Migrant child, welcoming child: the fingerprints of humanity on the move

Syracuse
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Cover: ***"Between the Drowned and the Saved"*** - acrylic on canvas (70x50) by **Ebrima Danso**, Gambian migrant painter ©

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The booklet is available on the website www.caritasfirenze.it in Italian, English, French, Albanian, Spanish, and Arabic.

This booklet has been translated from Italian by Santina Morciano.

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“The child, for the harmonious development of their personality, needs love and understanding. They should, as far as possible, grow up under the care and responsibility of their parents and, in any case, in an atmosphere of affection and material and moral security”

Declaration of the Rights of the Child

“No war is worth the tears of children”

Pope Francis

"I am one of the Mediterranean, which is neither South nor North, neither East nor West. It is the liquid belly between Asia, Africa, and Europe. Those born on its shore have in their blood an archipelago of people"

Erri De Luca

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Preface

by Francesco De Luca
Paediatric Cardiologist and Founder of Circular Narrative
The Story of a Different Paediatrics

Traditionally, Circular Narrative – the story of different pediatrics, always dedicates one day of its work to a social issue concerning children. This year, we find ourselves in Sicily, a borderland, and we deemed it appropriate to dedicate this "special day" to the migrant child.
The issue of child migration in Sicily is extremely delicate, involving hundreds of boys and girls who, often without the protection of adults, embark on a perilous journey across the Mediterranean. They dream of a better future in Europe, but their path is marked by suffering, uncertainty, and all too often, death.
In an increasingly interconnected and ever-changing world, the issue of migrant children represents one of the most urgent and challenging problems our society must address. The chance encounter with Santina Morciano and Young Caritas Florence paved the way for a journey rich in passion and love, extending well beyond the boundaries of Sicily. From this fruitful collaboration comes the idea to create a booklet [1] that, through the testimonies of young volunteers and migrants from across Italy, guides us on an exciting journey to discover the daily challenges faced by these children. We will learn how solidarity, compassion, and sharing can transform our communities into places of welcome and mutual growth.

A unique opportunity to explore the experiences, challenges, and potential of migrant children, not only as individuals seeking refuge and protection but also as agents of change and hope.

The title, **"Migrant child, welcoming child: the fingerprints of humanity on the move"** invites us to look beyond categories and recognize the deep bond that unites us as human beings.

[1] Available on the website www.caritasfirenze.it in Italian, English, French, Albanian, Spanish, and Arabic.

Every migrant child carries with them not only their own stories of courage and resilience, but also the "imprints" of a humanity in constant motion, intertwining their own experiences with those of the communities that welcome them.

Young Caritas has done outstanding work in giving a voice to these children and promoting open and inclusive dialogue on the issue of migration. This booklet, the result of contributions from 220 young people between the ages of 18 and 30, is a tangible reflection of their dedication and passion for building a more just and compassionate world. The drawings by children included in the book lend a deep sense to the work done and represent a magnificent expression of it.

I sincerely hope that this collection can inspire and catalyze concrete actions, becoming a valuable tool for educators, pediatricians, social workers, parents, and all those dedicated to the well-being and future of migrant children.

Together we can build bridges of understanding and solidarity, overcoming the barriers that divide us and embracing the richness of human diversity.

As Luca Orsoni suggests in his introduction, we can experience "new synergies, promote skills, and carry out activities, but only with everyone's contribution."

I would like to conclude by quoting Pope Francis, who, during a recent meeting with young people from Catholic Action, emphasized the importance of promoting a culture of embrace within the Church and society: "A human life begins with an embrace, that of the parents, the first gesture of welcome, followed by many others that give meaning and value to days and years... what would our lives be without these embraces?"

Introduction

by Luca Orsoni
Coordinator of Caritas Services, Head of Young Caritas Florence

Young Caritas Florence was delighted to accept the invitation to participate in the third edition of the congress organized by “Circular Narrative - The Story of a Different Paediatrics” sponsored by the Italian Society of Pediatricians.

The issue of migrant children is significant in many ways: the often tragic images that have accompanied the phenomenon of migration in recent times have made us reflect on the importance of welcoming, ensuring that these needs do not receive only emergency responses. Instead, they should represent the first step toward integration; welcoming must then become the starting point of a path of integration for migrant children in school and the community. Equally important is the right to health, or rather to "care," which is a crucial step toward full integration. There remains the issue of acquiring citizenship in a reasonable time frame in our country, as true integration must begin there.
Many issues and challenges, if left unaddressed, could undermine the already complex social cohesion, which today relies on a system "rooted" in producing foreigners rather than a modern system that creates individuals—women and men who are inhabitants of the world.

Young Caritas strives to contribute to this journey: its primary goal is to create a space for young people and by young people—open, dynamic, flexible, and multitasking—where young individuals have the opportunity to be not only involved but also take on leadership roles, engaging directly in a creative and dynamic experience.

An experience where they can bring their perspective to the interpretation of reality and its needs and choose to act in new and novel fields and contexts, exploring new paths and using new tools.

It is a space where the ability of young people to recognize, judge, and act is supported and encouraged, along with the opportunity to have their

voices heard and contribute their unique perspectives even in the "decision-making spaces," where Caritas' orientations and strategies are shaped. With this spirit, the young people of Young Caritas Florence took action after the invitation to the congress, producing what you will be able to listen to and see during these days, starting with this guidebook, embracing the challenge of looking beyond and becoming champions of a series of activities aimed at understanding others, sharing ideas, experiences, and best practices, collaborating, experimenting with new synergies, promoting skills, and carrying out activities with everyone's contribution.

1. The tree and the fingerprints

by Francesco Bacci
Young Caritas Florence

Trees have always been intertwined with human life and history, a symbol found in all cultures. Thanks to their seeds, they inhabit the entire world, crossing all types of borders. The extent of the canopy is proportional to that of the roots, just as the value of our actions is proportional to the ideas that support them. The roots that delve deep into the earth draw nourishment from our origins, strengthening our present and providing vital sap to the entire plant.

The trunk that connects the roots to the canopy is a symbol of our identity, of the environment that shapes us and allows us to give life to the fruits represented by our imprints.

