

# The development of a computer-based information system to inform social work interventions with unaccompanied minors

**Mara Sanfelici**

University of Trieste, Italy

**Silvana Mordegli**

University of Genova, Italy

**CORRESPONDENCE:**

*Mara Sanfelici*

e-mail: [msanfelici77@gmail.com](mailto:msanfelici77@gmail.com)

## *Abstract*

*This article describes the development of an information system, built in order to monitor the data gathered in the context of a pilot project for early child protection interventions with unaccompanied minors. The project included multidisciplinary expert teams, that carried out interviews with children and young people from the moment of their arrival on the Italian territory, assessing their strengths and needs. A comprehensive information system was developed with the extensive input of social workers, applying a participatory approach. Pre-existing forms for data collection and social work assessment tools had been analyzed and modified to include specific variables, addressing the unaccompanied minors' needs. The system included quantitative variables (characteristics of children and families, their journey to Italy and the child welfare interventions) and qualitative data (written professional evaluation). The goal has been the construction of a user-friendly information system, adaptable to other social services working with unaccompanied minors. It can improve the understanding of the phenomenon and support the evaluation of the child protection paths devoted to them.*

## *Keywords*

*Information system, unaccompanied minors, participatory approach, social work practice, child welfare.*

## Background

### *Social work and information systems*

Since the 1980s, human service organizations have implemented computer-based information systems (IS) to record and process data about their activity with service users. Information systems are playing an important role in the social work practice. Communication and interaction between professionals are increasingly being done through ISs, that have become parts of action and decision-making in daily social work practice. However, there is a growing body of research that suggests that information systems can undermine frontline practice (Peckover, White & Hall, 2008; Pithouse et al., 2009; Shaw et al. 2009). IS have been criticized for imposing structure on the activity of professionals, running the risk of altering priorities and the nature of the tasks carried out (Ley & Seelmeyer, 2008). These systems may lead to standardized data collection, which restricts the information that professionals engage within their work (Aas, 2004), increasing errors in decision-making. Parson highlights how, using IS in social work practice, the form of knowledge may change from «social» to «informational» (Parton, 2008). Detailed «surface» descriptions of what clients bring to the services can replace «depth» explanations that draw from psychological and sociological theories (Howe, 1996). White et al. (2009) describe how an integrated IS in child protection in the UK has transformed practice, by attempting to standardize the responses of professionals to children and families. Some studies have analyzed possible reasons why configurations of IS may be problematic, with reference to how their development has been shaped. One of the issues is a lack of consideration to demands and priorities of professionals in the provision of social services (Senyucel, 2008). Moreover, there is an ongoing tension between time spent entering data about activities and working with service users, mostly experienced by front line social workers (Parton, 2008). Authors (Fuchs, 1989; Fancett & Hughes, 1996) highlight the importance of involving practitioners in both the design and implementation stages of IS. A negotiation between administrators and professionals about the required levels of reporting and how many details about service activity need to be recorded in a new information system may be an important strategy in addressing these problems.

Also in Italy, in the last two decades, IS have been introduced in social services. Some challenges are similar to the ones described in the literature examined above. In particular, it has been reported the lack of involvement of professionals in the definition of system design and in knowing why and how the data and information collected can be actually useful to inform practice (Ghezzi, 2018). Recording information can be perceived as a merely administrative task, with no positive impact on professional practice. An analysis of the information system used in a Northern Italian region was carried out by a group of social workers, linked to their regional Council (Ghezzi, 2018). The practitioners highlighted

a series of challenges, including a lack of training in the use of the system and the fact that it did not always mirror the social work helping process. Moreover, it was reported that the process of entering information can be perceived as meaningless, if the data is not used to analyse relevant aspects for the social work field intervention. At the same time, the professionals recognized the importance to collect data to improve the knowledge of service users and their environment, that can be used to raise awareness in the organizations about priorities and issues that need to be tackled. These professionals also highlighted how IS can be useful when they include tools to orient the helping process, to allow more uniform ways of assessing and planning interventions.

