

# Communication, digital media and future: new scenarios and future changes

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edited by  
Elisabetta Gola, Andrea Volterrani, Fabrizio Meloni



RESOCONTI /1

This volume collects a set of meaningful full papers of Medcom2020+1 international conference, which has been organized by the University of Cagliari, University Hospital of Cagliari, and University of Tor Vergata (Rome). The conference has been held online from the 17th to 19th June 2021, on "Communication, digital media and future: new scenarios and future changes", which is also the title of this volume. The general topic has been divided in 8 sessions which range from social media to screen culture, from media education to social communication, politics and multiculturalism. The general topic has been divided in 8 sessions which range from social media to screen culture, from media education to social communication, politics and multiculturalism. The topics also embrace reflections on the experiences after-pandemic, that had a strong impact and caused many changes on communication and society. The proceedings of the conference include a selection of 22 papers out of the about one hundred talks from the conference.

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## Educational Invisibility and Media Communication. The Educator between Action and Representations\*

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### Abstract

In the interconnected and hyper-complex society, the growth of the opportunities for information transfer does not yet correspond to a real and equal increase in the possibilities of communication. The reciprocity of the communication process is questioned by the perception of the educator who feels “invisible” to the eye of public and media attention. The media only give a partial picture of the complex world of the reception of Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC) and largely overlook the wide range of projects which, if highlighted, would contribute to the affirmation of a different vision of the migratory phenomenon and of good management practices of the same. From the research conducted by L. Milani (2020), on the concept of invisibility related to UASC, it emerged that educational action and its real and perceived scope do not find an effective confirmation in media communication. The media refer to a stereotyped representation of difference. The research results ask for a reflection on the media communication methods relating to the educational system of reception of UASC to whom education provides a competent response that needs to be recognized. For this purpose, a brief review of the printed paper (*Il Corriere della Sera* historical archive) and of the *RAI* archives was conducted, useful for the construction of a knowledge framework about representations of UASC and educators. This research reveals a deficit, flattened and negative image of the migrant child and little or no consideration of educational work. In fact, not much is said about integration projects but much is said about the critical management issues of the phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Unaccompanied minors, educators, invisibility, social representations, media communication.

### Introduction

The stereotyped representation of gender, migrants, minorities, cultures, or ethnicities still constitutes a critical node in both print and audio-visual media production, thus giving rise to real misinformation (Calvanese, 2011; European Commission, 2020) and the reinforcement of forms of hatred or discrimination. The hyper-complex and hyper-connected society (Giddens, 1991; Beck, 2013), in fact, has fostered neither an effective and equitable development of the possibilities of communication and expression nor a precise, articulated, and free from prejudice vision of these diversities, much less of Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC). The reality of these minors, described in the media, suffers from this representation and is confused with that of adult migrants, generating false knowledge and feeding mistrust. This poor and stereotyped representation of UASC corresponds, in fact, to their invisibility, because they are marginalized and rendered unintelligible to media users. The picture returned by the media is partial (Traverso, 2018) and fails to describe the wide range of services, projects and interventions of reception nor the good practices of inclusion and integration. The same educators working with UASC do not have a real media visibility and report an indifference of the media to the multiplicity of issues and projects in place.

From the research on the invisibility of UASC conducted in 2018 (Milani, 2020), it emerged, from the educators interviewed, that the media communication does not confirm the heterogeneity and richness of the educational reality and the scope of pedagogical professionalism. This research also highlights the self-perception of educators as invisible persons associated with the invisibility of children and their interest in giving voice to this dual invisibility. The

\*This contribution, fully shared by the authors, was drawn up as follows: paragraphs 1 and 4 by L. Milani; paragraphs 2 and 3 by F. Matera

research results ask for a reflection on the media communication methods relating to the educational system of reception of UASC to whom education provides a competent response that needs to be recognized.

### 1. Background

The number of UASC landed on Italian territory between 2016 and 2020 is 51,480; the number of untraceable, in the same years, is 23,393 (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020). From the available data, we note a steady decline, especially from 2017 to 2018, and then a gradual recovery in 2020, when the number of UASC landed increases from 1,680 in 2019 to 4,687 in 2020, despite the Covid-19 pandemic.