The imprint of the hands was a primordial tool of human expression, an immediate trace of one's passage, as evidenced by Paleolithic cave paintings and the great evocative power they still hold today. Since the time of the Babylonians, the uniqueness of fingerprints has been recognized, particularly the personal signature they provided on tablets dating back to 500 B.C. The distinctive patterns of our prints are called dermatoglyphs and are formed by the alternating ridges and furrows on the fingertips.

Fingerprints have been used for human identification for centuries due to their immutability and uniqueness, which can be empirically demonstrated.

Today, fingerprints are part of the biometric data used to manage migration flows and asylum requests within the European Union under Regulation (EU) No 603/2013, Eurodac.
The fingerprint carries a history, the story of the one who leaves it, the mark of a passage.

[1] Regulation (EU) No 603/2013 of 26 June 2013

The imprints that represent the fruits of our tree do not have a purely identificative function, but rather serve as a narrative and a means of self-determination, helping us reflect on their dual nature and how a macroscopic view renders them indistinguishable from one another. Yet, they gain uniqueness when observed in detail, much like the stories of every one of us and of those who find themselves lost in this world, in these journeys where individuality often gets lost in classifications that don't quite align with human uniqueness.

What mark do we want to leave behind? The mark of our consumption? Our actions? Our thoughts?

2.1. The Evolution of Regulations on Unaccompanied Minors

by Margherita Fiochi Romagnoli
Caritas Florence Poverty and Resources Observatory

"For Unaccompanied Foreign Minor, the term refers to a foreigner, who is not from the European Union and is stateless, under the age of eighteen, who is present in the national territory without legal assistance and representation" [1]

The specific rights to which every child is entitled are codified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed in New York in 1989. The Convention recognizes that children also have civil, social, and political rights, and it protects their fundamental rights, such as the right to life, survival, and development, the principle of non-discrimination, and the principle of the best interests of the child.

In our legal system, the provisions concerning Unaccompanied Foreign Minors [2] are primarily contained in Legislative Decree No. 286/1998, known as the Consolidated Law on Immigration [3], which primarily deals with the regulation of residence permits. It wasn't until Legislative Decree No. 142 of 2015 that specific provisions were made for the reception of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors. These provisions, as modified by Law No. 47 of 2017 (commonly known as the Zampa Law), represent the framework for the reception of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors.
The law expressly introduces an absolute prohibition on turning minors away at the border. Moreover, it modifies the rules on expulsion, introducing a ban on expelling foreign minors, which may only be overridden for reasons of public order and state security. Article 8 of the same law, however, allows for assisted and voluntary repatriation only if family reunification is in the best interests of the child.

The recent Decree Law No. 133/2023 introduced significant changes regarding the reception of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors, though in the direction of a lesser form of "protection".

[1] Ministry of Labor and Social Policies
[2] From now on, we will use the term "minor" to refer to the Unaccompanied Foreign Minor
[3] Legislative Decree No. 286/1998, articles 32-33

Specifically, it is envisaged that after initial reception in government facilities aimed at rescue and identification needs, minors will be accommodated in SAI*. However, in the case of significant, multiple, and close arrivals of unaccompanied foreign minors, when accommodation cannot be provided by the Municipality - thus places in SAI* are not available - the Prefecture may activate temporary facilities exclusively dedicated to minors, namely CAS* for Minors. In case of temporary unavailability of CAS for minors, the Prefect may arrange for the accommodation of unaccompanied foreign minors over 16 years of age in facilities different from those reserved for minors, therefore in adult CAS*. It is necessary to consider to what extent cohabitation between adults and minors meets the needs for the protection and safeguarding of unaccompanied foreign minors.

THE ITALIAN RECEPTION SYSTEM

SAI (Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione), ensures integrated reception interventions that go beyond mere provision of food and accommodation. It also includes measures for information, guidance, assistance, and orientation, through the establishment of individual pathways for socio-economic integration.
CAS (Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria) were initially conceived as temporary facilities intended to address the exhaustion of spaces in government centers, as identified by Prefects in the territory. However, they have become a permanent part of the Italian reception system, and since 2023, the services offered have been reduced to a minimum

We cannot take for granted that age attribution is certain. Often minors arrive without identity documents, although the absence of documents cannot in any way prejudice the protection of the minor's rights. Currently, the DPCM 234/2016 represents the most comprehensive regulatory source regarding age attribution. The DPCM states that in cases where there are reasonable doubts about the age, and this cannot be determined through documentation, initiation of a multidisciplinary procedure aimed at verification can be requested.

It must always be borne in mind that the verification is carried out pursuing the primary interest of the minor. This procedure includes a social interview, a pediatric examination, and a psychological or neuropsychiatric evaluation, all conducted with the assistance of a cultural mediator. In cases where, considering the margin of error, the minor or major age remains doubtful, minority is presumed. It is important to emphasize that throughout the period relating to the verification of age, the individual must be considered a minor in order to ensure immediate access to care and assistance. On this issue, the D.L. 133/2023 also intervened, which integrates this discipline by stating that "in the event of significant, multiple, and close arrivals of unaccompanied foreign minors, the public security authority may immediately order anthropometric or radiographic surveys aimed at determining age". This involves methods that reduce guarantees while increasing the margin of error. In 2017, a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission indeed argued that such examinations alone can have a significant margin of error, up to two years.

At the supranational level, the Recommendation adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on September 6, 2023, appears relevant, aiming to strengthen reporting systems on violence against children. This recommendation is in line with the "Council of Europe Strategy for Children's Rights (2022-2027)."