### *Data and research on unaccompanied minors*

Unaccompanied minors or separated children (UASC) are defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as children under the age of 18 who are outside their country of origin and arrive in other States unaccompanied by a parent or other legal guardian. According to Eurostat, around 1.3 million asylum applications were lodged in the EU in 2016, almost five times as many as in 2010. Within the larger group of international protection applicants, the number of UASCs has increased from about 10,600 in 2010 to over 96,000 in 2015, and 63,000 in 2016. Italy has been one of the most affected countries with regard to this phenomenon. Eurostat reports that in 2017 over 10,000 UASCs asylum applications were lodge in this country. According to the European Migration Network (EMN), even though the majority of UASCs have access to the procedure for the granting of the international protection, some do not apply. For this reason, the number of applications is used to have an indication of trends, but it does not provide an accurate picture of the phenomenon. The Italian Ministry of Labor and Social Policy registers their presence and provides statistical data on them. The national statistics report that in 2017, among the 17,337 minors who arrived, 91% were unaccompanied or separated. This is a 33% decrease compared to 2016, that is mainly due to the overall drop in the number of people crossing the Central Mediterranean since July 2017.

Behind statistics, these children and young people have lived through a range of experiences linked to migration, many of them traumatic. Previous to arriving in Europe, some might have been involved in human trafficking, labour exploitation and been victim of different forms of violence (European Commission, 2017). Girls are particularly at risk of forced marriages as families struggle in straitened circumstances or wish to protect them from further sexual violence. Risks are exacerbated when children are obliged to share overcrowded facilities with adults who are strangers to them. Unaccompanied children may face additional stressors also after arrival, such as discrimination and economic strains (Keles et al., 2018). Moreover, they face an insecure future, which might result in feelings of powerlessness (Sleijpen et al., 2017). Research on unaccompanied minors has often

focused on the vulnerabilities of these children and young people (Derluyn & Broekaert, 2008). However, recent studies have increasingly stressed the strength and resilience of UASCs, despite the traumatic experiences and challenges (Ní Raghallaigh & Gilligan, 2010; Luster et al., 2010). Belloni (2019) has highlighted the complexity of representing young refugees as active social agents, without neglecting that they also need support. Addressing this dilemma requires a relational understanding of agency and vulnerability which considers how inequalities, structural violence, power imbalances determine limitations to the freedoms and possibilities of choice of these children.

Also the myriad of institutional processes migrant minors are subjected to and interact with influence the way in which vulnerabilities and agency are perceived, with an impact on the outcome on child wellbeing. The integration process (Ager & Strang, 2008) in the new country is linked to the way in which UASCs are welcomed and treated, which is influenced by the legislation and related policies, the programmes and the intervention of local and international organizations to support their process of integration in a new country.

## **A pilot project for early recovery interventions with unaccompanied minors in Italy**

In Italy, different institutions are involved in the disposition and care of UASCs, including the central and territorial offices of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, the Ministry of Health, and the social services in every municipalities. In 2017 a new law (known as «Legge Zampa») has introduced a model to strengthen the protection for all unaccompanied foreign minors, recognizing their specific needs. The reception system for UASCs consists of first and second-line reception centres. The law establishes that every minor should remain less than thirty days in first-level facilities, that must be ad hoc ones for unaccompanied foreign minors, according to standards set out in a ministerial decree. After, they have to be housed in second-line centres, specifically dedicated to them or in foster care families.

In 2016 the number of UASCs was continuously increasing and it was recognized that a stronger effort in qualifying the path in the Italian system for the protection of UASCs was needed. The Ministry of the Interior, the National Foundation of Social Workers and CIES Onlus started in February 2017 a one-year pilot project entitled «PUERI – Pilot Action for Unaccompanied Children: Early Recovery Interventions», in the framework of the Urgent Measure of the 2014-2020 European Union FAMI Fund. The National Foundation of Social Workers is a no profit organization committed to enhancing the well-being of people, particularly those more vulnerable, through the advancement of social work practice. The Foundation was involved by the Ministry of the Interior, whose objective was to respond to the needs of unaccompanied minors in a more appropriate way, supporting in particular the territories where the highest number of children and young people was arriving. The CIES Onlus was a partner in involving cultural mediators included in the project's staff.