In this frame, the evident visibility of the numbers corresponds to an invisibility of the minors: the UASC remain invisible persons, escaping the mesh of the social network. This is a real process that leads to invisibility, a process in which visibility (Milani, 2015) is still marked by uncertainty and fragility (Kohli, 2006; Eide and Hjern, 2013). This fragility does not only belong to the single minor, but it is also rather a systemic fragility (Accorinti, 2014; Milani, 2015) that involves all the net that – starting from the country of origin – brings to the destination country, up to the reception system.

This process of invisibility is very complex. Indeed, its variables are several: social, political, cultural, and economic. Our contribution builds on a previous research completed in 2018 (Milani, 2020). The research explored the category of invisibility as a category to read, to interpret, to diagnose and to question the practices of hospitality for UASC in the Italian context and specifically in Piedmont. The research was structured as an interpretative inquiry through a self-filled questionnaire with 10 open questions. The questionnaire has been administered to 71 educators working with UASC.

The answers to question 10 raised new questions that promoted our current research that we present here. *Question 10*, in fact, asked: “We ask you to write down the question that is not contained here and to which you would have liked to answer on this subject and we also ask you to give us your answer”. This question allowed us to widen the perspective of the research, giving the “power of interviewing” to the interviewee himself, considered as an “expert”.

The interpretative categories have brought out the data that we see represented in Table 1.

*Table 1: Interpretative categories emerged from the “Question 10” – Research on invisibility of UASC (Milani, 2020). Respondents: 71, Answered: 46, Not Answered: 25*

Number	Description: Invisibility in self-administered questions becomes...
1	... <i>bureaucratic invisibility</i> as a necessity to identify the child but also to promote identity
2	... <i>structural invisibility</i> of the composite multilevel governance network that makes things more complicated and working with minors intricate: the procedures, the taking on responsibilities and the multi-professional management
3	... <i>invisibility / media visibility</i> of the child and poor public information. <i>At the media level, minors become paradoxically visible when they commit crimes</i>
4	... <i>invisibility / visibility of the social workers and educators</i> who feel themselves invisible

As seen in Table 1, there is a strong awareness in these responses of the complexity of the phenomenon and the problems arising from multilevel governance. In some answers proposals are also made to improve the reception practice. In particular, the questions and answers given by educators highlighted the invisibility of minors and educators in the media (no. 3 and 4). An unexpected result concerns this invisibility of educators.

From these findings, the need for research emerged to understand the invisibility of UASC and educators in the media and their silence.

From careful analysis, we noted the absence of specific studies on the media representation of UASC and educators working in the reception system. The lack of literature strengthened the motivation for this empirical research conducted on the analysis of print and audio-visual products.

Starting from the research on invisibility (Milani, 2020), some hypotheses were extrapolated: media communication conveys a unique message on migration, negative, deficient, and flattened, not allowing the development of a critical thought on migration and its protagonists, lacking the research of motivations and factors that are intertwined in marginal lives.

The second hypothesis is that minors who undertake pathways of integration and active participation in the territory remain invisible to the press.

Finally, the third hypothesis considers the absence of educators from media communication.

Therefore, some research questions were identified:

- What representation is given by the media of the migration phenomenon and specifically of UASC?
- Is there an invisibility of educators?
- What is the visibility of educators and UASC?

## 2. Materials and Methods

In order to investigate the modalities of media communication related to the phenomenon of child migration in Italy and the role played by education in the territory and in reception facilities, a brief review of the printed paper (*Il Corriere della Sera* historical archive) and of the *RAI* archives was conducted. The goal is to construct a knowledge framework about representations of UASC and educators, in order to promote the visibility of pedagogical action, its professionals and its social implications.

