. In particular, on October 19 and 20, 2020, a meeting was held between experts from Italy, Bulgaria, Spain, the Netherlands and other European countries with the aim of sharing good practices and promoting different forms of alternative reception for UASC, as well as presenting and finalizing the contents for the first cycle of training (train-the-trainer).

This Train-the-trainer in Italy was held in person in Palermo, on June 16 and 17, 2021. The training program was delivered by Nidos and IRC Italy, with the support of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and Adolescents of the Municipality of Palermo. The 24 participants included staff from different stakeholders and institutions that are part of the reception system in various capacities, including operators of reception centers and family homes in Sicily, operators of other agencies and associations, volunteer tutors, as well as local officials and civil servants working in the fields of child protection and immigration in Sicily. Francesco Micela (President of the Juvenile Court of Palermo), Giuseppe Vecchio (Ombudsman for Children and Adolescents of Sicily region), and Cinzia Mantegna (Councillor for Solidarity Citizenship of Palermo) welcomed the participants with their institutional greetings.

The key actors and professionals who participated in the train-the-trainer in turn will be accompanied and supported in the organization and adaptation of a cascade training (5 trainings with at least 30 participants) to spread a shared methodology among colleagues and network with other actors and stakeholders active in the alternative care system in Sicily. The cascade training cycle, is scheduled for October - November 2021.

SESSIONS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

WORKING TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE CARE FOR UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN ITALY – The contents and specific objectives of this training in Italy arise from consultation meetings, which took place in the second half of 2020, in order to learn about the experiences and needs of volunteer guardians, operators, subjects active in the system of alternative reception in Sicily, and to listen to the voice and reflections of boys, girls and young adults already living in residential facilities. The training aims to provide professionals, practitioners, and volunteer guardians with the tools to facilitate access to and increase the quality of family and community-based care and shelter solutions for unaccompanied boys and girls between the ages of 15 and 18. In particular, in light of the recent establishment of the SAI in the Municipality of Palermo, the training aims to raise awareness of alternative forms of reception, to co-construct operational models for the support and care of boys and girls and to prepare guidelines for the drafting of operational protocols and networking practices.

Module 1: Rights, development, well-being and needs of Unaccompanied Children

Overview: Understanding unaccompanied children specific background and developmental needs by applying a cultural, age and safeguarding lens; individual and collective culture and differences in hierarchy of the needs.

This introductory module focuses on the development of boys and girls as persons, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with links to national child protection legislation. Module 1 includes knowledge on case management and creating a training plan to accompany boys and girls in their transition to adulthood, through formal and non-formal education.

Learning Outcomes:

1. A shared basic framework on child development and needs, with an understanding of how family and community based alternative care is the best option to meet these needs.
2. An understanding about differences in the way UASC accept what is happening around them. An understanding of the difference from working with a person who grew up in Italy. UAC may have different reactions because of their different values/culture.
3. Help staff understand what their role is in caring for these children.

Session 2: Educational plan, guidance and professional skills

Overview: Windows of tolerance, understanding behaviour, understanding resilience, protective factors; case management, assessment (different elements); role of cultural mediator;

Module 2 - This module is dedicated to strengthening the necessary skills (cultural knowledge, active listening, PFA and communication skills for trauma and stress management, etc.) of the people who support boys and girls, with particular regard to guardians, foster families and those who work closely with them on a daily basis.

Learning outcomes:

1. An understanding of behavioural patterns of UAC, and practical tools to support them in different situations.
2. Staff able to identify different psychosocial needs and to respond appropriately.
3. Staff have tools and understanding of how to communicate effectively with children at different ages and from different backgrounds.
4. Understanding of the importance of cultural mediation.
5. Shared understanding on risks and benefits of different forms of care, with a clear understanding of the benefits of family- and community-based alternative care over institutional care for unaccompanied children

Session 3: Alternative care in Sicily and access to services

Overview: Alternative care in Italy; Reception and Integration System; Care Leaver model; Individualized Education plan; local agencies and services supporting UASC.

Module 3 - This module focuses on the forms of alternative care available in Italy, with particular attention paid to the new Reception and Integration System (SAI) and why it can be considered a form of alternative care even though it is institutionalized, on the holistic approach adopted to support the independence of boys and girls in accessing rights and services on the territory.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Clear understanding on how the case management process flows, how the tools underpin the process, and how to find best solutions within the context.
2. Care plans and care plan reviews are seen as an achievable goal and that they are done together with the child and the service provider. Staff see the importance of the care plan in all cases, even for short stay.
3. Understanding the importance of multi-sector communication and cooperation when working with UAC, including cooperation between the child protection and migration actors, which could improve their access to alternative care when looking for the best care option to suit the needs of the individual child.