The pilot project was implemented in four territories in the South of Italy (Trapani, Pozzallo, Lampedusa and Taranto). It provided that a multidisciplinary expert team made up of a social worker and a psychologist, in the presence of a cultural mediator, ensured an immediate intervention at the moment of UASCs disembarkation. All of these minors have arrived in an unknown socio-cultural context, meeting professionals and other people for the first time. For some of them, past experiences, particularly those in their countries of origin, may have impacted on their ability to trust people. Some children talk about difficult and traumatic events, eroding their sense of trust, that may be linked with their reasons for seeking asylum (Ni ´ Raghallaigh, 2013). They may also feel unable to tell their true reasons for leaving their countries of origin, because they fear repercussions of telling the truth, such as reprisals against their families. Behnia (2004) has reported that survivors of torture are often suspicious that professionals may work for the police or for the government of their country of origin. The aim of the project was to invest time and qualified skills to enable the child to feel safe, to promote a deep understanding of his/her perspective and feelings, respecting his/her sense of self-determination (Seabury, Seabury & Garvin, 2011). This may facilitate the disclosure of difficult information, fundamental for their need and risk assessment. Not only empathy, but also continuity and commitment are required from the helping professional in order to build and maintain the relationship, a central task to allow an accurate assessment and to define the project with the child. After the first meeting at the moment of the arrival, another three interviews were planned in the following stages, to support the minor in the process of being transferred and adapt to facilities. The aim was to provide a point of reference for the UASCs and promote their active participation in the decision-making process. Another main objective of PUERI was to ensure continuity of care among services, through coordination between actors and authorities. Tracing and exchanging information among professionals was of paramount importance to guide a holistic assessment and intervention. A second level unit was tasked to activate, coordinate and evaluate the team's interventions in different territories, connecting them with Prefectures (provincial level offices of the Ministry of Interior), the volunteers of other organizations, the social and health services of different municipalities.

One of the pilot project's tasks was the development of a computer-based information system to record detailed information on minors in care. The next section is going to describe the steps of its development.

## **The development of an information system on unaccompanied minors in care**

The PUERI's information system was understood as a contextually bound system embedded in the practice (Orlikowski & Iacono, 2001). It was thought as an instrument that was part of making decisions and taking action. Different goals guided its develop-

ment. First, it allowed to collect data about UASCs' characteristics and their paths through the child welfare system, allowing to prevent the dispersion of information through the different stages. Data collection was considered of paramount importance to improve available evidence on unaccompanied minors, useful to inform practice and raise awareness about their needs and experiences. One of the social workers' roles was working to promote networks with the reception centres and different institutions at the territorial level (social and health services, Prefectures). Another aim of the IS was to support this process, allowing more easily shared information among the different teams involved in the project. It facilitated the communication and reciprocal updates on a daily basis, and this was particularly helpful in cases of urgent interventions. The next paragraph is going to present in details how the information system was also made to guide and inform the helping process, including tools useful to support the assessment of children needs and the project's evaluation.

### *Conceptual map*

The conceptual map of the information system mirrored the process of data collection on the actual cases and the workflow. In each stage of the helping process, the first-level teams and the second-level units were attributed specific tasks.

