



PSYCHOSOCIAL HANDBOOK FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

in charge of receiving unaccompanied foreign
minors



*We hereby report to you
The story of a journey, undertaken by
One who exploits and two who are exploited
Observe the conduct of these people closely:
Find it estranging even if not very strange
Hard to explain even it is the custom
Hard to understand even if it is the rule
Observe the smallest action, seeming simple,
With mistrust
Inquire if a thing be necessary
Especially if it is common
We particularly ask you –
When a thing continually occurs –
Not on that account to find it natural
In an age of bloody confusion
Ordered disorder, planned caprice,
And dehumanized humanity, lest all things
Be held unalterable!*

[Bertolt Brecht, from: The exception and the rule]

Terre des Hommes has many years of experience in the field of receiving unaccompanied foreign minors and has produced first of all a legal and social training project for the involved workers, then a legal Handbook, a project for psychological and psychosocial assistance and finally this practical handbook.

In my opinion it is important to remember all stages, because they show how a “system” ought to be built up by investing in skills, discussing resources, pinpointing priority issues and monitoring how effective the different actions are. In the last years on the contrary there has been a sequence of political and institutional unfulfillments, a vacuum of decision making, partial or not always efficacious actions, disregarded announcements that evaporate as soon as the media coverage stops. It is a run up to emergency that produces emergency.

In Terre des Hommes activity I find reception and human solidarity principles, the respect of rights and the highest form of civilization and also the principle of listening in order to know the people’s needs that is a fundamental step in implementing human rights. This handbook provides those who are willing to read it (or who analyze it thoroughly) with a great amount of technical, human and social information. We all know the emergency situation in which workers in charge of unaccompanied foreign minors work, we know how burdensome it can be by the lack of a reception system based on the interest of the involved minors and the shortfall in funding. But we are also aware of their involvement, their generosity and the needed professionalism. Knowing the story of the minors, why they decided to set out on the “journey of hope”, what their migrant project is can help them in welcoming them in the best possible way. Each story is special and we cannot use anonymous categories that are the same for all.

Terre des Hommes listened to hundreds of minors and understood the complexity of their needs. It sensed their fear, mistrust, suffering, solitude as well as the intensity of their dreams, often more concerned with their families' welfare back in their countries of origin than with their own life. Not yet 18, but already their lives are often steeped in violence.

This Handbook also aims at motivating us to do even better, to listen and ask more.

Vincenzo Spadafora

National Authority for Childhood and Adolescence

To migrate does not only mean to look beyond one's own story, but also to find an identity in new cultural contexts. There are nevertheless migration stories where the intertwining of trauma and violence experienced in the country of origin and during the journey before braving the sea and its unpredictable forces does not allow to *look beyond* by shelving the psychological approach to the new culture in complex risk trajectories. This is the disorientation many unaccompanied minors experience when reaching the Italian territory without being able to live it and integrate it in their mind in order to continue a growth respectful of children and adolescents' rights.

In the case of minors in a complex emergency situation, the psychosocial approach allows the child to be secured by reducing through a healing reception the reactivation of post-traumatic symptoms and social isolation, both risk factors for the development or maintenance of problems having to do with mental health. This approach facilitates the cultural negotiation these children or adolescents have to start in our Country and takes on the challenge, by focusing on the minors and exploring any possible support actions that are more easily accessible in order to help them re-elaborate their story. The moment will come for them to face their traumatic experiences and consequences, but not before having built up resilience and reception opportunities.

The Handbook challenge starts now. It defines cure, reception standard and focus. It gets off the ground a "path" where professionals' training, structures that are able to receive the minors, a referral system will have to contribute to the effectiveness of the Handbook itself, in agreement with SISST on the importance of psychosocial actions in emergency and complex emergency contexts.

The Handbook makes SISST feel less alone in this project. We hope it is a launching platform for creating synergies and action patterns that can overcome fragmentation through a common effort in order to offer reception, support, cure to children and adolescents who, starting from traumatic conditions, may find in our Country a context for *post-traumatic growth*, where they can restart the migration journey looking forwards, towards the future.

Vittoria Ardino

President of the Italian Society for Studying Traumatic Stress (SISST)

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Introduction

Who is Terre des Hommes

Terre des Hommes has been for 50 years at the forefront in protecting children all over the world against violence, abuse and exploitation and in guaranteeing every child school, informal education, health care and food. **Terre des Hommes is presently active in 64 Countries with over 800 projects aiming at children protection.** Terre des Hommes actions in Italy are sensibilisation (*advocacy and lobby*), studies and projects on the territory aiming at a better condition for children also through actions that can influence the relevant legislation. Fondazione Terre des Hommes Italia is a member of *Terre des Hommes International Federation*, works in partnership with ECHO and is accredited at the European Union, UN, USAID and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Migrant minors, especially unaccompanied migrant minors have been a priority for Terre des Hommes since the launching in 2001 of the campaign *Stop Child Trafficking*, and now with the campaign *Destination Unknown* aiming at the protection of migrant children.