Session 4: Supporting unaccompanied children toward independence

Overview: supportive network; networking; guidelines for a new and improved model.

Module 4 - This module aims to facilitate the building of strategic networks between stakeholders that are key to the development of UACs, through their active and direct participation. This last module aims to create a space for participants to make their roles explicit and agree among themselves on a possible approach to promote collaboration and increase quality of alternative care, in the best interest of boys and girls.

Learning outcomes:

1. Understanding facilitating factors and good practices vs obstacles and bad practices when supporting UASC and doing case management.
2. Finding alternative and improved solutions to known models, gathering elements and building an operational model for alternative reception.
3. Attempting to build an operational mode shared by participants from SAI and other services for UASC, as well as reflecting on the procedures and ways to improve them.

FULL TRAINING PROGRAMME

Day 1		
Time	Subject	Details
9:45	Registration	Registration of participants and welcome coffee.
10:15	Kick-off and welcome	Introduction to IRC and Nidos' work, staff and trainers, presentation of the ACT project and detailed program of day 1 along with organizational information and COVID-19 rules to respect during the training. Institutional greetings. Session was co-led by IRC & Nidos.
10:45	Start of Session 1	Rights, development, well-being and needs of UASC

10:45	The Rights of Children and Adolescents	<p>European Convention on Human Rights and Convention on the Rights of the Child: Development of Children as Persons, Rights and Needs. Connection with the Italian and local legal framework.</p> <p>Session was led by Ombudsman for children and adolescents of Palermo.</p>
11:15	Meet Mussi, a 16-year-old boy	<p>Presentation of the Mussi case study used for activities and group works over the 2 days.</p> <p>Activity: take few minutes to think answer some questions to let participants step in Mussi's shoes, understand and emphasize.</p> <p>1 What does it mean for Mussi to leave the country, and what does he leave behind or bring along? 2 What are the experiences of Mussi during his journey to Europe? 3 What does it mean for Mussi to arrive in a new country? What will he experience?</p> <p>Session was led by Nidos.</p>
11:30	Who are UASC? How to understand their well-being and behaviour.	<p>Nidos to present on needs and consequences on UASC of experiences lived after leaving their family and home country, and while travelling to Europe alone.</p> <p>Activity: Ask participants to think of a young person they know who has coped well with enormous adversity. Think about their personal characteristics, family environment, and social environment. Ask participants to describe factors that appear to promote resilience and help. Elaborate grief and loss.</p> <p>Psychological implications of the separation and of the experiences lived throughout the journey and at the arrival and their effects on UASC; grief and loss, PTSD and chronic stress.</p> <p>Resilience, internal and external source of resilience, Risk and Protective Factors. Including how quality alternative care is a strong factor in developing good attachment and resilience in UASC.</p> <p>Session was led by Nidos.</p>
12:00	Break	
12:15	What do UASC need? Implications for reception and orientation.	<p>Activity: Using the case of Mussi to explore these concepts at a practical, individual level. Putting what illustrated into practice to improve access to care by knowing the UAC, and understanding the essential ingredients of support, guidance and reception.</p> <p>Important factors to secure rest and safety to UASC in the initial phase of the reception. This also includes cultural aspects relevant to UASC. Competencies to offer the right support. Nidos to link this all to how care arrangements for UASC should be small scale / family based.</p> <p>Session was led by Nidos.</p>