1. Referral. The second-level unit was informed in advance through the Prefecture about the arrival of unaccompanied children by sea and it activated the first-level team.
  2. Engagement. The first-level team intervened at the moment of arrival of the UASCs, immediately after the police interview. The professionals explained their role and provided all the information about the rights and the services available, adapting the communication in relation to age, maturity, gender, culture. Specific child-friendly guidelines informed the way of providing information, including the need to take into account the impact of the information on the child's situation and specific vulnerabilities.
  3. Assessment. The workers assessed the relevant factors about minors' strengths, needs and expectations. If immediate concerns existed about serious vulnerabilities, the team interacted with the second-level unit, in order to activate specialistic social or health services on the territory. An alert was made through the information system to the national coordinators and the second-level unit.
- Case management and evaluation of the project. Other three interviews were guaranteed to the child at the facility, to strengthen the relationship of trust and to gather further information about desires and needs of the child. An integrated intervention with the personnel of the center and the local social workers had the aim to define a personalized project, to promote the child inclusion in the local

community and to find a specialized second level facility or a foster care family. Both the team and the unit recorded all the daily activities, issues arisen and decisions made, while team meetings were held to evaluate the progress of the interventions.

4. Conclusion. PUERI's intervention was normally completed within two months from the first meeting of the child with the local team.

## *Tools*

In its final version the computer-based information system included:

- The «UACS Folder», that contains the items related to children's strengths and needs, families characteristics, information about the migration process, dates and types of interventions, authorities, professionals and centres involved, the outcome of the intervention.
- The «Reporting Form», to record information about cases in which high-severity vulnerabilities (victim of human trafficking, victim of torture, sexual or physical abuse, serious health issues) were detected during the assessment stage. When the involvement of specialistic health and social services was needed, this section allowed to report urgent communications at the attention of the second level unit and the national coordinators.
- The «Quality Records», that provided a frame for the description of the daily activities and interventions carried out by the first-level teams and the second-level units. This information was useful to trace professionals' actions and decisions, and create the opportunity to learn from each others thorough sharing experiences, best practices and ways to overcome challenges.
- A «Summary Overview», that allowed for programming and visualization of the calendar of the interventions for each professional involved.
- An area for «Statistics Report», able to provide synthetic reports about the data collected in the previous areas.
- A «Documentation Area», from which every professional could have access to laws, guidelines, tools descriptions, relevant literature on UASCs.

## *Fields development*

Several meetings and consultations with the professionals involved were held to determine the appropriate fields for data collection in two main areas: 1) the profiles of UASCs and 2) the interventions carried out. The objective was to identify a set of items and shared definitions to facilitate the integration and transfer of information gathered by different teams and services, avoiding the duplication of data and interventions.

It was learned that information of interest for the assessment was already being collected through the existing paper-based case records provided by the Ministry of Interior and used by the facilities. This tool enabled to gather information about minors' strengths and needs, child-specific drivers of migration, their families, the journey towards Italy, and the services provided by the facilities. The decision shared among professionals was to include the items of the paper-based tool, by coding most of them into categories. The use of drop-down menus was chosen to restrict data options, in order to reduce data inaccuracy. It was thought that using tools already in place could have facilitated both the introduction of the new IS and ensured continuity after the end of the project. However, there was an identified need for other UASC-specific fields to be collected, such as details to track characteristics of the minors, their paths since their arrival at the hotspot, and the interventions of the PUERI's teams. Discussions were carried out among professionals and researchers to consider which fields were a priority and most suitable for surveillance, based on the specific needs and risks of the UASCs in this stage of the intervention. For example, one serious issue was the number of children and young people that flee from the facilities, a situation that can put them in serious danger. According to the monitoring of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies, while 25,846 UASC arrived by sea in Italy in 2016 at the end of that year, only 17,373 UASCs were being hosted in the Italian reception system (Italian Ministry of Labour, 2016). Many of them drop out of the child welfare system to travel onwards irregularly and take their future into their own hands. These minors are often at particular risk of abuse and exploitation, as they may live in precarious shelter arrangements and have limited access to food, water and money to finance their journey. It was considered of paramount importance the collection of data about the characteristics of this group, to better understand the reasons for fleeing. Accordingly, it was decided to introduce a close field that recorded the event. Two more fields were added to allow more in-depth descriptions of issues or desires that drove UASCs migration, expectations and projects for their future. Other two open fields allowed to enter multidimensional assessment texts and to record information about the legal procedure, since its lengths is one of the variables known to influence the risk of drop out of the reception system.