In 2009 the Foundation published “***Minori erranti – L’accoglienza e i percorsi di protezione***” (***Wandering minors – How to receive and protect them***) an essay at national level that points out the malfunctioning and inconsistency of the Italian reception system. Later it started FARO, a series of support projects for migrant minors.

The projects



Between June and September 2011, Terre des Hommes was operating in Lampedusa with the FARO project (I) offering legal assistance to unaccompanied foreign minors and migrant families with children arriving at the island.

Following the experience in Lampedusa, Terre des Hommes decides to start a second phase of FARO project (II), together with C.N.O.A.S, whose goal is legal and social training of workers in charge of receiving UFM (Unaccompanied Foreign Minors), in order to support their daily work through an accurate updating on current regulations.

The goal of the project was therefore to give welfare workers and workers in charge of receiving UFM a legal and social training, based on the model of direct comparison and exchange of experiences, in order to simply and clearly pinpoint the main difficulties.

Successively we have the first *“Guida Giuridica per Operatori impegnati nell’accoglienza dei MSNA”*, (Legal Handbook for Workers in charge of Receiving UFM), under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Cooperation.

In 2013, in Lampedusa the third FARO project (III) is launched, whose goal is to help unaccompanied foreign minors and families by providing them with psychological and psychosocial support.

The projects goes on early 2014 (Faro IV) in the Siracusa area awaiting to be restarted in Lampedusa, with the re-opening of CPSA (Centro di Primo Soccorso e Accoglienza, First Aid and Reception Centre) at Contrada Imbriacola.

Why a psychosocial Handbook?

This handbook follows on from the previous handbook and aims to be a practical tool for taking over and developing Faro experience. It is an operational tool for workers involved in psychological and psychosocial support to UFM's., especially educators and cultural mediators working in different UFM's reception centres of the Italian system. It intends to give them a thorough overview of “what happened before”, that is to say the children's former experiences.

With this in mind, the paragraph dealing with Terre des Hommes project experience at Lampedusa is of particular relevance. By working directly with hundreds of young people and mothers, TdH gathered useful information in order to rebuild these migrants' journey and previous life.

This Handbook highlights the complex needs of these people and will facilitate their migration process.

The mediator's role: a bridge between two cultures

The cultural mediator plays a key role in all delicate situations where mediation between different cultures is required, as it happens with migrant minors' reception and assistance, where beneficiaries approach a totally new reality that has nothing in common with their country of origin. First of all a mediator must facilitate communication between the different workers involved in the reception and the migrants and promote the overcoming of linguistic and cultural barriers that prevent the understanding of important concepts.

The mediator must therefore valorize migrants' language and culture and at the same time promote the culture of the new context, by explaining values and customs, rights and obligations they have to assume on the arrival in the host Country.

To foster the encounter between these two worlds the mediator's delicate task is to support migrants in expressing their needs and help them translate the corresponding concepts into the social fabric of the host country or by possibly explaining to the migrant the elements of the new reception system that are difficult to be correctly understood and acquired.

The mediator must therefore be able to accurately interpret and translate both verbal communication and concepts, values and principles belonging to the migrants' linguistic and cultural system, as for example the meaning of disease and recovery, the concept of therapy and cure, the concept of "minority", and so on.

More generally speaking the mediator's role is to act like an "umbrella" playing a key role in supporting social workers actions that may risk to be misunderstood or even compromised.

Who are the Unaccompanied Foreign Minors

Unaccompanied Foreign Minors are minors who are in Italy without their parents or other legally responsible adults.

EU Council Resolution of 26 June 1997 defines UFM as “third-country nationals below the age of eighteen, who arrive on the territory of the Member States unaccompanied by an adult responsible for them whether by law or custom, and for as long as they are not effectively in the care of such a person” which means “foreign nationals or stateless persons below the age of 18, who arrive on the territory of a state unaccompanied by a responsible adult and who are left unaccompanied after they entered the territory of state.

> **The European Parliament resolution of 12 September 2013** recalls that “an unaccompanied minor is above all a child who is potentially in danger and that child protection, rather than immigration policies, must be the leading principle for Member States and the European Union when dealing with them, thus respecting the core principle of the child's best interests; recalls that any person below the age of 18 years, without exception, is to be regarded as a child and thus as a minor; points out that unaccompanied minors, particularly girls, are twice as susceptible to problems and difficulties as other minors; observes that they are all the more vulnerable insofar as they have the same needs as both other minors and other refugees, with whom they share similar experiences; emphasises that girls and women are particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights throughout the

migration process, and that unaccompanied girls are at particular risk as they are often the principal targets of sexual exploitation, abuse and violence; points out that unaccompanied minors in the EU are frequently treated by the authorities as delinquents who have infringed immigration laws rather than as individuals who have rights on account of their age and particular circumstances”.

The phenomenon

Unaccompanied foreign minors (UFMs) are children and adolescents who for many different reasons become actors of an independent migration project.