13:15	Lunch Break	
14:30	Start of Session 2	Educational plan, guidance and professional skills
14:30	Evaluation tools and shared case management	<p>Importance of case management and multi-sector communication and engagement.</p> <p>Nidos to lead on some simple assessment tools and activity on how to use these tools effectively.</p> <p>Group work: Read the case and assess the strengths, the vulnerabilities, protective and risk factors, and the needs of Ahmed using the assessment tool. (i.e. What does Ahmed need to feel safe, to feel at home? What needs Hamid to deal with his trauma, grief and stress. What contributes to build on resilience and strengths?). Share benefits of using this tool in the plenary</p> <p>Session was led by Nidos.</p>
15:15	Break	
15:30	Taking into account the background of the child	<p>Skills to offer the right support.</p> <p>Emphasis was placed on the importance of crossborder networking, to contact and collaborate with the parents and family of the UAC in the land of origin.</p> <p>Session was led by Nidos.</p>
16:00	Interview with Nidos alternative care experts	<p>Q&A session with Nidos colleagues offering alternative care to UAC 15-18 year olds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What components should be embedded in the 'perfect' alternative care model? • Illustrate the satellite model - how does this work? • How is family care organized in the Netherlands? <p>Group work:</p> <p>1_What are the benefits and disadvantages (risks) of SIL for Mussi</p> <p>2 What are the benefits and disadvantages (risks) of large scale reception</p> <p>3 What are the benefits and disadvantages (risks) of foster care for Mussi</p> <p>Session was led by Nidos.</p>
16:30	Reflection on what elements of today you take with you for a train de trainer?	
16:45	Finish	

Day 2		
Time	Subject	Details
10:15	Welcome & Overview	IRC to welcome back participant, illustrate the training schedule, and set rules, method, objectives and expectations for the day.
10:45	Start of Session 4	Alternative care models, SAI, and access to services
10:45	SAI presentation and Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) presentation	History of the reception system for UASC in Italy, which is considered a form of alternative care. Holistic approach, actors involved and services provided.

		<p>Introduction to Individualized Education Plan as a fundamental shared tool for assessing the situation of the UASC and his or her skills, take into consideration personal story, motivations, dreams and aspirations when developing the plan.</p> <p>Illustrate the Care Leaver for Italian adolescents transitioning to adulthood.</p> <p>Session led by IRC and the manager of 2 SAI centers in Palermo.</p>
11:30	Break	
11:45	Actors supporting UASC and their path towards autonomy and independence	<p>Prior the training, IRC circulated among the participants info sheets to provide more details on the role and the work of organizations or institutional agencies supporting UASC in Palermo. IRC also ask to prepare a 5 min presentation to be delivered during the work group.</p> <p>Activity 1, 3 subgroups (30 minutes): On the basis of the information received from participants before (service presentation sheet) and during the training (SAI presentation), subgroup members should work on a graphic representation of the support network around UASC and the SAI system: how does their service fit into the SAI model? How does it support UASC?</p> <p>Plenary (30 minutes): Each spokesperson reports to the whole group and illustrate their graphic representation of the support model.</p> <p>Session was led by IRC.</p>
12:45	Games to reconstruct perceived reality	<p>The spy & 10 trees.</p> <p>The goal is to stimulate and develop flexibility and creativity in order to facilitate the search for solutions that, at first glance, might appear complex or otherwise schematic and/or rigid. These are metaphors and games that aim at reflecting on the use of external resources as one's own; on the restructuring of the perceptive field, leaving behind the schemes that generally block the vision of other solutions; on the possibility of offering participants a vision that separates the different logical levels. The term "game" also pushes participants towards a team game in which everyone plays a different position and role but with a single objective.</p> <p>Session was led by IRC.</p>
13:00	Lunch Break	
14:00	Start of Session 5	Networking to support MSNAs: roles and approaches
14:00	Unexpected problem-solving	<p>Activity 2, 2 subgroups (20 minutes): using the case of Mussi, the two groups describes facilitating factors and good practices (group A), obstacles, problems an bad practices (group B) when taking care of UASC and managing cases.</p>

		<p>Plenary (20 minutes): report back to the group and discussion.</p> <p>Session was led by IRC and the Palermo Ombudsman.</p>
14:50	Break	
15:00	Alternative care and case management – reflecting on good and bad practices	<p>Based on the good and bad practices emerged during the previous activity, participants guided by the Ombudsman and the IRC outlined some suggested operational guidelines to improve networking and quality of alternative care for UASC.</p> <p>Activity 3, 2 subgroups – same ones of activity 2 (30 minutes): Through a series of questions, each subgroup attempts to build an operational model for improving access and quality of alternative care for UASC, a 'hypothesis of guidelines for the alternative reception of unaccompanied boys and girls.</p> <p>Plenary (30 minutes): report back to the group and discussion.</p> <p>Session was led by IRC and the Palermo Ombudsman.</p>
16:00	Reflection on what elements of today you take with you for a train de trainer?	
16:15	Conclusions	Summary of two days of training, with a particular focus on activities and thoughts exchanged during session 4.
16:45	Finish	