



CiSoTRA

Civil Society for Social Inclusion of Unaccompanied Minors in Transition to Adulthood:
Learning Communities for Shaping Transition Interfaces • <http://cisotra.eu>

WP 2 Initial Study

WP 2.4 Reflection on transition of UAM to adulthood (in general) and presentation of national situation for Slovenia

V 2 September 2020



GENERAL ABOUT TRANSITION OF UAM TO ADULTHOOD (reflections from: Synthesis report, Compilation of national reports)

General Findings and Model of Transition System

Europe is currently faced with a surge in migration from third countries, which is considered by some as a migration “crisis”. This surge has brought to the surface differences in attitude and general political outlook, which are hard to reconcile. While it is obvious that the situation in the countries of origin of refugees like Afganistan, Irak, Syria, Eritrea, Mali and others is desperate, the legal systems in most European countries admits third country nationals only in cases of individual or collective prosecution.

All refugees, except the few which are admitted along this legal framework, are in a situation of limbo, facing long periods of insecurity of status of residence, having only limited access to the educational system and labour market.

Among the group of refugees are young refugees, in fact the by far largest group, as young healthy and dynamic males, due to the current mostly illegal ways of getting to Europe, have the best chance of arriving.

These youth carry the hopes of friends and family, on the one hand to be safe from the immediate effects of war and conflict, as this group is the one drafted to the military and often cruel and illegal militia. On the other hand they carry the hope that a relative who makes it to and in Europe may be able to support its family from there.

Unaccompanied minors are a significant group among these young refugees and although most of them are close to adult age, these young refugees enter the distinct systems of youth protection which exist in all of Europe’s countries.

The purpose of the project CiSoTRA “Civil Society for social inclusion of unaccompanied minors in transition to adulthood – learning communities for shaping transition interfaces “is to contribute to the knowledge about practices which currently shape the policy field in the partner countries, thereby expanding the knowledge about policy options, identify training needs of professionals and youth and to suggest an overall model of fostering a smooth transition of youth from the status of protected minor to adulthood. A special focus is the contribution the civil society is making to these transitioning practices.

The partner countries CiSoTRA (Italy, Slovenia, Greece, Germany, Turkey) face a number of specific challenges as well as some common ones.

Greece and Italy are considered by most refugees as countries of transition, therefore the institutions which care for the youth are often challenged with disappearing clients, which have moved on to northern Europe. In Turkey a high number of Syrian refugees forms a, until now, quite distinct community, which only now is being gradually integrated into the Turkish mainstream society. In Italy and Turkey illegal work and the maintenance of the human rights of youth are an issue. In Slovenia the overall number of young refugees is low and while the country is not very used to welcoming refugees, it can study the best practices of other countries to set up a capable system, based on a flexible and knowledgeable educational system. Details of the situation in each partner country are described in the document *Compilation of National Reports*,

available on [www](http://www.cisotra.eu)

About documents Compilation of national reports and Synthesis report - outputs of activity Initial study (documents from in 2018).

The document **Compilation of national reports** presents situation of UAM in transition to adulthood in 5 partner countries: Slovenia, Italy, Greece, Germany, Turkey. Report was written based on literature review, interviews and focus group research. The document is available on [www <https://cisotra.eu/resources/>](https://cisotra.eu/resources/)

The purpose of **Synthesis report: *Facilitating the Transition of Unaccompanied Minor Refugees to Successful Adulthood – Pathways, Critical Incidents and Building Life Skills Through Multi-Actor Cooperation*** is to contribute to the knowledge about those practices which currently shape the policy field in the partner countries, thereby expanding the knowledge about policy options, identify training needs of professionals and youth and to suggest an overall model of fostering a smooth transition of youth from the status of protected minor to adulthood. Synthesis reports includes collection of 29 good practices identified from 5 partner countries. Report is available on [www <https://cisotra.eu/resources/>](https://cisotra.eu/resources/)

Challenges to a smooth transition and inclusive factors

Minors are mostly in a relatively protected situation, they often live in protected communities, and are accompanied by professional staff. Once these young people turn eighteen years old—depending on the country and its administrative practices—they are regarded as adults. Often, they have to abruptly leave these protected communities and move into a regular shelter for asylum seekers, where there is considerably less social-pedagogic support. Overall, this is an enormous challenge for them.

Integration into host societies, even those which are more and more aware of themselves as “migration societies”, however, requires a much more complex process of mutual negotiation of the terms of acceptance. This process of negotiation requires the host societies to explain themselves, to explain terms of “inclusion in diversity” and to translate this into concrete regulations of access to education, training and employment, but also of the terms of societal immersion.