The database made possible to update any kind of item at different time of the intervention. As already stated, often children may fear revealing important information or they lack trust in adults, given the difficult experience they went through. Trust and time were considered important to create opportunities which allowed children to tell their stories and to present more complex representation of themselves. It was important to compare different information, not only to improve the assessment, but also as an indicator of the quality of the professional relationship and its efficacy in engaging the child.

With regard to minors' paths in the system, fields were added to record dates and types of interventions. At the conclusion it was specified if the child was housed in facilities specifically dedicated to UASCs, if he/she was placed in foster care families, if a voluntary assisted repatriation was organized, or if the child fled from the facility.



Another PUERI staff's priority was to gather information about the quantity and the quality of the interventions of the professionals involved in the project. Both the first and the second-level teams were required to report data at the end of the intervention about the number and the kind of activities they were involved in, issues arisen, and if and how they were tackled. In addition, they reported decisions made, strengths and weaknesses of the tools and the data system. These «Quality Records» were included in the information system with coded items and open-ended answers, able to gather information about the overall process of intervention and inform the ongoing evaluation of the project. High caseloads negatively affect the quality of service delivery, especially in a project where a primary focus is the quality of the professional relationship with the child. This issue forces social workers to manage their time skilfully between the needed administrative duties and direct contact with clients. The data about the process was able to inform the national coordinators about the quality of the intervention and the needed resources.

The system was made to protect the privacy and confidentiality of data related to minors. Each team's professional could access only the data referring to their assigned cases. The professional of the unit had access to the data at the provincial level, while the two national coordinators had access to all of the cases assessed. Individual identifiers have been removed upon transfer of copies to the central centre and when used for research purposes.

### *Professionals involvement and training*

One of the well known risks in the introduction of information systems is that they could shift the focus from social to informational and bureaucratic accountabilities, where a disproportionate amount of time is spent in front of the computer instead of being with clients.

The information system's development included professionals in both the stages of its design and evaluation. It was guided by the principles of participation, reflective practice and cultivation of a learning environment through the sharing of theory and practice. All the professionals selected for the project had previous experiences in working with unaccompanied children and young people, so their knowledge about the field and the topic was considered of paramount importance. The process initiated by selecting and sharing the literature and documentation among all professionals involved, guided by a social work researcher. Then, it was decided to establish a working group of social workers and psychologists to analyse different paper-based assessment tools already in use, in order to jointly reflect and make decisions on the appropriate fields for data collection, as described in the previous paragraph. The «UASC Folder» and the «Quality Records» forms were the result of the shared effort to establish which information were considered as priorities in relation to the overall aim of the project: promoting

unaccompanied minors well-being and an adequate reception system able to respond to their complex needs. Before starting the fieldwork, two meetings were organized together with the ICT team to develop a common vocabulary and terminology. The contribution of all the professionals of the teams and the ICT was fundamental in the stage of evaluation of the database. First, to verify that the definition of the variable and coding initially chosen were understood by everyone. Second, to solve together with the ICT team usability problems, due to poor screen design, misleading names on command buttons, and an incomplete drop-down menu. The staff shared the importance of filling the information regarding the minors immediately after each interview and the quality form at the end of the day. The IT support team gave phone support to workers if the user needed help. Professional supervision on case management and the use of the information system was continued at a territorial level. A social work researcher was specifically dedicated to the monitoring of the project. During the evaluation stage, she supported the elaboration of guidelines to orient the completion of the open fields, specifically the written multidimensional assessment and the vulnerability form. Her role was also to improve the professionals' skills in data analysis and utilisation, showing how data could be used to inform practice.

Territory-wide conferences were also held to present the data collection system and the evidence that emerged from it to the authorities and the professionals of other institutions involved.