For a reading of the representations of UASC and educators in the media, we decided to use the archives of the newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* from the years: 2016, 2017 and 2020 and those of *RAI* from the same years. As for the *RAI* data, since the archives are not accessible due to the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, we considered the material already partly processed by the *RAI* archivists and, therefore, the analysis of the data is limited by the impossibility of viewing the original materials. The choice of the years was made based on the criteria of the most salient events that have characterized the migratory phenomenon and the reception of UASC in our country and with the following reasons:

- 2016: is the year in which the arrivals of UASC reached unprecedented peaks, with a number equal to 25,846;
- 2017: is the year in which the Law 47/2017 came into force;
- 2020: is the year of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In order to answer these questions, we proceeded to the analysis of the texts of the articles for *Il Corriere della sera*; for *RAI* we used the Excel file, with the short texts of the audio and video descriptions of the sources, guided by the emerging thematic categories.

For each article considered, a reading was conducted aimed at identifying:

- The topics covered;
- Salient data;
- Significant expressions.

The empirical basis was subjected to progressive analysis. We then proceeded to search for answers to the starting hypothesis, then to a top-down analysis, and to a bottom-up analysis, being guided by the themes that emerged from time to time (Cadei, 2005).

### 3. Results and Discussion

Based on these two coordinated approaches, we analysed the sources, identifying the following categories:

- Landings;
- Legislation;
- Illegality and security;
- Planning on the territory;
- Educators;
- Numbers and management, structural and economic, of reception.

The analysis of the data led to the identification of a very large number of themes that open to complex reflections. However, here we focus on the salient elements.

The number of frequencies may not match the number of articles or video products, as there may be multiple categories found in each. This highlights the high complexity of the analysis.

For the RAI historical archives, the TG, TGR and television programs were considered. A total of 111 services were analysed.

*Table 2: Results from the analysis of “RAI” Historical Archive (TG; TGR; TV programs) – 2016*  
*Keywords: minori/e stranieri/o non accompagnati/o; Msna; Misna - Total programs analysed: 111*  
*Year: 2016; programs: 25*

Category	Descriptive elements	Frequency
Landings	Increased landings and presences of UASC in Italy: “children, on the way” (closure of the Balkan route)	5
Legislation	UASC reception and protection draft law (Law 47/2017)	5
Illegality and Security	Untraceability; risk of exploitation and damage to structures for migrants (arson attack)	3
Planning on the Territory	Opening and implementing new foster care and “placement” projects for UASC and training courses for volunteer guardians	5
Educators	Interviews with operators (not educators): economic and management difficulties of structures; foster care projects	6
Numbers and Management, structural and economic, of Reception	Lack of structures, overcrowding, structural and economic shortcomings (“collapsing” structures); emergency management of the migratory phenomenon and reception and difficulties in protection (too long residence times of UASC in places unsuitable for minors: hotspots); “Without name, without trace”	9

As seen in Table 2, for the year 2016, there were 25 programs analysed and the category most present is that of management of reception, linked to structural deficiencies, lack of places in the structures and inadequate management of reception – minors remain for too long in

the hotspots. It is also mentioned that there has been a significant increase in the number of landings and the presence of UASC in Italy, the need for a specific law for these minors and the population's intolerance regarding the presence of migrants. Regarding educators, they are not appointed. Interviews with operators are mentioned, mostly regarding the difficulties of the structures.

*Table 3: Results from the analysis of "RAI" Historical Archive (TG; TGR; TV programs) – 2017  
Programs: 65*

Category	Descriptive elements	Frequency
Landings	Growth of UASC landings and presences (six-fold the number of UASC landed in Italy); first UASC Atlas by Save the Children	6
Legislation	Approval and widespread appreciation of Law 47/2017 (prohibition of refoulement and equal rights with Italian minors); establishment and presentation of the figure of the volunteer guardian	13
Illegality and Security	In Europe, approximately 10,000 UASC lost track of in 2016: attention to the phenomenon of untraceability; UASC living on the street and perception of dangerousness both for minors and social alarm (diseases of a physical nature and psychological-behavioral problems)	3
Planning on the Territory	Projects, conventions, city festivals and exhibitions also in collaboration with citizenship for the reception, integration, and widespread knowledge of the phenomenon; much attention to the development and training of volunteer guardian	22
Educators	Interviews with associations and presidents of cooperatives for UASC	3
Numbers and Management, structural and economic, of Reception	Difficulties in the economic and structural management of the phenomenon: increased costs for the social sector, inadequate placement of UASC, high number of untraceable; Sicily: Italian region with the highest number of UASC	17