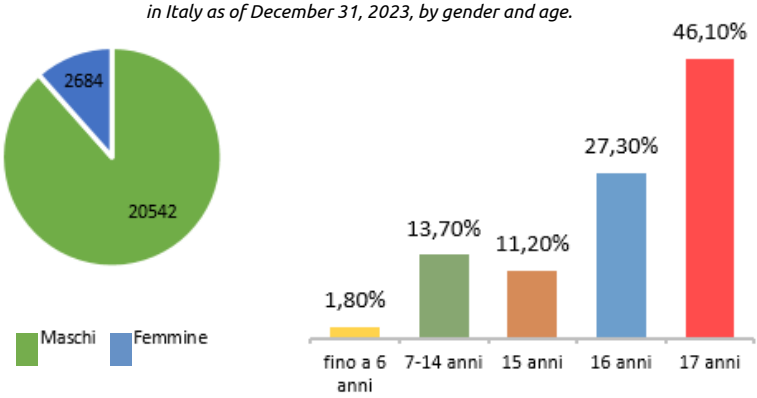
[4] D.L. 5th october 2023, n. 133, art. 5

2.2. Unaccompaneid Foreign Minors in Italy

by Margherita Fiochi Romagnoli
Caritas Florence Poverty and Resources Observatory

As of December 31, 2023, there were a total of 23,226 Unaccompanied Foreign Minors registered in Italy. These minors are predominantly male (88.4%), with females accounting for only 11.6% of the total. Regarding age distribution, 46% are 17 years old, 27.3% are 16 years old, while those aged between 7 and 14 years represent 13.7% of the total.

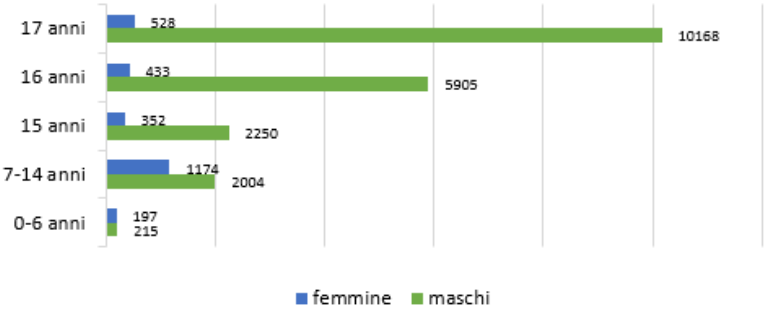
Graph 1 - Demographic characteristics of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors in Italy as of December 31, 2023, by gender and age.



SOURCE: Analysis based on data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies

The distribution of minors by age and gender (Graph 2) shows some significant differences. Among females, the most substantial age group is represented by those aged between 7 and 14 years. Meanwhile, among male minors, the most substantial age group is those over 17 years old.
Considering the prevalence of male minors, the age distribution of males substantially overlaps with the total. The age distribution of females is strongly influenced by the presence of Ukrainians. In fact, if we exclude the 2,100 female minors from Ukraine, the age distribution normalizes and confirms a higher representation for the older age groups (16 and 17 years).

Graph 2 - Age groups by gender

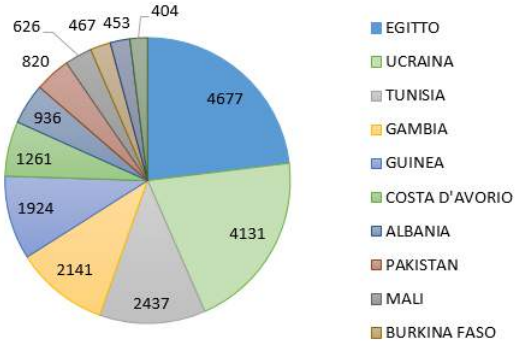


SOURCE: Analysis based on data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies

Unaccompanied foreign minors present in the reception system as of December 31, 2023, come from 63 different countries. The majority (68.7%) come from the African continent. There are 11 Eastern European countries from which 22.8% of unaccompanied foreign minors originate. Following these, we find the Middle East (8.5%) and South America (1%).
The main nationalities of the recorded minors are Egyptian (4,667 minors), Ukrainian (4,131), Tunisian (2,438), Gambian (2,141), Guinean (1,925), Ivoirian (1,261), and Albanian (936). Together, these nationalities represent three-quarters of the unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy. Other nationalities that are also well represented include Pakistani (820), Malaysian (626), Burkinabe (468), Eritrean (453), and Afghan (404).

Analyzing the data from the past five years, we can observe that some countries have shown a decreasing trend in terms of presence. Indeed, the presence of Egyptian minors is decreasing despite remaining the largest nationality among unaccompanied foreign minors. The presence of Ukrainian minors has also slowed down; following the war that began in 2021, arrivals continued throughout 2022. In 2023, there has been a slow but steady decline in their presence.

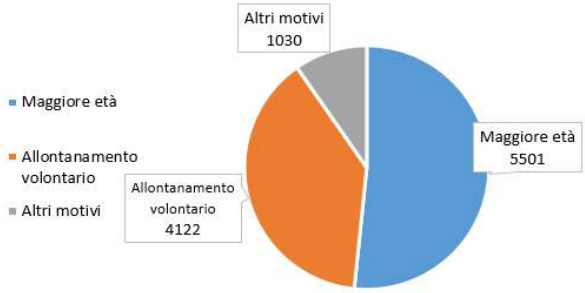
Graph 3 - Distribution of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors by Main Nationalities as of December 31, 2023



SOURCE: Analysis based on data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies

To better describe the phenomenon of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (UFMs), it is also important to consider the turnover between minors entering and those exiting the care system. Among minors who have exited the care system (Graph 4), there are not only those who have reached the age of majority but also those who have left voluntarily. Certainly, among the motivations for voluntary departure, we find the desire to reach other European countries. Exit from the care system for "Other reasons" includes motivations such as family placement, voluntary assisted repatriation, and tracing of parents or legally responsible adults. Overall, the UFMs who exited the care system in the second half of 2023 numbered 10,653, with 38.7% departing voluntarily. Therefore, we can affirm that there is a significant group of vulnerable individuals, both newly adults and minors, outside the assistance system.

Graph 4 - UFMs Exited from Care July-December 2023



SOURCE: Analysis based on data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies

2.3 Data Analysis

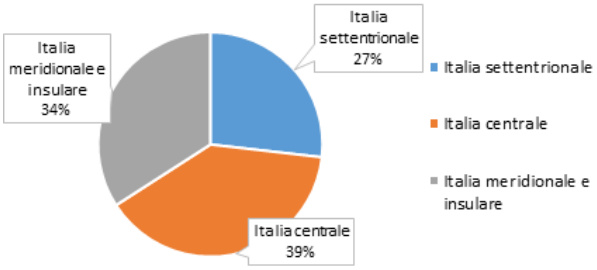
by Margherita Fiochi Romagnoli
Caritas Florence Poverty and Resources Observatory

During the National Congress "Circular Narrative - The Story of a Different Pediatrics," Young Caritas Florence spoke on behalf of the boys and girls who work in Caritas and/or are active in Italian Young Caritas.

