

Chapter One

About the CiSoTRA Project

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Project Background

Europe is currently faced with a surge in migration from third countries, which is considered by some as a migration 'crisis.' Differences in attitude and general political outlook brought to the surface by this surge are hard to reconcile. While it is obvious that the situation in the countries of origin of refugees, namely Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Eritrea, Mali, and others is desperate, the legal system in most European countries admits third country nationals only in cases of individual or collective prosecution. All refugees, except the few admitted under the legal framework, are in a situation of limbo, facing long periods of insecurity regarding their status of residence and having only limited access to both the educational system and the labour market. Among them, young refugees are most numerous by far, as, due to the current mostly illegal ways of getting to Europe, young healthy and dynamic males have the best chance of making it. These young people carry with them the hope of friends and family that they will be safe from the direct consequences of war and conflict, as they are most often conscripted into the army or into cruel and illegal militias, but also the hope that they will be able to get to and stay in Europe to support their families from there.

Among these young refugees, unaccompanied minors are a significant group and although most of them are close to adult age, they enter the distinct systems of youth protection which exist in all European countries. Therefore, in all European countries and in the CiSoTRA project partner countries, the topic of young refugees is a complex one in many respects:

- Political controversy about the legitimacy of third country immigration for reasons of
- Conflict and hopelessness.
- Complex psychological and legal situation of the youth: insecure status of residence,
- Pressures from host country law enforcement, societal attitudes, often unrealistic own and
- Family expectations.
- Educational, legal and youth protection systems which are generally not designed for such a
- Situation and therefore has to be reshaped and repurposed under the pressure of high
- Numbers of migrating youth and limited human and sometimes financial resources and a
- Limited systemic adaptability of systems.

Although minors (youth under 18 years of age) are a special group, the general rules, and policies of the European Union on migrants apply. They are particularly relevant for young migrants, as they are the largest group. Unaccompanied minors are subject to several international treaties and conventions, which put them in a privileged position as being particularly vulnerable and therefore entitled to comprehensive protection.

All partner countries are part of these treaties, among them the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Article 22 regulates that ‘States parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child who is seeking refugee status [...] shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights set forth in the present Convention and in other international human rights or humanitarian instruments to which the said States are Parties.’

The Aim of the Project

The aim of the CISO^{TRA} project was to develop and apply innovative methodology to foster social inclusion (including inclusion through education) of unaccompanied minor migrants in transition to early adulthood through holistic support networks, which would facilitate the

transition from the youth support and education system to the adult education and employment system. This was supposed to be achieved mainly through:

- Identifying current good practices, based on mapping various pathways for migrants from the arrival to the ‘end’ (integration in the country – further education or/and the labour market, transition to the country of origin or another country) and identification of shortcomings, gaps, and traps on that pathway.
- Personal capacity building of key professionals (professionals from: educational institutions, labour market, social care, local/regional/national authorities) – identification of needs and competences required for effective work in the field.
- Identifying the needs of unaccompanied minors and young adults (needs analysis through workshops including empowerment activities).
- Institutional capacity building.
- Improving cooperation of institutions/organisations in the region/country and development of a model for better social inclusion.

Project Target Groups

- Professionals who work with unaccompanied minors and/or young adults – professionals from educational institutions, the labour market, social care, local/regional/national authorities, etc.
- Unaccompanied minors and/or young adults.
- Stakeholders: ministries, researchers, academics, officers from local/regional authorities, human rights ombudsman, other NGOs, or public entities that work on the issue of migrants, professionals who work with unaccompanied minors, and young adults.

Key Project Activities

Initial study. Collection of relevant insights from international and national literatures and good practices. Reviews of the current states of the art in partner countries and validations of good practices are needed to successfully perform all the following steps of the project. Data collection methodologies include document analysis, interviews and focus groups.

National seminars for different stakeholders. During the lifetime of the project, one national seminar was organised each year in all project countries. 50 stakeholders were expected to attend each seminar, to discuss the most demanding issues on social inclusion of unaccompanied minors and young adults. The topics of the seminar were adopted according to the current needs of each country.