As seen in Table 3, for the year 2017, there were 65 programs analysed, with the most frequent category being planning. We talk about projects, city festivals and exhibitions in collaboration with the citizenship for the reception, integration, and widespread knowledge of the phenomenon of UASC. Much attention is devoted to the training of the volunteer guardian, a figure introduced by Law 47/17. The other category represented is that of the management of reception, for which we speak of economic and structural difficulties for the growth of the presences of UASC, mainly in Sicily. Educators are also left out in this case: interviews are mentioned with operators, not educators. Finally, the high number of untraceable people is related to the spread of danger and social alarm.

Table 4: Results from the analysis of “RAI” Historical Archive (TG, TGR, TV programs) – 2020  
Programs: 21

Category	Descriptive elements	Frequency
Landings	/	0
Legislation	/	0
Illegality and Security	Increase in migrants arriving from the Balkan route; health security for Covid-19 (quarantine and fear of contagion); high number of untraceable minors	3
Planning on the Territory	Numerous services dedicated to the “WelcHome” project to raise awareness of family-based foster care (interviews with caseworkers and foster caregivers); mentoring projects for UASC	7
Educators	Associations, NON-educators	1
Numbers and Management, structural and economic, of Reception	Increasing number of UASC in Friuli Venezia Giulia (Italian region) due to arrivals from the Balkan route and difficulties in managing presences also due to the health emergency: overcrowded facilities	9

There are 21 programs in 2020. We note immediately that there is no mention of landings or of the law, and that once again the category most represented is that of reception management, especially in the regions of northern Italy, and to the difficulties linked to the Covid-19 pandemic. In this case, in fact, we are talking about health security linked to the fear of contagion. The projects most represented are those related to the practice of foster care, also encouraged by Law 47/2017.

Turning to the newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*, there were a total of 92 articles analysed, including 36 in 2016, 50 in 2017, and only 6 in 2020.

Table 5: Results from the analysis of “Il Corriere della Sera” newspaper (online historical archive) –2016.  
Keywords: *minori/e stranieri/o non accompagnati/o; Msna; Misna* - Total articles analysed: 92  
Year: 2016; articles: 36

Category	Descriptive elements	Frequency
Landings	Massive (“It is the most important displacement of people in Europe since World War II”): in October, more 19,000 UASC landed in Italy -EU country must be affected by landings -, “invasion”, “siege”, budget gap	10
Legislation	Need for central management for diffuse reception; “regulatory vacuum”: law for the protection of UASC needed (Law 47/17 approved in the House); systematic violation of migrants’ rights and discriminatory acts (rejections at the border)	7

Category	Descriptive elements	Frequency
Illegality and Security	Logic of emergency and control, and high number of untraceable cause restrictive policies and fear of the foreigner, labour and sexual exploitation, health security, problems of public order: "What reception can be done in a building in the open country, with the courtyard shared with that of the family living there?"	23
Planning on the Territory	Projects that promote: interculturalism, active citizenship and integration; collaboration between local authorities and territory; dissemination of best practices; projects to manage the emergency (foster care initiatives by operators); volunteering; Save the Children project for street children; solidarity	8
Educators	Victims of violations of fundamental rights; not paid; "guilty" of not being able to guarantee reception; lack of a central role; educational devaluation: 1) cost criteria as prevalent in the choice of placement; 2) facilities for minors are not necessary; promoters of "insertion", "autonomy" and "recovery" projects for UASC who "really want to integrate"	12
Numbers and Management, structural and economic, of Reception	Overcrowded reception system, driven by the logic of emergency (temporary, inadequate, and undignified accommodations) and to be reorganized in order to deal with exploitation and psychological imbalances; lack of funds for minimum services for survival and to pay operators; less funds for Italian minors; migration incentivized by "popular tales"	28

As seen in Table 5, regarding 2016, we talk mainly about the management of the phenomenon, driven by the logic of emergency and therefore to be reorganized, including at the regulatory level, to respond also to exploitation, psychological and behavioural imbalances and problems of public order. Then there is a comparison with Italian minors, who, due to the high number of unaccompanied minors in facilities, are at risk of receiving fewer care services. In this case, educators are mentioned twelve times, but they are represented as victims of violations of fundamental rights, guilty of not providing reception because they are not paid. In particular, the lack of a central role and an educational devaluation are highlighted. In fact, the choice of the child's placement is based on cost criteria and educational facilities are considered unnecessary. A central role is given to the child, who can be integrated only if he/she "really wants to integrate".