### *Issues in the development stage*

Various challenges were reported by the professionals and analyzed with the project coordinators. At the start of the project a decision was made to allow data entering within the day of the interview only. This choice was made in order to make sure to have a first picture of the information about the child, to compare it with data collected in the subsequent stages of the process. Moreover, recording data immediately after the interview was thought to ensure more accuracy. However, especially during the first interview at the place of arrival, there had been frequent difficulties with accessibility problems (kicked out or inaccessible). Entering complete data was also particularly difficult when the number of arrivals in the same day was extremely high and there was hardly any time left after the interview with the children. It was therefore decided to extend the range of time in which the information could be entered. This also had a positive effect on the quality of the data recorded, especially in the open field.

Another issue was related to the completeness of the data. In one out of four territories the number of missing data was higher. More training was dedicated to all the professionals at the territorial level, allowing discussions about the importance of data accuracy and completeness.

An additional problem that arose was the difference among practitioners in the quality of professional writing, particularly the one dedicated to the multidimensional assessment. The texts collected in the information system were used for analysis, that led to the definition of shared guidelines to write the final multidimensional assessment.

## **Discussion: innovations, limits and lesson learned**

Social workers play a prominent role in the protection of immigrants children rights and are uniquely qualified to address their needs and value their capacities (Kohli, 2007). The premise behind the pilot project presented in this paper was that vulnerability of children and young people can be tackled using two interconnected strategies. The first was to ensure specialized personnel able to support them from the moment of their arrival. The second was to raise awareness on the situation of unaccompanied minors and mobilise the commitment of the institutions and the society to address their special needs. A computer-based information system was one of the instruments to support these strategies. It could be used not only to evaluate the project and the interventions carried out, but also to collect evidence to influence decisions for the rights of these minors. Being able to daily update information about this phenomenon allowed to better understand its characteristics and the challenges that the child protection system was facing. Data made evident the gap between the diversity and the complexity of these minors' needs and the type of services and personnel available both in the facilities and on the territory. In addition, it was possible to gather quantitative and qualitative information on children and young people that fled from the facilities. A parallel action for advocacy at local and national levels was conducted to raise awareness about human rights violations and the necessity to promote adequate services in the reception system, giving voice to these children.

One of the strengths was that the information system's design was not thought as a mere technical project, but managed as a process of organizational development, in which information technology is considered as a strategic asset to support organizational structures and social work practice.

The framework adopted was oriented by the principles of participation, negotiation and learning.

As opposed to conventional surveillance systems, where administrators or outside experts design and manage the process, it was decided to empower the project staff, with the support of a social work researcher as facilitator. The aim was to promote the active participation of the professionals on the field, by them taking the lead in tracking and analysing progress towards jointly agreed results. The effort was to build on what practitioners already know and do. The choice to include the assessment tools already used intended to value the competences in place and stimulate the improvement of the

existing instruments, allowing for a continuation of these practices after the project ended. In a participatory approach, professionals can learn together from experience and gain the abilities to evaluate their own needs, priorities and goals (Estrella & Gaventa, 1997). This process required negotiations to reach agreement about what should have been monitored, which information was useful in practice and what interventions needed changes. Reflections that were shared among participants led to co-construction of knowledge<sup>1</sup>, corrective actions, and the recognition of the limits of the pilot project.

Learning does not happen in one sitting, but is part of an ongoing process, in which practitioners reflect continuously on the effects of their actions and where the process is leading them. This means that it implies time and resources. Another reflection was shared about the sustainability of this way of working once the project was ended if changes in the availability of human resources in the local welfare systems were not made. Advocating for more resources on the territory dedicated to child welfare was not the only answer. The constant interactions with the local professionals in the public services and the facilities about the result of the project was the first step, that led to a wider involvement of the local institutions and community. As Folgheraiter (2004) stated, working in a participatory way means adopting an approach in which the social workers, users and other actors involved are motivated to work together, to identify the problems faced and how best to address them (Folgheraiter, 2004). Participative and inclusive ways of working are used to activate and develop supportive networks of relationships. The IS was useful in this stage both to enable a shared monitoring on the phenomenon and to facilitate the communications among different professionals and organizations involved at the local level. A result was the perception of working within a network, in which continuity of care was a shared goal. One of the consequences was that the specific role of social work with unaccompanied minors was more and more visible to the different actors and institutions, and helped to empower social workers to be recognized as leaders not only in practice, but also in a process of analysis and evaluation, useful to inform social policy.