It is an old phenomenon but, in order to understand the reasons of the flow to Italy since the Nineties, we must consider it in relation to the globalisation trends that, together with wars and local conflicts, has affected the extent of the phenomenon and the Countries of origin of these minors.

According to data collected by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies as at 31 March 2014 there were 7,865 UFMs, 1,966 of whom (equal to nearly 25% of the total amount) were considered untraceable, which is an alarming percentage. Males accounted for 93.4% and females for 6.6%. 78.9% of the UFMs were between 16 and 17 of age. 11.4% were 15 and the even younger ones accounted for 9.8%.

The 2014 figures exceed the peak of 7,750 reached in 2011, at the time of the so-called emergency of North Africa; in 2010 UFMs had been 4,588 and in 2009: 5,879 .

Countries of origin: in 2010 the three first Countries of origin of the UFMs present in the reception centres were Afghanistan (16.8%), Bangladesh (10.9%) and Albania (10.0%); in 2014 Egypt (21.7%), Albania (16.4%), Bangladesh (13%) a variation due to what happened in Egypt last year.

Among the UFMs now present in Italy about 23.7% come from Asia, 47.1% from North Africa and the Horn of Africa, 12% from sub-Saharan Africa and 15.8 % from Eastern European countries.

The geographical area of origin obviously conditions the minors' journey before arriving in our country, duration, physical and psychological dangers that are particularly important for those who

have to pass through Sahara and Libya; also Greece turned out to be a country at high risk.

As for the return of asylum-seekers to Greece, in relation to the application of the Dublin Regulation to Greece, (15.4.2008) UNHCR continues to remain concerned that, while the Government of Greece has taken a number of steps to improve its asylum system and practice, a substantial number of asylum-seekers still face serious challenges in accessing and enjoying effective protection in line with international and European standards. The note complements and revises UNHCR's position on The Return to Greece of asylum-seekers with "interrupted claims" from July 2007 and supplements the information relating to Greece contained in the UNHCR's Study of the Implementation of the Qualification Directive. In summary, based on EU Member States' obligation to ensure access to fair and effective asylum procedures, including cases subject to the Dublin Regulation, UNHCR advises Governments to refrain from returning asylum-seekers to Greece under the Dublin Regulation until further notice. UNHCR recommends that Governments "*make use of Article 3 (2) of the Dublin Regulation, allowing States to examine an asylum application lodged even if such examination is not its responsibility under the criteria laid down in this Regulation*".

The reception system

While in other countries like Canada, England and France, the reception system is regulated by established migration policies, in Italy it is mainly regulated within an alleged emergency framework; the law governing in a managed way the migratory phenomenon of minors is still lacking as is a comprehensive system of asylum regulations.

The Italian reception system provides for protection of migrant minors and UFM's represent a sort of paradox: they are at the same time minors to be protected and also migrants to be controlled. The

question of UFM is complex and multifaceted: some of them are escaping from wars and poverty in search of a better life, others are vulnerable minors lured and exploited by criminal networks. Anyway each minor has his/her own story, a migration story that often changes over time.

For many young people Italy is only a transit country on their way to Northern Europe, where they can join family and friends or benefit from a reception and integration system perceived as being better.

Psychosocial support is essential for the implementation of their migration project by stressing the value of individual, family and social resources on the territory as well as by protecting them against the risks to which they may be exposed for being migrants

The reasons for the journey

Some minors undertake the journey by themselves while others rely from the onset on specialised networks. In these cases, the journey can be organised in the most minute details, is very expensive and according to the Countries and routes it can present risks due to difficulties at points of entry. The at distance economic backing of their family is often decisive to reach the destination country.

In order to understand the reasons of these minors' migration route, it is worthwhile considering push and pull factors without forgetting the journey itself during which the project is often modified. The migrant minors' active and subjective choice depends on personal, family, legislative and social ties that form their effective movement, both real and symbolic. It is within this area of relative freedom that the minor will make choices and start any possible process of subjectivation and integration.

Structural and representational motivations of the journey

Political and economic motivations as well as representational and ideational motivations fuel contemporary child migration.

Community workers have the delicate task of helping minors recognize this “area” and be aware of the opportunities and limits it offers, in order to guide them to act accordingly with their desires and obligations.

Structural motivations

Minors arriving in Italy come from areas where economic policies have not been able to satisfy the population’s needs. Migration is often the only possible choice for survival. Also the **social background** determines the choice to migrate. Many minors who arrive in Italy leave their country bringing with them a common desire for redemption. For these young people migration means that it is possible, though very risky, to find a new social position and to improve at least the economic situation of their families.

Representational motivations

In brief we may say that some of the minors who arrive in Western Europe have undertaken the journey because they were forced by dramatic situations like war or personal threats. This is why they have not been able to build a representation of their future much different from escaping a threatening situation.

Others on the contrary had time and sufficient conditions to draw up a project where expectations of a better and more secure life in another country are well represented.

Minors who were living a more difficult personal or family life in their country of origin make up a third smaller group; for these minors the representation of their future is less or not at all complex.

The journey as a rite of passage

For many minors the journey is a sort of “rite of passage” towards adulthood: disengagement from ties and security in order to generate new subjectivities.