220 young people active in Caritas across the peninsula participated in the survey. Specifically, we can divide them into three age groups: 27.3% are aged between 18 and 22, 42.7% between 23 and 26, and finally 30% between 27 and 30.

Regarding the regional distribution (Graph 5), 59 operate in Caritas in Northern Italy, 86 in Central Italy, and 75 in Southern and Insular Italy.

Graph 5 - Regional Distribution of Survey Participants



SOURCE: Own elaboration

Through the questionnaire, it was possible to investigate and gather perceptions of the migratory phenomenon, particularly concerning the number and origin of unaccompanied foreign minors (UFMs) present in Italy as of December 31, 2023.

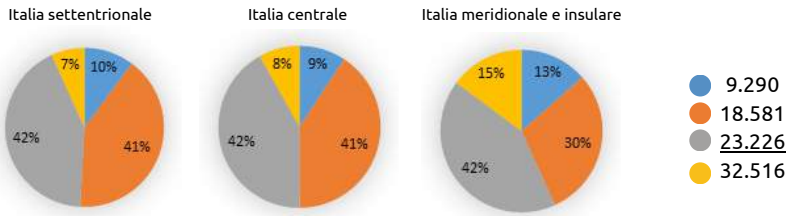
[5] N**orthern Italy**: Valle d'Aosta, Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna. **Central Italy**: Tuscany, Marche, Umbria, Lazio, Abruzzo, Molise. **Southern and Insular Italy:** Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily, Sardinia.

The aggregated data shows that 41.8% of participants have a correct perception of the number of minors, 23,226 at the end of 2023. However, there is a significant portion (36.8%) who underestimate their presence by 20%, stating that the total number of minors is 18,581. The remaining participants have a much more distorted perception: 10.9% underestimate it by 60%, and 10.4% overestimate it by 40%.

These data gain greater significance when compared with the regional origins of the respondents. Data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies show that UFMs are not equally distributed across the national territory. In fact, over half (51%) of minors are hosted in Southern and Insular Italy, 36% are hosted in Northern Italy, and only 13% in Central Italy. Regarding specific regions: 26% of minors are hosted in Sicily, 12% in Lombardy, 8.2% in Emilia-Romagna, 7.4% in Campania, and 5.9% in Lazio. Overall, these five regions host more than 60% of all UFMs present as of December 31, 2023.

In general (Graph 6), in all three macro-areas, we find that the majority of participants have a correct perception regarding the presence of UFMs (Northern Italy 42.4%, Central Italy 41.9%, and Southern and Insular Italy 41.3%). Despite this, around 30-40% of respondents from each area underestimate their presence by 20%.
Analyzing responses from Southern Italy, we can observe an increase (15%) in those who overestimate the presence of UFMs by 40%. This data could be attributable to the high number of minors hosted in that area. However, we do not find such a perception among respondents from Northern Italy, who (10.1%) significantly underestimate the presence of UFMs.

Graph 6 - Perception of the Number of UFMs by Macro-Areas



SOURCE: Own elaboration

The Census of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (MSNA) present in Italy as of December 31, 2023, conducted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, allows for the identification of the countries of origin of minors. Specifically, out of the 23,226 MSNA, 8,526 come from sub-Saharan Africa, 7,414 from North Africa, 5,287 from Eastern Europe, 1,965 from the Middle East, 24 from South America, 8 from Asia, and 2 are stateless. The questionnaire also investigated perceptions regarding this aspect, asking participants to rank the six macro-regions in ascending order based on departures.

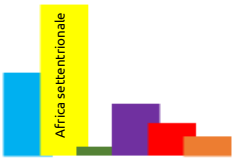
What emerged is far from reality; the majority of respondents claimed that the region with the highest number of MSNA is North Africa, followed by sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, South America, and finally Asia.
Through Graph 7, we aim to present the perspective of the boys and girls who participated in the questionnaire.

Graph 7 - Perception Regarding the Origin of UFMs

"According to you, from which region do the most Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (UFMs) arriving in Italy come from? Assign a number to each area where 1 indicates the region with the least number of departures and 6 the region with the highest number of departures of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (UFMs)"

Africa sub-sahariana
Africa Settentrionale
Sud America
Medio Oriente
Est Europa
Asia

1. Geographic Area with the Highest Number of Departures of UFMs



The majority of participants believe that North Africa is the region with the highest number of departures

2.

The second region of origin is North Africa; however, the majority of participants claim that it is sub-Saharan Africa

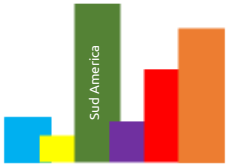
3.

In this case, the majority overestimates the presence of UFMs from the Middle East, placing them in third position. In reality, the third position in terms of numbers is occupied by UFMs from Eastern Europe

4

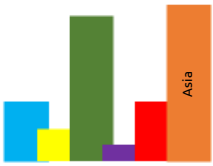
Benché vi sia maggiore distribuzione delle risposte, la maggioranza, indicando il Medio Oriente, è in linea con i dati ufficiali

5.



La percezione della maggior parte dei partecipanti in questo caso è in linea con i dati nel collocare il Sud America al penultimo posto per numerosità di partenze

6. Zona Geografica con il minor numero di partenza di MSNA



La percezione del maggior numero dei partecipanti è orientata nel definire come zona con il minor numero di partenze l'Asia, coerentemente con la realtà.

2.4. Responsibility

by Isabel Radovani and Silvia Meloni
Caritas Florence

"Do you feel you have responsibilities towards migrant children?"

The issue of migrant children is complex and evokes a variety of thoughts and feelings regarding the responsibility we have towards them within our community.