Unfortunately, due to frequent changes in the government and the decentralisation process of the social services, the challenge of developing a more multi-sectoral approach to the child-in-care information system is still an issue. In Italy there is no national system for data collection about children in care. Every municipality can decide the way to record data through paper-based tools or information systems, with the consequence that no comparable information is available. Some regions have developed more comprehensive administrative database, still not linked to a national system. As regard to unaccompanied minors, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies collect general data on demographics

---

<sup>1</sup> One of the social workers was able to use shared reflections and analysis recorded in the «Quality Reports», to actively collaborate in the development of an handbook for frontline professionals, to convey child friendly information to children in migration, edited by the Council of Europe (<https://rm.coe.int>)

and migration trends. However, no specific information about their needs and vulnerabilities are gathered in a systematic way. PUERI has shown a possible method for data collection on unaccompanied minors in care and its potential. However, one of the main limits was that it did not become part of a larger network between research institutions, social and health services, different NGOs and authorities at the national level, to ensure long term sustainability.

The aim of the present article was to value and share «lessons learned» from this pilot project, that can be useful also in different contexts. First, it has demonstrated how a participatory approach, that allows cooperative learning and reflexivity, can help to overcome some of the negative consequences that the literature reports about the introduction of IS in the social work field. This approach was based on the assumption that theory and practice in social work must be interconnected, if we actually want to have an impact on people well-being. The development of the IS was a joint effort made by professionals on the field, whose main goal was to build tools effective in fostering outcomes of interest. Second, it shows how an information system can be useful for monitoring the intervention with this population, as a social work instrument to advocate for human rights and adequate services. Although there is a widespread recognition of the challenges faced by unaccompanied and separated migrant children, there is a dearth of comprehensive data to inform policy and practice, both in Italy and in European countries (Sanchez, 2018). The information collected can be used to deepen the knowledge about the phenomenon, the decision-making process behind children's migration to Europe, their strengths, needs and vulnerabilities, their path in the child welfare system. In Italy, the importance of data collection in social work is often a neglected topic, also in many of the academic curriculum, where there is a lack of specific training about data utilization. This project also provided an opportunity to discuss and share the importance of improving this skill, to inform the intervention and to be accountable about the overall helping process.

## References

- Aas, K. F. (2004). From narrative to database: Technological change and penal culture. *Punishment and Society*, 6(4), 379-93.
- Ager, A. & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: a conceptual framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 21(2), 166-191.
- Behnia, B. (2004). Refugees' convoy of social support: community peer groups and mental health services. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 32, 6-19.
- Belloni, M. (2019). Family project or individual choice? Exploring agency in young Eritreans' migration. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(2), 336-353.
- Derluyn, I. & Broekaert, E. (2008). Unaccompanied Refugee Children and Adolescents: The Glaring Contrast between a Legal and a Psychological Perspective. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 31(4), 319-330.