Despite their young age and the uncertainties typical of some evolution stages, many consider themselves as real “adults”. Besides having to accept an early and often sudden separation from their native context, once they reach their destination they often have to cope with very bloody memories they have gathered during the journey. Many minors often say they had not been “prepared” for the amount of violence they have experienced.

They sometimes feel guilty because they have survived; it often happens with minors who have lost travelling companions. They also feel ashamed to have exposed themselves to so many dangers but above all to have witnessed violence against other people without being able to prevent it.

Having to live extreme situations and to take independent and quick decisions keep the children in a state of constant preparedness, because they are obliged to react on a fight-flight response based on the lack of confidence in the surrounding environment.

Their relationship with social workers, their first reference figure in Italy, may therefore be affected by the difficulties these minors encounter in building relations based on mutual confidence.

These adolescents need both to demonstrate to themselves that they are totally autonomous and to give space to their uncertainties and fears.

Social workers can help these young persons to accept their uncertainties and to elaborate them through the most appropriate tools. Activities that help them to regain confidence and to control their space can play a very positive role.

Valorizing minors' experiences and skills can help them become aware of their fragility without compromising the strong self-image they had to build up. and minors.

The family and the migration “mandate”

Minors' migration is sometimes planned within the family; in other more infrequent cases it happens without the family's knowledge or even against their will or fleeing it. Minors aiming at joining relatives already settled in Europe may be economically supported by diasporic networks, whereas those who flee violence could not organize a project with their relatives whose traces have sometimes even been lost. In most cases the migrant minor's personal fulfillment goes through the economic liberation of the family but does not end there. They also wish to invest in the possibilities the reception system offers them as “adolescents”. While their family considers them “young adults” in our society they are considered as minors and thus treated as such.

It is important that workers recognize how the family migration “mandate” integrates with the minors' wish of subjectivation, in order to help them give an answer to both while respecting their evolutionary needs. It is therefore useful

to create areas where, through appropriate expressive tools, minors' lived experiences concerning this twofold project and their self-representation can emerge .

Generational inversion

Taking on the redemption of their family status, contemporary migrant minors are protagonists of a real “generational inversion”. Money is not only a tool to improve better living conditions; it also socially upgrades the authority of parents who “have remained behind” in systems the children describe as “immovable”. The burden of the responsibilities they have taken on is stressed in what they say: *“I must save my family... I must work to help my brothers/sisters... I must send money home for allowing our relatives to follow a treatment... to pay debts contracted for my journey...”*.

Minors often feel they are the only ones responsible for possible failures that will affect their families. That is why it is very important to guide them in choices that could have a negative impact on their integration process. It is also important to help them distinguish between external and internal elements that could prejudice or on the contrary favour their project.

The “double absence”: which loneliness and which support for migrant minors?

Another risk factor for migrant children concerns the “loneliness” that characterizes migration. Abdelmalek Sayad calls it “double absence”. Those who leave their country rarely tell the cost of this experience, that in the common unconscious represents the access to a better quality of life. In the Countries of origin people only see the advantages of migration and tend to hide risks.

Success is a “must” that generates a tacit agreement between the migrant and his/her family. The migrant must not tell “the whole truth” and the family must not believe negative stories.

The “double absence” concept underlines well the coercive must and the anxiety that characterizes the migration experience of UFM; having invested a lot in this project they are not prepared to admit a possible failure.

The urgent need to demonstrate that they are able to give an answer to the family mandate and to build a “successful” self image at least in their Country may sometimes lead minors to give up growth and integration, medium-long term development and enter into the channels of exploitation.

The main goal of the reception system aiming at giving an answer to minors’ needs is to avoid any risk of a “double failure” for these children escaping situations where they were condemned to marginalization. They must be helped to mediate between personal needs and family mandate and to make the best use of their own resources and of those made available to allow them to emancipate.

It is therefore important to:

- < stabilise as soon as possible the migrant minors’ legal position so that they can feel safe
- < establish with them relations recognising the family mandate as not being in contradiction with their integration process
- < understand the emotional substrate generated by migration and help them create internal spaces for negotiation
- < facilitate mediation with the family, even if often only through the telephone.

An approach to the double identity of children and adolescents, minors as well as migrants, is crucial when developing actions that give a correct answer to their needs and don't indirectly lead them to escape. This happens mostly at the reception stage when it is very important to listen and persuade them it is possible to start a process where they can be given the value they deserve.

Facing the Italian reception system and regulations

For many minors arriving in Italy, to be considered “minors” – as defined by Italian and European legislation – is not at all an automatic process because it means having to compare and integrate a typically western concept of childhood with others that can be very different.

In many Countries children have more obligations than rights and according to their social origin they can be called upon to play a very active role in supporting their family. To facilitate a meaningful adaptation within the integration process, **cultural mediation**, as above said, has a key role in solving inevitable misunderstandings and misapprehension between minors and social workers.