On the level of social integration, there is a wide consensus among experts about the risk factors for refugee youth to drop out of society permanently out of frustration, denied opportunities, lack of building social relations and mental illness. Many actors see the danger of the formation of an alienated “parallel society” of individuals who are not deported, but also not an integrated part of the society.

Inclusive factors of social integration

Youth enter the host country with very different orientations and often have to reframe their mindsets about their goals in life and their perceptions, for example what is accepted in the host country, what is allowed there and what are the conditions for success there. The youth often have a lot of emotional and psychological trauma; their life stories are stories of escape and insecurity.



For the first time, they are in a relatively safe position to reconsider their personal situation and form new life projects for themselves.

Therefore, there is a challenge to the youth to **stabilize** their situations. **Orienting** is the next step to societal integration. Orientation requires a focal point to form suitable life projects for the youth and should be an organized process. Assuming that stabilizing and orienting have been successful, the next step is to leave the support system designed to assist refugees and to enter the regular system, which is not designed for refugees. This entails **inserting** the youth into the regular educational system or a regular job or apprentice in a company in the host country and phasing out the support system.

The aim should still be to enter the regular system as soon as possible, i.e., leaving those activities designed just for refugees and become part of activities in regular society, such as a sport club or other organizations that are part of everyday civil society. This final aim is an additional stabilizing factor.

The above-mentioned factors are practical and provide a sound intervention, but the problem is that they are often designed and implemented separately from each other. There is no overall system. These elements are in detailed described in Synthesis report.

COUNTRY SPECIFIC PART – reflection on situation in Slovenia

1. Overall context - facts (and the most important numbers)

From the point of view of most migrants, Slovenia is a transition state. This means that most UAMs leave the country relatively quickly and follow their path to the countries of Western and Northern Europe. Some evidences in numbers: 679 UAM in the period 2002-2016, 388 UAM applicants for asylum in 2017, and 555 in 2018. Around 75% of UAM left Slovenia on their own, which means that international protection procedures initiated in all those cases were suspended (Žakelj and Lenarčič, 2017; Ministry of Interior, 2019).

The quantitative dimension of the challenge is thus small for Slovenia. Therefore, the country is in the situation of being able to test policy and intervention alternatives on small scale and to thoroughly study the efforts in the larger countries. The small community of migration experts is in close contact, backed up by partly very strong and influential philanthropic organisations and a high level of access of practitioners and expert scholars to political decision makers.

2. Legal basis *or* National legislation, relevant for migrants

When UAM arrive in Slovenia, they have 2 options: 1) They remain in the country as illegal migrants without status and are resident in the Aliens Centre until they return to their country of origin. 2) They submit applications for international protection – which is practice in most cases (receive refugee status or subsidiary protection for defined period). Strategy of the Government of RS in the area of migrations 2019 (Strategija vlade RS na področju migracij, 2019) stressed several recommendations:

- **Need for cultural mediator:** A system of intercultural mediators should be developed, who would assist in the communication between migrants and various services (health, social care, schools, etc.) and between migrants and the majority population.
- **Specific trainings for professionals:** Regular and compulsory education should be introduced for all who are in regular contact with UAM. All employees in the various services, that are in contact with migrants (administrative units, centres for social work, schools, kindergartens and other educational organizations, health centres, hospitals, police, etc.) should be provided with specific training in the field of development of intercultural competences, and special knowledge (identification of vulnerable migrants, identification of various symptoms, victims



of violence, torture, trafficking in human beings, etc.) should be acquired.

- **Housing groups and foster families for UAM:** Housing groups with 24/7 professional presence would prepare migrants for independent living shall be established. Foster care may be the most appropriate form of accommodation for young unaccompanied minors and additional training for existing foster carers should be provided and new potential foster carers should be attracted through awareness raising and promotion activities. Foster carers shall be provided with needed support, and monitoring/control of foster care should be introduced.
- **Attention to children victims of trafficking:** Particular attention should be paid to children who are victims of trafficking in human beings and should receive special treatment.
- **Paying attention to transition to adulthood:** When designing systemic solutions, it is also necessary to plan gradual transition of unaccompanied adolescents to adulthood and to provide them with adequate care. After attaining the age of majority, minors who turn out to be not yet sufficiently independent should be provided with further assistance in a tailored form so as to facilitate their transition from full care to autonomy and independent living.

The project CiSoTra with its activities will help to realise objectives of the strategy.