Responsibility towards others is a fundamental concept that pertains to our duty to consider the interests, needs, and well-being of the people around us. This responsibility can manifest in multiple ways, both on a personal and societal level. It means taking on the task of helping others when they are in need, being empathetic and supportive in interpersonal relationships, and contributing to the welfare of the community and society as a whole. Responsibility towards others also implies respect, kindness, and mutual consideration. Embracing and honoring our responsibility towards others is vital in order to forge deep bonds, promoting harmonious social inclusion, and shaping a society imbued with justice and solidarity.

Many participants have emphasized the importance of individual responsibility in ensuring the welfare and protection of migrant children. They feel a strong sense of human and civic duty in offering direct support to these children, who often find themselves in situations of extreme vulnerability. This support can take many forms, from actively participating in their integration into the local community to providing emotional and practical support.

Others have highlighted the importance of collective societal engagement in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for migrant children. They believe that it is essential for all members of the community to work together to address the challenges these children face, ensuring their access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and legal support.

Many people have expressed a strong desire to raise awareness about the importance of supporting migrant children and the underlying causes of their migration. They believe that education and awareness are crucial to combating discrimination and promoting inclusion. At the same time, many actively engage in action, participating in volunteer initiatives and supporting organizations working to aid migrant children.

The questionnaire responses reflect two main approaches to responsibilities towards migrant children. Those who feel responsible highlight a sense of general humanity and a willingness to cooperate and support migrant minors, pushing towards concrete actions such as volunteering and integration. Conversely, those who do not feel direct responsibility often attribute this lack of engagement to a sense of powerlessness or deference of responsibility to other actors, such as governments or human traffickers. However, even if they do not recognize direct responsibility, many emphasize the importance of being sensitive and welcoming towards migrant children, despite individual limitations.

In conclusion, the collected opinions reflect a strong sense of responsibility and deep commitment to ensuring a better future for migrant children. Both at an individual and collective level, there is recognition of the importance of acting with compassion, solidarity, and determination in the face of the challenges these children face every day.

2.5. En - pátheia

Among the questions posed to the 220 youths actively involved in various capacities in Italian Caritas and Young Caritas, two were particularly personal:

- "What would you say to a migrant child? Feel free to respond in the language of your choice"
- "What emotion does the image of a migrant child evoke in you? Feel free to respond in the language of your choice"

The choice to allow respondents to answer in their preferred language is of great significance, as many of them come from migratory backgrounds both within the European continent and intercontinentally. This constitutes added value not only for the working team (specifically, the referring Caritas), but also for the global social fabric. This decision aimed to highlight the value of multilingualism, the importance of linguistic interferences, and the right to preserve one's mother tongue, which is the right to recognition of one's own history. The mother tongue represents our roots, maintaining our identity and guiding us in the process of learning other languages, leaving the authentic imprint of our personal history.

2.5.1. In Lak'ech

by I. Radovani, G. Monasteri, M. Fiochi Romagnoli, S. Meloni, K. Cepa, S. Morciano

"In Lak'ech": "I am another you", "you are another me."

This is the meaning of a greeting and a philosophy of life from Maya culture that teaches us the importance of recognizing the other as part of a larger whole, in line with what Pope Francis expressed in the encyclical "Fratelli Tutti." The pontiff emphasized the importance of an open and empathetic fraternity that allows us to recognize, appreciate, and love every person, regardless of where they were born or live.

[6] Pope Francis, "Fratelli Tutti" (2020)

In this perspective, empathy plays a key role in every human encounter, allowing us to understand others by empathizing with their experiences. Hence the choice to title this chapter "In lak'ech": before judging and before discriminating, it is an ethical duty to listen, to put ourselves in the shoes of others, and to welcome them.

This concept, which should be the cornerstone of every human relationship, is actually rarely reflected in the responses of the 220 youths active in Italian Caritas organizations. However, a small portion of them embraces and internalizes this philosophy, focusing on the child as such without crystallizing them into the migrant category.

"I can't think of a specific phrase. I would try to relate to him/her as I would with an Italian child, which doesn't mean disregarding the trauma he/she has experienced, but for me it means trying to make him/her feel at home with a certain carefreeness, which as a child he/she deserves"

"I would tell him/her to keep feeling like a child"

From the responses emerges the naturalness and spontaneity of simple human contact, which materializes in "what's your name" and "how are you." An important aspect is taken by Identity, or the sense and awareness of oneself as a distinct entity from others and continuing over time.

"Identity is a house with many rooms"

This is connected to the importance placed on the sense of belonging.

"It is possible to build one's life without losing one's roots"

"Anche questo posto può diventare casa tua"

"I would say that I can imagine his/her suffering, that I can try to understand how he/she feels, but that I could never fully comprehend what he/she is experiencing"

IFinally, unfortunately, from some responses, a paternalistic attitude emerges that subordinates the child's position, departing from the empathetic, inclusive, and pastoral logic.

"I wouldn't say anything, I would hug him/her. I wouldn't say anything because everything would seem out of place to me"


gioia
somiglianza
fragilità
sofferenza
instabilità
nessuna
coraggio
terrore
pena
apprensione
abbandono
disperazione
malinconia
preoccupazione
impotenza
anger
protection
pietà
sadness
curiosità
empatia
rammarico
normalità
protezione
carità
esasperazione
solidarietà
rispetto
tristezze
rinascita
fortuna
necessità
felicità
tristezza
incertezza
tenerezza
compassione
accoglienza
pazienza
dispiacere
preoccupazioni
rabbia
retos
delusione
colpa
comprensione
paura
angoscia
dubbio
responsabilità
bisogno
commozione
ingiustizia
speranza
forza
solitudine
vicinanza
respect
fallimento
hope
dolore
sconforto
pity
scoperta
diseguaglianza
inquietudine

3. Just Italian

by Klea Cepa
Young Caritas Florence

Hi, I'm Klea, and I've been living in Italy for 14 years.
I was 7 years old the first time I set foot in Ponsacco, the place where I grew up and where, with my family, we decided to settle down.

I was just 8 years old when I started school; the idea of starting the first grade again in a different place, far from my classmates from the previous year, terrified me. I hated Ponsacco.