To keep in mind the concept of childhood and adolescence, the values they communicate, rights and obligations they impose in the children’s context of origin is crucial both for helping foreign minors understand the new framework of protection and for reducing the number of possible failures in the relationship between workers and minors.

The concept of “minority” for unaccompanied foreign minors

The concept of minority has legal and social value for a migrant, but above all a cultural value that necessarily collides with the rules of the host Country. The mediator plays a key role in helping migrants understand the importance of this “new” concept and its consequences in the new society. The mediator often uses similarities – where they exist – between home and host country and gives concrete examples. To be able to deliver any kind of information the mediator must first of all establish a relationship of trust and empathy with the minors like for instance valorize their culture and values (particularly if they are the same as the mediator’s), their identity and language.

It is then possible to take a further step forward in conveying complex and delicate concepts such as “minority” by clearly explaining the protection opportunities recognised by the host Country and focusing on reducing the migrant’s feeling of disorientation. In this phase the mediator must give special attention to a correct understanding of the conveyed key concepts and make sure that there are no doubts nor misinterpretations. As mediator and migrant speak the same language and have the same socio-cultural background, the mediator should be able to get the message through.

Facilities

The Italian reception system for UFM's has four types of facilities:

- < CPSA (First aid and Reception Centres)
- < Emergency transit centres
- < Centres for Minors
- < Communities for Asylum-seeking Minors

Lampedusa: an example of first aid, psychological and psychosocial reception for UFM's

Terre des Hommes experience at Lampedusa can be a possible operating model for “frontier” centres. Migrants arriving from Africa often find at **Lampedusa** the first “safe and secure” outpost where they can lower the alert level of the journey. It can also be the place where the happiness at having reached the “Europe’s gateway” can be affected by the fear of a failure because of the possible obstacles minors perceive in the new reception system that could threaten their project. This explains their growing resistance against photos and fingerprinting procedures that bind them to lodge an asylum application in the country where they first entered EU.

Who are the minors who landed at Lampedusa and where do they come from?

They are young, most of them between 11 and 17 of age, coming from Eritrea, Somalia, Gambia, Senegal, Nigeria, Niger, Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Algeria. They are tired and disoriented, happy to have succeeded but already looking forward to their next destination.

They are usually in good physical conditions despite the suffering and deprivations they have gone through for a long period and the daily violence aimed at making them feel full of fear, intimidated and objects without any right. At this stage of their journey they haven't got only responsibilities and obligations due to their status of being migrants, but also memories and bad experiences. This is the considerable emotional baggage these minors carry when they arrive in this island. The conditions of stress take the form of fatigue, changes in the sleep/wake cycle and nightmares. Law enforcement officials work in the First Aid and Reception Centre (Centro di Prima Accoglienza CPSA) and mainly during the first days the simple sight of their uniforms activates in UFM's the above mentioned fight/flight system, due to the fact that they are used to flee and distrust military and police officials in the Countries they have gone through.

Faro III

A model of psychological and psychosocial support at first aid and reception stage

In 2013, Terre des Hommes started in Lampedusa the first psychological and psychosocial program in favour of minor migrants and families with children at the CPSA in order to support them in the delicate phase of facing the new reception system.

FARO III project targets are the following:

- > Enhance the strategies of resilience by promoting individual and group resources through a methodology aiming at understanding minors' needs and requests to facilitate both their present and future planning
- > Reactivate positive ties like emotional, cultural or religious ties that have often been “removed” or “suspended” during the journey in order to enable minors to take care of themselves.

These aims are consistent with Tobie Nathan's ethnopsychological approach that views the persons, their individual functioning and the modalities of their interactions as based on multiple attachments to languages and places, deities, ancestors, and behaviours...

The different actions aim at :

1. Guiding minors in the CPSA context
2. Offering free or semistructured exchange spaces in order to allow the children symbolize their present emotional state and help them through the transition between their past and their present situation.
3. Giving the possibility to speak about the journey and investigate its individual and collective meaning.
4. Talking with them about their expectations, studies or working projects, enhancing their skills and giving value to their personal experiences.
5. Reactivating connections to important reference figures and enhancing their effective strategies to face difficulties.
6. Offering an individual psychological support when needed and reporting vulnerable cases for a rapid transfer to a community for psychological care.
7. Providing practical and specific services such as lending of books, Italian language classes, table games, paper and felt-tip pens also when the social work team is not present in the Centre.

Consistent with the key principles of emergency psychology, Terre des Hommes psychological and psychosocial support program adjusts to the environment, where security is the priority, and integrates with other services focused on minors. It has been demonstrated that after potentially traumatic experiences the first reception environment plays a very important role in implementing useful resources for processing the lived experiences of the involved subjects.

The Italian first aid and reception system designed for large numbers of people can be perceived as “depersonalizing”. Psychological and psychosocial actions must therefore promote acknowledgement and attention to “subjectiveness”.

The team is composed of a psychologist/psychotherapist and a linguistic-cultural mediator and is working in the Centre seven days a week. It is a reference point for the minors from the moment of their arrival at CPSA until their departure.