- Estrella, M., & Gaventa, J. (1997). *Who Counts Reality? Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: A literature Review. International Workshop on Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies Working Paper 70.
- European Commission (2017). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. The protection of children in migration*. Retrieved May 7, 2020 from [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170412\\_communication\\_on\\_the\\_protection\\_of\\_children\\_in\\_migration\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170412_communication_on_the_protection_of_children_in_migration_en.pdf).
- Fancett, S. & Hughes, M. (1996). The development of a client record system within a non-governmental child care organization. *Computers in Human Services*, 13(1), 62-72.
- Folgheraiter, F. (2004). *Relational Social Work: Toward networking and societal practices*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Fuchs, D. M. (1989). Integrated information systems for child welfare agencies'. *Computers in Human Services*, 4(3-4), 191-204.
- Ghezzi, G. (2018). Report dei laboratori sulla cartella sociale comunale, socio-sanitaria e informatizzata. (Report on the laboratories on the municipality computer-based social folder). *Quaderni dell'Ordine*.
- Howe, D. (1996). Child abuse and the bureaucratization of social work. *The Sociological Review*, 40(3), 491-508.
- Italian Ministry of Labour (2016). *Monitoring report on unaccompanied and separated children in Italy*, December 2016.
- Kohli, R. (2007). *Social work with unaccompanied asylum seeking children*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke.
- Keles, S., Friborg, O., Idsøe, T., Sirin, S., & Oppedal, B. (2018). Resilience and acculturation among unaccompanied refugee minors. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 42, 52-63.
- Ley, T., & Seelmeyer, U. (2008). Professionalism and information technology: Positioning and mediation. *Social Work and Society*, 6(2), 338-351.
- Luster, T., Qin, D., Bates, L., Rana, M. & Lee, J. A. (2010). Successful Adaption among Sudanese Unaccompanied Minors: Perspectives of Youth and Foster Parents. *Childhood*, 17(2), 197-211.
- Ní Raghallaigh, M. (2013). The causes of mistrust amongst asylum seekers and refugees: Insights from research with unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors living in the Republic of Ireland. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 27, 82-100.
- Ní Raghallaigh, M., & Gilligan, R. (2010). Active survival in the lives of unaccompanied minors: Coping strategies, resilience, and the relevance of religion. *Child & Family Social Work*, 15, 226-237.
- Orlikowski, W. J., & Iacono, C. S. (2001). Research commentary: Desperately seeking the "IT" in IT research. A call to theorizing the IT artifact. *Information Systems Research*, 12(2), 121-134.
- Parton, N. (2008). Changes in the form of knowledge in social work: From the "social" to the "informational"? *British Journal of Social Work*, 38, 253-69.
- Peckover, S., White, S. & Hall, C. (2008). Making and managing electronic children: E-assessment in child welfare'. *Information, Communication and Society*, 11(3), 375-94.
- Pithouse, A., Hall, C., Peckover, S. & White, S. (2009). A tale of two CAFS: The impact of the electronic Common Assessment Framework. *British Journal of Social Work*, 39, 599-612.
- Sanchez, G. (2018). Special Issue on Child Migration. *Migration Policy Practice*, VIII, II.
- Seabury, B.A., Seabury, B.H. & Garvin, C.D. (2011). *Foundations of interpersonal practice in social work: Promoting competence in generalist practice (3rd ed)*. London: Sage Publications.
- Senyucel, Z. (2008). Impact of ICTs on user-provider relations: Perspectives from UK local authorities. *Information Technology and People*, 21(4), 401-14.
- Shaw, I., Bell, M., Sinclair, I., Sloper, P., Mitchell, W., Dyson, P., Clayden, J. & Rafferty, J. (2009). An exemplary scheme? An evaluation of the Integrated Children's System. *British Journal of Social Work*, 39, 613-26.
- Sleijpen, M., Mooren, T., Kleber, R. J., & Boeije, H. R. (2017). Lives on hold: A qualitative study of young refugees' resilience strategies. *Childhood*, 24, 348-365.

White, S., Broadhurst, K., Wastell, D., Peckover, S., Hall, C. & Pithouse, A. (2009). Whither practice-near research in the modernization programme? Policy blunders in children's services. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 23, 401-11.

Sanfelici, M., & Mordegli, S. (2020). The development of a computer-based information system to inform social work interventions with unaccompanied minors. *Relational Social Work* 4(1), 30-44, doi: 10.14605/RSW412003.



Relational Social Work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License