The conditions of minor migrants in Italy is a complex issue and should take account of the opportunities offered by the local authority that welcomes them and the regional and national regulations that govern integration processes.

Minor economic migrants (those NOT requesting international protection) arrive in Italy with the hope of finding a better future. They count on being able to work immediately and help their families, partly to pay back the debt taken on for their irregular journeys.

Regarding the minors welcomed at our care facilities in 2015, 68% of them come from Egypt. Egyptians also comprise the majority of unaccompanied foreign minors present on Italian soil.

However, they don't always leave their country to gain freedom, but rather, in many cases, because their parents urge them to leave in order to earn money and send home remittances. The economic conditions of the "sending" families are not that bad. In many cases the father works and the family owns a small plot of land and livestock.

In particular, regarding the minors from Egypt, we have noted that they come from the same place (the district of Gharbeya). This leads us to believe, which is confirmed by the children themselves, that their departure is also due to imitation of other migrants and the fact that fellow countrymen (including relatives) are already living in Italy.

So migration is driven by their families and the widespread choice made by their peers rather than their own personal requirements. Indeed, many of the children say that if they could they would rather not repeat the experience and many wish to return to Egypt, but their families, who are opposed to welcoming them back, discourage them from doing so.

Another important aspect concerns the laws regarding regularisation of foreigners' status in Italy.

Adult foreigners may only obtain residence permits on the basis of the quotas set each year by the Italian government. However, minors, who cannot be expelled under Italian law, are granted residence permits which may very easily be converted to allow employment or enable them to wait until they reach 18 years of age before being able to seek employment. So immigration by minors is a stratagem to regularise their status in Italy.

This motivates people traffickers to "publicise" this shortcut in order to encourage growth of their own earnings.

After arriving in Italy minors are welcomed in communities where they are able to start the integration process, including:

* Identification and location of identity documents
* Recording of their stories and contact with their families
* Allocation of a public or private guardian in the absence of relevant adult figures
* Application for a minor's residence permit
* School placement, vocational training and work placement
* Placement in a community for minors until they reach 18 years of age.

Local authorities assist minors until they reach the age of majority. On their 18th birthday they are discharged and are no longer eligible to receive assistance.

The problems we often encounter in implementing the intervention procedure are:

The children arrive without identity documents

The photographic identification carried out by the police isn't always communicated to us, and often children have already been welcomed at other facilities

Public guardianship takes effect many months after submission of our application

In many cases minors leave the communities where they have begun the social care process, which means they have to start again, thus prolonging the intervention

School placement is hampered by the "resistance" of public schools to take charge of children enrolled during a school year in progress due to the difficulty of integrating them into classes with younger children and the fact that the minors lack knowledge of Italian.

There are very few vocational courses, and those that exist have entry requirements that are too demanding for our children. Work placement is almost impossible not only due to lack of offers, but also to the children's poor employability profiles, which is a direct consequence of the high rate of early school leaving. If we analyse the specific situation of Egyptian unaccompanied minors, who have reached adolescence without knowing the language and are swiftly absorbed by the labour market, the possibility of resuming any training process is minimal. They are usually employed in tiring, temporary and sometimes dangerous jobs that are badly paid. The Egyptian community offers jobs in carwashes, greengrocers, fish shops, etc. After an initial period of enthusiasm, fatigue and stress coupled with the very low wages, sometimes lead them to take painkilling opiates. In some cases they were using such drugs before migrating, and in Italy they step their consumption with serious repercussions on their health.

Another possible consequence is becoming involved in petty crime: theft, dealing and prostitution. These activities generate higher and rapid earnings. Reliable and up-to-date data are hard to come by as this phenomenon isn't covered by official statistics. Most of the figures are estimates, and partly derive from social workers, institutional representatives and minors living in Italy. Some of the numbers for 2013 are provided by the European Commission, which reports that approximately 5.5 million minors around the world are victims of trafficking for the purposes of sexual and/or labour exploitation.

Indeed, providing assistance until 18 years of age stymies prior interventions as those who have just come of age, deprived of financial resources and maybe without having completed their pathway to autonomy, have not reached the minimum level of self-determination needed to deal with the social context, thus exposing them to risks of marginalisation.

Proposals:

* Identification procedures need to be standardised at national level
* Partnership agreements should be entered into with the diplomatic authorities of the countries of origin of minor economic migrants (therefore excluding international protection applicants) in order to facilitate the issue of identity documents for their citizens
* Streamline the allocation procedures for guardians who should preferably be private in order to avoid conflicts of interest between the reception system (for which the local authority is responsible) and initiatives on behalf of the welcomed minors
* Create literacy centres in public schools for new arrivals, in preparation for their integration within normal school classes
* Step up vocational training courses, facilitating access to them, and making them short and cyclical
* Study employment support initiatives with incentives for employers
* Extend assistance to 19 years of age for those just reaching majority in need of it.

*Caritas Diocesana di Roma, Italy*

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