General training sessions at basic and advanced level). The project aimed to train those key professionals who had been working with unaccompanied minors or young adults. Training consisted of two courses (at the basic and advanced level), each equivalent to 6 ECTS, implemented in a combination of face-to-face tuition (3 days per course) and on-line activities. The topics included:

- Non-discrimination and intercultural dialogue; multicultural society; ethics of key professionals.
- Human rights; international and national legislation and protocols on the care and support of migrant children and young migrants; national migration procedures; harmonising the protection of unaccompanied minors in Europe.
- Migrants and the right to education; young migrants in the labour market.
- Vulnerability of young migrants: socio-psychological aspects; techniques for interviewing migrant children and young migrants.

Specialised training. The project wanted to equip key professionals with specialised knowledge and skills. Four courses were developed, and specialised training sessions offered, each equivalent to 6 ECTS, with the following topics:

- Reception, service standards and health standards for unaccompanied minors.
- Harmonising the protection of unaccompanied minors in Europe.
- Migrants' right to education and work.
- Social inclusion as a dynamic two-way process.

Workshops for unaccompanied minor migrants (up to 18 years). These workshops were attended by minors' guardians and professionals who work with minors. The main purposes of these workshop were:

- getting feedback on the needs of minors and their guardians (satisfaction with services offered, and possible gaps detected).
- carrying out capacity building activities for minors to inspire them to ‘follow’ their own life projects.

Workshops for young adult migrants (in transition from minors; 18–25 years). These workshops were also attended by professionals working with young adults. Their main purposes were:

- Getting feedback on the needs of young adults (satisfaction with services offered, and possible gaps detected).
- Carrying out capacity building activities for young adults, to empower/inspire them to ‘follow’ their own life projects.

Dissemination of the project. The project results were being disseminated during the project lifetime and beyond. The main dissemination activities were:

- Dissemination via the CiSOTRA website, social media, leaflet, newsletters, and other dissemination channels.
- Members of the consortium presented results and activities at conferences in countries outside the consortium.
- International conference organised in October 2020 in Istanbul.

Impact Achieved and Sustainability

The main achievements of the CiSOTRA project are the following:

- CiSOTRA declaration, together with policy recommendations summarises project outcomes and results and provides partners’ commitment for further use of project achievements.
- The project has produced a lot of high-quality material, available in an e-learning platform, including 4 ECTS courses for professionals, and 16 short training courses.
- In CiSOTRA events, complex and demanding issues on the transition of UAM to adulthood were discussed, as well as the role of civil society. Stakeholders were able to get better insights into the needs of UAM and young adults.
- One of the most important achievements of the project was the development of the CiSOTRA model of coordination of actors for better social inclusion of migrants in transition to adulthood.

- CiSOTRA project and similar projects can contribute to improved knowledge and skills of professionals who work with UAM in transition to adulthood.

About CiSOTRA Model

The CiSOTRA model is a model of cooperation and co-dependency between organisations that deal with unaccompanied migrant minors and young adults, and their interrelations in terms of supporting minors in the system. The model explains what various organisations could expect from each other, as well as what each organisation in the network should change in its functioning, to improve its work. The model is an innovative and inclusive approach to supporting the UAM in transition to adulthood and to strengthening the links between different interfaces, i.e., organisations involved in the support for young migrants forming learning communities, i.e., networks of different actors. However, the role of a coordinator, that is often neglected, could contribute to a more integrative community leading to a higher level of cohesion in a society.

The model of intervention used in the CiSOTRA builds on and extends the work done as a part of the initial study identification of the main problems resulting from the current situation in partner countries, current policies on a policy level, professional training and NGO activity, and existing best practices in addressing these issues. The model is based on a structured ‘Theory of Change’ planning process, which has involved all partners to:

- Identify key issues or reasons for shortcomings.
- Prioritise key issues for the project intervention methodology.
- Specify expected outcomes because of the application (testing) of the project methodology.
- Discuss activities that can achieve these outcomes based on evidence from literature.
- Present stakeholder involvement, best practices, and professional experience of partners.
- Agree on mechanisms of change linking the key issues, activities, and expected outcomes.

Overall, the CiSOTRA model of intervention specifies:

- the target group – the characteristics of professionals in UAM and young adult refugee support and UAM and young refugees to be involved in the pilot projects,
- the guiding principles and main contents of the training,
- expected outcomes – the short, medium, and longer-term outcomes the methodology is expected to achieve among teacher and volunteers,
- the elements of the intervention.