I grew up in the countryside, where the most I could encounter on the street were grazing animals; here, I couldn't walk alone, and I wasn't used to seeing streets so busy with vehicles.
Everything seemed so different from what I was used to, and I often thought I would never fit in. I even bought a piggy bank to put in, coin after coin, the money needed to buy a one-way plane ticket to Albania. Then I bought many plane tickets to Albania, but they all included the return.

Ponsacco became my home. And I became its citizen, or almost... After 14 years in Italy, I still don't have Italian citizenship.
After 14 years, after completing my entire educational journey in this country, I still don't have Italian citizenship.
But I no longer feel like an Albanian citizen either.

Certainly, the language, customs, and traditions are part of me, and my roots are deeply planted in that wonderful land, but my life now is here. The place where I want to grow is here, but I can't fully consider myself welcomed by this country until, absurdly, a piece of paper proves it.

Last year, I left for Ecuador, where I lived and worked for a year,

[1] I was a volunteer operator in Civil Service from September 2022 to September 2023 in Ecuador.

and just moments before boarding the plane that would take me to Latin America, I thought I would never make it.

Hi, I'm Klea, I'm Italian. Or rather, I feel like one, I feel Italian but I still can't vote. Hi, I'm Klea, I'm Italian.

Will I be able to say it one day? I wish I could say it without having to think: "do I have to specify that I still don't have a piece of paper to prove it?" Hi, I'm Klea, and two years ago I became Italian, in my municipality.

Currently, Ponsacco is the only place where my honorary citizenship, conferred by Mayor Francesca Brogi, is valid.
This gesture filled me with pride, made me feel welcomed, and reminded me of how important it is for everyone to do the same.

There are many children and teenagers who live in the same reality as me, the reality of those who truly cannot feel part of something.
In Italy, currently, 10 years of residency with a residence permit and a job that allows you to earn the minimum required income are necessary.
And at least 3 years are equally necessary to receive a positive or negative outcome.

Three years ago, my family and I tried to apply, but the pandemic complicated things; my father lost his job, and it wasn't possible to guarantee an income to apply for citizenship.
We are trying again this year; will it be the right time?

I have thought a lot about what would be appropriate to write, while I'm here thinking about how to convey all this, about the impact that my experience related to much larger problems could have.

It's true, I am perfectly integrated into this country and I feel extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to shed light on this condition, but I am aware that this is the last step.

True integration does not start with a piece of paper; true integration would be allowing all children like me to live a childhood worthy of being called such.
I would like to convey a reflection; my story is just one among many. I would like each of you to be aware of what a migrant child experiences, and this Congress is the right place to discuss it together. I would like to be a spokesperson for those who have no voice; I would like to be able to say, one day, that Italy is a country that truly welcomes, a country that recognizes its citizens, who can make it even greater thanks to the sensitivity of those with a migration experience behind them.

"*Vorrei essere libero come un uomo.*
Come un uomo che ha bisogno di spaziare con la propria fantasia
e che trova questo spazio solamente nella sua democrazia,
che ha il diritto di votare…
…Libertà è partecipazione"[3]

Everything is encapsulated in these simple words: *Freedom is participation*, and I, like many others, will never be free until I can actively participate in the country where I grew up.
Just Italian, it's my right.

[2] In reference to the III edition of "Circular Narration - The Story of a Different Pediatrics" held in Siracusa from May 16th to 19th, 2024.
[3]Translation from Italian: "*I would like to be as free as a man. Like a man who needs to roam with his imagination and who finds this space only in his democracy, who has the right to vote. Freedom is participation*". From the song "La libertà" by Giorgio Gaber (1972).

ماء

4. Se sarà, sarà Sarajevo

by Morgan Rosano
Civil Peace Corps in Bosnia and Herzegovina,
formerly White Helmet in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Caritas Siracusa

My service experience began in May 2022. At that time, I was studying at the University of Turin, and I had only heard about Civil Service in a generic sense. Before applying for Sarajevo, I saw many projects abroad that all seemed very interesting, but something drew me to Bosnia, and while waiting to hear if I had been accepted or not, I thought, "if it will be, it will be Sarajevo."

I will tell my experience starting with some elements and reflections on Bosnia. Then, I will specifically talk about my work.

Upon arriving in Bosnia, the first few months were intense and full of stimuli. Bosnia is a country that does not hide its complex past: the signs of the war of the 1990s are firmly present in the everyday reality that surrounds you, from the walls of the buildings to the memories of the people who moderately and without giving too much away, open a window on that period never fully understandable to those who have never experienced the war.

On my first day in Sarajevo, I was impressed by the holes in the buildings, the evident signs left by the bombings in the houses where people still live. I was even more surprised by the contrasts that characterize this atypical capital; one part of the city has the typically socialist design that you can find a bit in Budapest, a bit in Berlin, and a bit in Tbilisi. The historic center is instead a mix of Ottoman-style houses and Austro-Hungarian-style palaces due to the many dominations of the last two centuries.

Sarajevo is not called the Jerusalem of Europe by chance because of the mosques, the Orthodox churches, and the Catholic ones, all within a few meters of each other. Here, in fact, 50% of the population is Muslim, 35% Orthodox, and 15% Catholic, although in Sarajevo, around 80% of the population is Muslim, and the rest is Catholic.

The Orthodox Serbs live instead in East Sarajevo, which, a bit like old Berlin and the recent (indeed very recent) Jerusalem, represents the other side here. Bosnia is the country where in the same street, a Matteo, a Mohammed, and a Miloš can live, all three Bosnian citizens but of three different religions and nationalities: indeed, before the war, it would not have been strange for the Catholic Matteo to marry Mohammed's sister, but after the war, Bosnia remains a multi-ethnic country only on paper.

Once, a trainer of mine, as we were heading to a refugee camp for training, told me about a saying she liked very much, "Where Bosnia begins, logic ends." Although I still don't like this saying very much, I admit that it finds its maximum expression in the fact that this is the only country in the world to have three presidents, one for the Serbs/Orthodox, one for the Croats/Catholics, and the other for the Muslims, and as if that were not enough, there is a sort of fourth international president who since the end of the war oversees compliance with the Dayton agreements, those agreements that ended the war.
The country lives in further internal division between the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, an entity predominantly Muslim-Croatian, and Republika Srpska, which is instead predominantly Serbian. Unfortunately, this is not only an ethnic division but also a bureaucratic-administrative one that limits the possibility of benefiting from a whole range of services if one is a resident in the other administrative entity (even though in many areas of the country, there are only a few meters between the Republic and the Federation).