Actions focus on the present and on the future but with a special attention to what people want to share of their past experiences.

Actions are structured in the following manners:

1. First contact with beneficiaries
2. In group expressive/supportive meetings with the help of information/expressive material
3. Individual interviews with or without linguistic-cultural mediation
4. Transmission of cases to the relevant Management body and/or to the Praesidium Project Agencies and vice versa, which means that Terre des Hommes receives people sent by these Agencies.

The adopted approach focuses on listening to migrants so that they can rebuild a sense of self-efficacy after a period during which they have made possibly desubjectivising experiences.

The use of questionnaires aimed at “isolating” the “traumatic lived experiences” is not expected. In the frequent cases where these lived experiences exert intolerable pressure on the person, a short-term support must pay attention not to automatically “pathologize” the problems that often have different origins.

In order to avoid misdiagnosis, an ethnopsychiatric approach is adopted that takes into consideration the different cultural meanings of psychological suffering as well as a geopolitical thinking on all forms of violence (political, institutional, genderbased, ethnic ...) and on how it affects society and individuals.

What does Terre des Hommes propose in terms of psychosocial and psychological activity?

1. It operates within a respectful relationship focused on resources, length of stay and needs of those who arrive
2. It avoids any infantilisation of these adolescents
3. It is aware that facing the Italian legal system that considers them as “minors” holding universal human rights can lead to confusion and misunderstandings
4. It gives voice to the individual also in group meetings thus respecting their will and need to share or not share with others
5. It does not use standardised tools to avoid the feeling of being studied, analysed and classified
6. It does not exert any type of pressure, so as to jeopardise balances that we are not aware of but that could be fragile
7. It carefully observes the dynamics of the groups within the Centre so as to identify the most delicate and best time for approaching beneficiaries on the field
8. It enables to identify critical issues and risk behaviour (aggression, self-harm, isolation, ...)

Activities and tools

1. Reception, Reassurance and Guidance

Aim: approaching beneficiary groups on the field and welcoming them, explaining who Terre des Hommes is and what it does (analysis of individual needs, issues to be focused on and identification of vulnerable cases).

The team contacts already established groups of minors in the common space trying to exploit ties that have strengthened during the migratory route. It thus proposes a **first meeting**, that is crucial for **building a close relationship**. As the stay time is short, this semistructured action sends a clear message about the procedures used to approach Terre des Hommes services.

Although it seems informal, it is actually a precisely defined sequence that nevertheless allows involved people to decide which aspects they want to focus on

1. Welcome and presentation of TDH, of the psychologist and the cultural mediator; people are asked to choose in what language they want to speak.
2. Delivery of an Italian/English/French/Arabic phrase book and of a map of Italy. Short orienteering on the territory (in following meetings more space will be given to the group's questions on the Italian context).
3. Questions on the country of origin. The answers will give the possibility to talk about the main common migration background.
4. Questions on the journey and on possible difficulties, losses or accidents during the voyage so as to create an empathetic contact with emotions like hope, relief, happiness but also fear and suffering.
5. Questions on how the children adapted to the CPSA context and first impressions on the capability of providing an answer to their needs. Explanation of the "security" and the protection ensured by the Police and the Public security forces within the Centre.
6. Questions on present psychological conditions and special attention to difficulties. Many minors show post-traumatic symptoms and signs. We explain to them that it is a matter of frequent physiologic reactions to prolonged stress and inform them about the individual support service and our willingness to listen to their needs.

The duration of the meeting varies according to the number of participants and their willingness to share their ideas. After the meeting we propose other debate sessions on issues that most attracted the minors' interest.

2. Psychosocial activities: supportive/expressive group discussions

Aim: to create through group discussions the conditions to share, to verbalise and symbolise some critical lived experiences during the journey, fantasies about the country of arrival and to open up space to individual planning.

Resources and potential of each and every one are promoted during the different meetings and the importance of being able to take on one's fragilities is underlined. It is therefore necessary to discuss the questions that the journey has raised.

Although focusing on the present and the future the staff must take into account also the migration experiences the group is able to elaborate at a collective level paying great attention at not dwelling excessively on individual stories, whose storytelling could traumatise once more some of the children.

We propose **discussion groups** that can use maps and drawings on the following topics:

> **Imaginary Europe:** debate on expectations and fantasies about Italy and Europe. Migration, the role of the family, worries, hopes, stereotypes, desires.

> **Individual project:** sharing a project. Value is given to skills, personal aptitudes referring to reality plan (desire, tools or concrete ways to realise it, project) together with information on the Italian education, training and vocational system and thinking about what kind of person the young migrants want to be. Surfacing of the minors' internal figures of reference (parents, grandparents, friends...), values that have guided them during the journey and their cultural baggage. Drawing is often a means to express their deep ties with parental figures (particularly with the mother) and their environment.

> **The concept of minority:** discussions on representations during childhood and adolescence and on minors' obligations and rights in their countries of origin. It is an important phase to start finding their way in a system that considers them as "minors" while many of them feel they are "adults", especially after the journey.