3. Lessons learned from project CiSoTRA

a.) Key informant from interviews and focus group

- Poor efficiency of organisations is the result of a project-based way of working that prevents the development of sustainable and systemic solutions.
- Efficiency of organizations could be improved through: study visits abroad; transfer of knowledge and practices from international environment - and adaptation to situation in Slovenia; joint national or international projects; regular joint meetings.
- Trainings for professionals should become permanent practice. Professionals who directly work with UMA and young adults shall have empathy, social skills, know methods for work with young migrants and how to motivate them.
- Young migrants need holistic support system
- It is necessary to provide better protection for minors who choose to leave Slovenia (ensuring safe transition to the target country).
- Several initiatives and concrete solutions are needed in the field of transition of minor migrants to adulthood – main emphasizes:



- It is necessary to establish support programs for the transition of unaccompanied children into adulthood. Support programs need to be focused on strengthening autonomy.
- Event before they turn 18, should be organized visit of institutions, that can help them with empowerment (visit, get in touch, get to know people there ..)
- It is important that adequate accommodation and care are provided even after they are 18.

b.) Actors (the most important in the country)

- **State Actors:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Labor, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport and Ministry of Health, Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for the Care and Integration of Migrants
- **NGOs:** Slovene Philanthropy, Association 'Odnos', Legal Information center, Youth Centres, Sports Institutes, Karitas, Red Cross, Unicef, Non-Violent Communication Society, and individual volunteers
- **Educational institutions** (elementary education, secondary education, higher education), **Student residences, Adult education**
- **Labour market organisations**

c.) What happens when UAM turn 18 (years) – the transition

With the age of 18, UAM lose their rights as a minor migrant:

- legal representative
- accommodation: from the housing unit for minors they are moved in the adult section; those who live in a Student residence can stay in the residence until the end of the 'current' school year, even if they have already reached the age of 18

No specific initiatives and projects have been held for transition of UAM into adulthood; some progress can be seen in last period- eg transition into adulthood has been discussed within government working group.

d.) Good practices (the most important, in brief)

In Slovenia there are no many unaccompanied children, but there are some good practices, targeted at offering support to UAM in transition to adulthood. Below are presented two:

Project: Program – Young Migrants (Slovene Philanthropy, 2020)

Responsible organisations: Slovene Philanthropy

Short description: The objectives of the program are to improve the protection of minor migrants, in particular unaccompanied children, children - asylum seekers and refugee children- For this purpose, several activities have been carried out like mentoring activities for unaccompanied children, activities for psychosocial support – as individual counselling, practical help with integration, activities for facilitation of integration in Slovenian environment, help with learning the Slovenian language, training of volunteers that work with unaccompanied children, etc.

Duration of the project: Initiative started in 1997

Project: Accommodation of minor migrants into Student Residences (The Government Office for the Support and Integration of Migrants, 2018)

Responsible organisations: Government of RS, service provider– Student residence of Forestry and Wood Technology School, Postojna.

Short description: In 2/2 of 2016, all unaccompanied children (that are asylum seekers) have been transferred to appropriate accommodation facilities- student residence halls (educators and other workers take care for their wellbeing).

Duration of the project: The project started in summer 2016 (Postojna and Gorica student residences). In Nova Gorica only piloted (1 year); the project is been held in Postojna in 2020 for 4th year (planned: until permanent solution of accommodation will be found).

*Practices are in detailed presented in the document *Compilation of National Reports* (available through <https://cisotra.eu/resources/>).*

4. Conclusions and recommendations from project CiSoTRA, specific for Slovenia

From the discussions that we had with young migrants (in transition) we can conclude, that the main difficulties that they faced in Slovenia were: obstacle in not understanding the Slovenian language; it was very difficult to wait for status.

From the discussions at the events CiSOTRA, literature review and interviews, we can extract the following recommendations for Slovenia:

a.) Recommendations related to UAM

- Emotional support needs to be ensured
- Support in the educational process

- Support in acquiring competences and gaining life skills, support for integration into the labour market, including help with finding a job.
- UAM need to receive support in understanding the system of bureaucracy
- Systemic solution of accommodation needs to be found
- To continue with initiatives, that support intercultural dialogue, interactions between migrants and local people (such good example was imitative ArtCaffe, cafeteria in Student Residence Postojna, hosted by migrants)
- In general, focus needs to be on assisting UAM in transition to adulthood, through different support programmes focused on strengthening autonomy and integrating them in 'regular' society

b.) Recommendations for providers of services

- There is need on accepting an integrative national policy/ national strategies in the field of unaccompanied children and unaccompanied minors
- Mutual cooperation between different actors
- Regular trainings for professionals
- Introduction of cultural mediators

4. References

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