In just a few kilometers by car, changing entities, you see mainly Cyrillic writings (the alphabet used by the Serbs), and it is not uncommon to find murals praising Ratko Mladic, the soldier of the Republika Srpska armed forces who in 1995 ordered the execution of 8,000 Muslim-Bosniak men and adolescents in Srebrenica.

Despite its ambivalences, Bosnia is a country that surprises you especially positively; its nature is very similar to that of Switzerland: it is full of lakes and forests, hills, and greenery everywhere. Its food is a mix of Slavic and Turkish culinary traditions, people are very kind and stubborn, and most young people speak English.

The country has a lot of variety, and even though it's small in size, you can find Međugorje, a strong pilgrimage destination every year. You can find the recently discovered pyramids of Visoko, the beautiful Sufi village of Blagaj, the stunning bridges of Mostar, and a myriad of places for rafting. But what I like the most are the countless stories of young boys and girls who have reinvented themselves through art. In fact, Sarajevo is teeming with very young artists, many of whom have now founded art galleries or run their own businesses in music, art, sculpture, etc. Events, festivals, and exhibitions are never lacking.

Now let's talk about my work experience.
When the Taliban took Kabul in August 2021 and masses of Afghans were evacuated, including to Italy, I wondered what kind of life they led, and I thought it would be interesting to talk to them. I could never have imagined that less than a year later, I would be doing this as a job. In Bosnia, in fact, my job consists of managing a small space called a social corner in a temporary reception center where we provide hot drinks, organize workshops, and games with migrants from the Balkan route who temporarily stop here to continue their journey through the Balkans to reach Western Europe.
The most common nationalities in the camp are Afghans, Pakistanis, Moroccans, Syrians, and Iranians, and at times there have also been Russians, Cubans, and Burundians. The Balkan route is indeed the obligatory path that many unaccompanied young people and families find themselves taking because even if they have a passport, when they cannot prove to the consulate of a European country that they have at least ten thousand euros in their bank account and a guaranteed place to live, no country will grant them a tourist visa, let alone a work visa.
Just to give you an idea, according to the global passport power ranking, Italy, along with other Western European countries, ranks second, meaning that there are many countries in the world where we can enter without a visa, while the power of Iraqi, Syrian, and Afghan passports is respectively ranked 90th, 91st, and 92nd, meaning that legal routes to reach us are a pipe dream.
The majority of migrants I have spoken to travel through Iran, then they stop for a while in Turkey to work for a few years, and afterwards they continue on to Greece.

In Greece, according to various accounts from migrants, the police don't hesitate to shoot at those attempting to cross the border illegally, including women and children, and if they decide not to shoot, they resort to punches, kicks, and baton strikes. Similar stories of violence have been recounted regarding the borders of Bulgaria, Serbia, and Croatia. The violence of the Croatian police is the one I have had the most direct testimony of; the border is heavily guarded by police and drones, and migrants traveling from Bosnia to reach it often sleep in the forests for days in winter with temperatures as low as -20°C and limited supplies, risking stepping on landmines since many wooded areas in Bosnia have not yet been cleared from the war in the 1990s.

Those caught attempting to cross the border have their phones destroyed, which contain maps to return to the refugee camps and various contacts of relatives and friends, and all their money is stolen, sometimes even hundreds of euros, as nobody traverses Europe on foot crossing various rivers with credit cards but only with cash. In winter, there have been cases of police officers forcing migrants to take off their shoes and return to Bosnia barefoot in the snow, amidst the backdrop of the severe beatings.

Although in daily contact with migrants, we talk about the negative experiences they have had during their journey, it is mainly about their dreams, stories, and desires. The sudden moment when people you have been in contact with for months tell you it's time to say goodbye because they are about to attempt the game (in migration jargon, it's the attempt to cross the Balkan borders) catches you off guard, but a moment later you think it's just right, and you can only remember the best of those long conversations.

When after weeks you receive messages from guys who have managed to reach Germany, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom with their selfies, you understand the true value of this experience. Every story enriches you a little, like that of the Algerian twins, my peers who wanted to be barbers, with whom I managed to eat pizza in Rome after months of not seeing each other since the last time we said goodbye in Bosnia in a refugee camp.

Like the story of a distinguished middle-aged Afghan man who worked as a carpet entrepreneur, a mechanic, a tour guide, and much more, and who then had to flee because he kept a video on his computer, discovered by the police, in which he mocked the Taliban with British tourists.

I also recall the story of a young Sudanese man who speaks German fluently without ever having been to Germany and who fled his country as a child due to war before moving to Libya, only to flee again for the same reason. With a certain smile, I think of my Tunisian friend, who, because of his Sicilian mother, speaks Italian and every time he sees me, he calls me "my blood", now eager to reach Spain.

Finally, I cannot conclude this testimony without mentioning the story of Zarfa, a colleague who chose to work in a refugee camp because who better than her can understand the drama of migration? Zarfa is from Srebrenica and was 17 years old when she had to flee alone to Malta, welcomed by some local organizations. Zarfa lost all her relatives in the 1995 genocide and only found her father's bones in 2005. Zarfa is now called "Mama" by all the migrants in the camp, and I have never seen anyone do this job with her passion and dedication.

In a conversation we had about war and forgiveness, she told me that a mother can only say she has done her job well when her children become good people. Indeed, it is in the essence of this sentence that I find the overall meaning of this experience, of civil service and civil peace corps.

Having met so many migrant peers, all so tremendously far from their mothers, with such significant life experiences, has helped me become a better and certainly more aware person than when I left two years ago. In my own small way, I can conclude this testimony by emphasizing that I have come to understand how migration is first an inner journey, and then an external one, a journey lived and experienced that, in most cases, makes a person better.

