Between 2014 and 2018, more than 70,000 unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) arrived in Italy by sea, 90% of whom were between 15 and 17 years old. The significant presence of UASC (in June 2019 equal to 7,272) and the growing number of UASC who have turned 18 (about 60,000 in the last five years) and arrived by sea, have highlighted the need to understand the factors that affect the paths of transition to adult life of UASC in Italy, facilitating or hindering it, both individually and structurally.

The research - commissioned by UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM - carried out by ISMU Foundation in collaboration with University of Roma Tre and University of Catania in three regions deeply affected by this phenomenon (Sicily, Lombardy and Latium). The research has highlighted, first of all, the artificiality of a distinction between ‘children’ (UASC) and ‘adults’ (UASC who turned 18) that does not take due account of the transitional process of becoming adults, the cultural, social and gender differences that affect this process and the vulnerabilities to which this category of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are exposed to. The analysis of the factors that favour transition paths also shows a prevalent incidence of contextual, subjective and relational variables relating to the personal resources, agency and resilience of boys and girls as well as to the networks of formal and informal relations activated once they arrive in Italy. The innovative value of this research lies in the adoption - alongside the quantitative one – of a participatory biographical approach, based on the recognition of the right of children and adolescents to express their opinion on decisions that concern them personally, favoured by a peer-research relationship that has seen a group of UASC who had just reached the age of majority as interviewers. This approach allowed 185 boys and girls to become protagonists with their multiplicity of stories, subjective difficulties, structural obstacles and support factors.

**Main Outcomes**

**THE FACTORS THAT FAVOUR THE TRANSITION OF UASC TO ADULTHOOD**

- **Legislation**: with Law 47/2017, Italy demonstrates that it has an advanced legal framework regarding the recognition of the rights and protection of UASC.
- **Reception**: the possibility of social inclusion is closely linked to the experience of reception. When it works, it plays a fundamental, positive role.
- **Relationships**: formal and informal relationships, even between peers, represent an important support for the UASC’s and former UASC’s pathways; in particular, the educator’s role and that of volunteer guardians is recognised as crucial.
- **Education**: school and vocational training are recognized by UASC and former UASC as fundamental milestones of their inclusion pathway.
- **Home**: in the achievement of independent living, the importance of alternative or transitional solutions emerges, such as family-related hosting or of supervised semi-independent living.
FACTORS THAT HINDER UASC’S TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

- **Legislation**: the slow and complex procedures for obtaining documents, combined with any bureaucratic hindrance, are a real obstacle to the lives of UASC.
- **Practice**: the very short time most UASC have because of their age (16–17 years old) at arrival is very limited to equip themselves with the necessary tools.
- **Work**: the difficulty in obtaining a regular work contract affects every other aspect.
- **Discrimination**: forms of discrimination and racism, including access to the labour and housing market, are an obstacle and affect the personal well-being of UASC and former UASC.
- **Traumas**: traumatic experiences in the country of origin or during the journey are difficult to overcome making social inclusion more difficult.
- **Violence**: the dynamics of violence, including gender-based violence, experienced in particular by girls even when they are not victims of trafficking, has a strong impact on their path.

Main Recommendations

*To the Italian authorities*

**GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION**

- Adopt an inter-sectorial strategy, including through the involvement of civil society, identifying multi-annual programming in order to increase the opportunities for social inclusion for young people who reached the age of majority.

**NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK AND IMPLEMENTATION**

- Ensure the full implementation of Law no. 47/2017 starting from the issuance of the implementing decrees;
- Ensure the prompt issue of the residence permit for minors and full respect for the best interests of the minor.

**RECEPTION AND SERVICES**

- Ensuring the reception of young adults entrusted to social services pursuant to Law 47/2017;
- Promote all forms of alternative reception, family care or community-based;
- Ensure a standard level and monitoring of all reception facilities;
- Ensure that all young people at risk or vulnerable can benefit from psychosocial interventions.

**SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL AND EMPLOYMENT INCLUSION**

- Accelerate procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications;
- Standardise procedures for the assessment of professional, Italian language skills and soft skills acquired in the countries of origin;
- Strengthen the territorial network between the reception system and the authorised and accredited organizations for employment services;
- Promote prevention interventions on the risks related to inclusion in informal and illegal circuits, including trafficking and sexual exploitation;
- Increase the participation of UASC and former UASC and refugees in social and recreational activities;
- Develop a new National Action Plan against racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

**DATA COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT**

- Improving the data collection system for UASC, creating a data collection system also for former UASC;
- Ensure a connection between the social file and the SIM data collection system.

*To the European Union*

- Ensure rapid and effective family reunification procedures as from the implementation of the Dublin Regulation;
- Ensure effective cooperation between Member States in assessing the best interests of the child;
- Set up a collection system that strengthens the protection mechanisms of UASC and former UASC;
- Take into account the needs arising from this research in the programming of the next AMIF funds, in order to strengthen the good practices identified.

*To civil society*

- Continue to promote participation and increase opportunities for meetings and exchanges between young migrants and refugees, the resident population and their peers, in order to enhance formal and informal relationships;
- Continue to experiment with innovative and alternative interventions for young migrants and refugees such as semi-autonomous, family or community housing solutions;
- Continue to provide assistance, accompaniment and support to young adults with a focus on those with specific needs, including SGBV survivors.