> **Osteometric test (age assessment):** it is useful to discuss this procedure with minors who spend most of their time in the Centre and on the imagery of control it evokes. Project staff underline the importance for the minors to focus on their personal project, regardless of their age and to make the best use of their resources and strategies within the reception system.

> **An approach to the Italian language:** Terre des Hommes proposes shared reading of the phrase book the children have been given during the first meeting and 5 literacy lessons conducted by the cultural mediator. Minors are given recreational material such as checkers, playing cards and other table games and also expressive material that they appreciate as being useful to convey questions and messages to the workers' team.

We underline the importance of proposing organised areas so as to "put order" in the confusion the children experience during the first days.

3. Short term individual psychological support

Aim: providing individual support to minors who ask to be listened to and to those who express particular vulnerabilities.

Due to the very short duration of our action, we must aim at guiding minors in order to request psychological support on arrival in the Communities. In such cases reports on the minor's conditions at his/her arrival at Lampedusa will be sent through the Managing Body at the destination Community.

Terre des Hommes Message

In summary it could be said that Terre des Hommes conveys the following messages to minors during their stay at CPSA:

1. Their views and expectations on what they have seen and lived are important as well as their perception of the reception system.
2. The violence they have experienced during the journey is not "normal" nor acceptable even if it seemed so and can have physical and psychological effects to which it is important to pay attention
3. It is possible to give space to telling and sharing of emotions on any traumatic event they have gone through. Questions on human nature that often emerge during these journeys will always accompany these young persons and time will be needed to find an answer
4. Each minor brings with him/her a heritage of rights, values, culture, skills, affection, ideals and desires that have to be protected and enhanced during the integration process.

Reception in Communities

First aid and reception communities, that we could define as “frontier” centres, tackle minors’ problems and needs which are somewhat different from those experienced by the same type of communities but that are situated in towns less affected by the immediate impact of very large numbers of foreigners arriving in our country and asking to be received. Terre des Hommes above mentioned program at Lampedusa is an example of first aid and reception centres’ activity.

The aim of Reception Centres for minors is to welcome children and adolescents by providing timely and effective responses to their need for reassurance, care, education, vocational training; by fostering their personal and social empowerment and, in the case of foreign minors, to work on their integration. These aims are common for all centres for minors, but in the case of UFM’s there is a difference between first aid and reception centres (CPSA) and “second-tier” reception centres.

In CPSA workers focus on reassuring minors after the traumatic experience of the journey and helping them to deal with the impact of the reception system. They have to provide minors with food, sleep, clothes and prepare them to the transfer to “second-tier” reception centers where they will focus mainly on personal and social autonomy, education, training, insertion into working life and social integration.

First aid reception centres (CPSA)

During the first two weeks after the arrival, the **basic objectives usually concern minors' physical and mental well-being and safety.**

This means:

1. reception and reassurance
2. meeting the basic needs (eat, wash, sleep and change clothes)
3. listening to minors' personal life (family, migration journey, expectancies and reasons for the journey, checking of documents)
4. Gradual insertion in the daily routine (wake up, meals, cleaning, afternoon stroll)

In the following weeks, social workers focus on **the adaptation to the reception system.** The **observation grid** used by social workers should mention data concerning the minors' strengths, that is to say their general and specific skills and their potential resources.

Data collected in this phase are also used to define the minor's profile in view of his/her transfer to a "second-tier" reception centre.

Observation and collection of data concerning the following areas:

- A. Behaviour profile
 - A1. Participation /adaptation to the daily routine
 - A2. Level of personal and social autonomy
- B. Affective/relational profile
 - B1. Relationship with peers
 - B2. Relationship with adults
- C. Basic literacy
- D. Pre-existing vulnerability
- E. Cultural dimension

“Second-tier” reception communities

They focus on **minors’ personal and social empowerment** which means that at the age of 18, when they leave the Community, minors must be able to support themselves. Workers focus on education, training and insertion into working life and on fostering their awareness of the environment they are going to live in, its regulations and habits.

How to improve the quality of education activities

UFMs seem to be, and often really are strong adolescents because they have been able to leave family and home and to experience the very difficult situations and traumas of an irregular journey. They are so strong that they have to successfully comply with what our legislation requires: to learn the language in a very short time and successfully attend the lower secondary school, then training and finally find a job. To understand how much strength and willpower it is needed to do that, we must keep in mind what kind of social tasks these adolescents are required to carry out.

They are strong, it is true, but they are also fragile because of the effects of the migration experience.

It is therefore necessary to support these young persons, because they have all lived the trauma of illegal migration. To improve the educators’ skills relating to understanding the psychological consequences of the traumas these minors have suffered can be a good practice.

This does not mean that educators have to become psychologists nor that they have to psychologize the problem: it is necessary to qualify skills the educators have acquired during initial basic training and most of all through working experience.

Skilled educators will be able to identify with reliable accuracy deeply distressed children who need special counseling.

It is necessary to provide psychological care to these children when their distress is too deep and becomes a pathological condition needing to be cured by a psychologist and a child and adolescent psychiatrist.