5. Step by step

by Santina Morciano
Caritas Florence

Faces, stories, gazes: on these, the identity of Caritas is built, the "symbolic" place where I have the opportunity to work. An identity that daily engages in practices of dialogue and support, of comparison and reciprocity, to connect the multiple identities of which it is constituted.

The identity of Caritas reminds me a lot of that of this land, the South, which Don Tonino Bello defined as a "Window-land. A symbol-land. A hope-land. A frontier-land. A land's end. (...) A land, an icon of redemption, which rejects the perspective of being used as a military bulwark of Europe, thrust into the Mediterranean as an arc of war and not as an ark of peace."

For this reason, when Narrazione Circolare - represented by Antonella De Vito and Prof. Francesco De Luca, whom I sincerely thank - invited me to participate in a Congress on migrant children, I first wondered how I could contribute, what imprint I could leave.

I started from my roots, which sink into a strip of land bathed by the Mediterranean Sea, the cradle of my history but the tomb of many others.

Then, I thought about where I have arrived now, to that "symbolic" place (which is Caritas) resembling the South: an open port that keeps alive the traditional vocation for welcoming the different, those in social and/or economic difficulty, the culture of exchange and gratuitousness, the awareness of solidarity necessary for those who carry out a service of charity (that is, a service of love) from person to person, from story to story, from face to face. I consider myself fortunate to have been born and raised in a land where the wind of diversity blows strong, causing hybrid and variegated seeds to sprout.

[1] In reference to the III Congress of Circular Narration - The Story of a Different Pediatrics, held in Siracusa from May 16th to 19th, 2024.
[2] A. Bello, 2007. *Sud a caro prezzo: il cambiamento come sfida*, La Meridiana, Molfetta.

It has taught me to train my gaze and critical thinking in recognizing faces.

"Immigrant child, welcoming child: the imprints of humanity in motion" is the title given to this project. But who is this child? What is their face? What is their story? Alan, Karim, Ahmed, Lea, Malak, Esther, Marie, Evelyn, Xhenisa, Mohamed, Nour, Latifah, Ismail, Lina. These are not just names. They are stories and emotional universes. For this reason, I was sadly surprised to read the responses to the question "What emotion does the image of an immigrant child evoke in you?": "Sadness", "compassion", "pity", "pain".

Faced with these words, one wonders: what is the daily life on which - as volunteers, trainers, social workers, doctors, educators, etc. - do we operate? What impact do these emotions have on the cognitive and affective universe of the child we interact with?
The immigrant child is not a photograph that remains still and immutable, but rather a frame of a broader process.
Only when we manage to see them as a story in continuous development rather than a person relegated to a category, perhaps we could better understand that the sensationalization of their suffering and the exhibition of the brutality to which they are often victims, should be discussed beyond any attempt at compassion.

The heartbreaking images spread by the media of children wrapped like golden cocoons in thermal blankets or at the end of life or lying on the shores or in situations of extreme poverty and/or danger, along the Balkan Route, generate sadness, compassion, pity, and pain unto themselves. Such emotional mobilization, although not undermining the reality of the facts, is extremely weak because it has short-term effects and on the individual, completely disregarding the social causes - albeit more or less recognized - of such sufferings.

[3] Reference to the question discussed on page 29 of this booklet, posed in the questionnaire administered to girls and boys aged 18 to 30 who work in various capacities in Caritas and Young Caritas throughout Italy.

The child becomes a flag instead of the wind that guides that banner. The context of children's lives, the reasons why they find themselves in a particular situation that leads to migration, are lost sight of.
What to do then? Probably, the first step is to be aware that we are responsible for each other, that one person's suffering concerns everyone but not everyone has the privilege of exempting themselves from suffering: "We cannot know why the world suffers. But we can know how the world decides that suffering will affect some yes and others no" [4].
In the past year, I had the opportunity to travel to Turkey following the earthquake that struck the southeast of the country and the northwest of neighboring Syria. The same tragedy with extremely different consequences for Turkish children compared to Syrian and Afghan children immigrated to Turkish territory. All with scars, all with different times and opportunities for healing.
Thus, awareness of the historically constructed structural inequalities can allow us to be social actors, promoters of change beyond mere rhetoric.
Significant in this regard is the fact that Pope Francis has declared this year the first World Children's Day, which will be held in Rome on May 25 and 26, 2024. In His Message, His Holiness invited "to become as agile as children in grasping the novelties stirred up by the Spirit in us and around us. (...) We can dream of a new humanity and commit ourselves to a more fraternal society attentive to our common home. (...) The world is transformed above all through small things, without being ashamed of taking only small steps. On the contrary, our smallness reminds us that we are fragile and that we need each other, as members of one body" [5].
In addition to continuing to be excellent professionals, we can commit to being active citizens by supporting the rights of those who have no voice or who struggle to be heard, promoting good practices of integration, dialogue, and coexistence. In this way, perhaps, the world will begin to change, or at least our world will. When we think of a migrant child, we will be able to see a story, a face, with an empathetic rather than compassionate look, fraternal rather than pitiful. It will be possible, step by step, we just have to believe in it!

[4] G. Calabresi ; P. Bobbitt, 2006. *Scelte Tragiche*, Giuffrè Editore, Milano.
[5] Message of Pope Francis for the 1st World Children's Day (May 25-26, 2024), March 2, 2024, www.press.vatican.va.it

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Finally, we thank all the diocesan Caritas organizations scattered throughout Italy for disseminating the questionnaire to their Young Caritas members.


Vorrei che le chiese fossero come un albero
che non chiede agli uccelli di dove vengono e dove vanno
ma offre loro ombra e cibo lasciali qui che volino via.
don Angelo Casati
Al lavoro per il workshop
che presenteremo a
Siracusa il 18 maggio 2024


UN SEGNO TRA
UMANITÀ E
DISUMANITÀ
Ebrima Danso
pittore
migrante
dall'Africa

Caritas
Organismo Pastorale
ARCIDIOCESI DI FIRENZE

young Caritas
FIRENZE

SIMPE
SOCIETÀ ITALIANA MEDICI PEDIATRI

III Edizione
NARRAZIONE CIRCOLARE
Racconto di una Pediatria Differente

Leukasia