According to the UN **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (particularly article 24), since 1991 Italy has recognized “the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. ... (Italy) shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services”.

Psychological qualification of educators' activities

While first aid and “second-tier” reception centres have different targets, **the methodology aspects that enable educators to psychologically qualify their activities is the same in both centres.**

- > use of the affective components
- > organization of team work
- > case supervision
- > registration tools for observation and activities.

Educators have a low-tech profession (as well as psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers); **their own person is a tool that can be governed and refined.** It means that also **the affective components must be considered as an essential part of the educator's tools.**

In any case we know that if we really want to understand another person we must develop our ability to empathize with him/her. In other words we must identify with the other and at the same time be able to keep our identity and stability. If properly developed, this ability becomes a basic skill to psychologically understand the others.

Also these affective reactions can become an important psychological tool for an educator, but this happens only if he/she is able to filter the affective reactions produced by the relationship with the other person.

The team work organization centered on regular meetings of the team is the most appropriate tool for the above mentioned “filtering function”.

It is within the team that the interconnection between affective and rational components takes place.

This “virtuous” interconnection can be improved thanks to the supervision of the different cases, that is to say when team meetings become a regular opportunity for discussions coordinated by an external psychology/psychiatry professional.

Supervision

Within education communities for minors, supervision coordinated by an expert in childhood and adolescence psychopathology focus on qualifying the educators' work whose target is to help minors living in communities to continue their affective and social development and to help them overcome difficulties.

The supervisor tries first of all to highlight the educators' empirical knowledge that they put into practice in their work with minors. This first phase will enable them to develop their professional skills by asking them to identify theoretical and technical conceptual references implicit in the educational treatment.

During supervision, this procedure goes together with an interdisciplinary work that is represented by the comparison between pedagogy on one side and psychiatry and child and adolescent psychopathology on the other. The supervisor proposes to read the topics to be discussed and derives elements that are useful both for defining a general psychological profile of the subject and to enlighten group dynamics within and outside the reception communities.

Such interdisciplinary confrontation needs a proper common vocabulary allowing a profitable dialogue so that each worker can dialogue with any other worker while maintaining his/her specialistic language. The progressive building up of such vocabulary made by educators and supervisor together is another key point of this type of supervision.

Observation as a method

It is important to keep in mind that what is said about supervision also applies to situations in which “the case” is not a single minor but the group of minors or the team itself or a particular problem the group has to deal with. It applies also to discussions on the material obtained by the observation work carried out in the communities.

Discussing with the team and during supervision the educators’ observation results is surely one of the most effective ways to psychologically qualify their work. There is in fact no better opportunity for educators than to intertwine their affective and cognitive dimension with their cultural and scientific dimension.

Observation has to be considered as a process, a path in which the observator is involved. It must not be a still image where the photographer is absent. In the first case we can say that the **observation is shared and dynamic** while in the second case it can be described as **static, descriptive and superficial**. We must remember that the observation is carried out according to procedures and methods that are never neutral and that only investigation tools and methods make the observed data significant.

The discussion of the observation results during the supervision phase psychologically affects and qualifies the reading of the data. Aiming at detecting children’s personal characteristics, the observation carried out in education centres for minors tends to or has to highlight any shift from what it is considered to be normal. We must be aware of children’s limits and difficulties if we want to help them overcome these limits. We must remember **how useful it is to organize observation tools that also detect strengths**. This

is important in order to better understand a person and to make plans that rely on his/her resources.

An example could be a presentation grid of the case to be discussed with the team or in supervision containing the traditional items (subject's background, behaviour in different situations, problems...) as well as the following question: "What are his/her strengths".

This item means to be able to understand in which occasion or context the child feels better and why this happens. These observations/information are particularly useful when planning future actions with the child. The observation both of weaknesses and also of strengths further qualifies the educational work.

How to cure and to prevent

It is surely important to cure when needed, but we all know **that prevention is better than cure. In the field of minors' and adults' mental health, prevention goes together with human rights protection. This means:**

- **A good welcome** which also means providing a good quality of the educators' work
- **To enable unaccompanied foreign minors to be adolescents, an experience they haven't had at home.** We must not treat them as children unable to look after themselves and at the same time expect them to behave like adults with personal and social autonomy. We must always keep in mind that they are adolescents and ask ourselves which adolescence they have had or have.
- More studies and research are needed to really understand what "adolescence" means for them, how they are building up their

identity and help us recognize evolutive risk factors and protection factors.

- To avoid their drifting into deviance. This aim can be achieved by ensuring a good supporting work and by facilitating the inclusion into the education system, job integration and social inclusion.

- **To guarantee a regular flow of budgetary funds to unaccompanied foreign minors.** If this is not possible, it is clear that it will be impossible to guarantee the continuity of education and health care.

When speaking of expenditures in favour of children and adolescents we must speak of investments and not of costs.

We can therefore confirm that prevention is better than cure and that social workers who are the target of this Handbook play a key role in order to achieve this aim.

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