Table 6: Results from the analysis of “Il Corriere della Sera” newspaper (online historical archive – 2017 Articles: 50

Category	Descriptive elements	Frequency
Landings	Massive: Italy most affected EU state; highest number of landings: Port of Augusta (Sicily); UASC: chapter “particularly disturbing”, “daily emergency”, “drama in the drama”, often become “invisible”, “in perspective unproductive” because “largely uneducated”	10
Legislation	Appeals from the territory for the acceleration of the law on UASC; approved in the House Law 47/2017 (equal rights with European minors): “A decision that places us among the most advanced countries”, “A choice of civilization for the protection and integration of the weakest”; Law 119/2017: mandatory vaccinations for minors 0-16, including UASC	6
Illegality and Security	Spreading fear of foreigners: threatened public and health safety (Islamic fundamentalism, citizen protests against refugees – “criminal profiteering” and “social danger” – declining school enrolment and migrant protests over poor conditions in reception centres); UASC statements: “we do nothing, we see nothing for our future”	16
Planning on the Territory	Projects to promote integration and intercultural exchange, to combat discrimination and to promote widespread reception in a spirit of solidarity; raising public awareness of the voluntary guardian: “a point of reference for education, as well as legal”	10
Educators	Those who “are most committed to this field”; more bets should be placed on them; educational work: “it’s not a matter of repairing damage and trauma, but of helping these kids transform their experience into an awareness of their abilities”	1
Numbers and Management, structural and economic, of Reception	UASC numbers increasing (“vulnerable and voiceless”); specific protection (“alone, fragile”); active role of society in reception needed; inadequate management of reception; repeated displacement and prolonged stay in first reception or hotspots; onerous economic management of reception; increased number of untraceable (“on the run”; Italy: transit country)	25

As seen in Table 6, 2017 is still an important year for the presences. Italy is mentioned as the European state most affected by landings, and UASC as a “drama within a drama”. UASC are considered “largely uneducated” and therefore “in perspective unproductive”. The category “illegality and security” appears 16 times. There is a widespread fear of foreigners, considered “social danger”. In fact, migrants complain about the poor conditions in the centres and consider themselves without a future. School enrolment is falling in a neighbourhood where there



is a centre for migrants, and a citizen interviewed says: “Would you send a six-year-old child to a place surrounded by desperate people?”. There is talk of projects to promote integration, intercultural dialogue, and solidarity and to combat discrimination. The strong presence of the educator in the work with UASC is recognized, who must promote awareness of their own abilities and not repair damage and trauma. Management of reception is still difficult and inadequate. There is a lack of places in the structures and a lack of training and apprenticeship projects.

Table 7: Results from the analysis of “Il Corriere della Sera” newspaper (online historical archive – 2020 Articles: 6

Category	Descriptive elements	Frequency
Landings	Migrants landed in Italy in the first half of 2020 almost 3 times higher than in the first half of 2019	1
Legislation	Law 47/2017 presentation	1
Illegality and Security	UASC baby gangs living in abandoned cars and committing crimes (dealing, beating, and robbing peers): “Violence as a form of redemption”; UASC: “kids <i>without families</i> ”	1
Planning on the Territory	Projects to promote mutual understanding, to “overcome the fear and mistrust both of those who arrive in a country so different from their own, and of those who experience immigration as a threat to their daily lives”, to promote inclusion, social relations, and economic and housing autonomy	2
Educators	/	0
Numbers and Management, structural and economic, of Reception	ISMU data 2016-2017: 40,000 UASC landed in Italy, 80% driven by better economic and social prospects; it is necessary to make a deeper and more complex reading of migration and of those “fugitive stories, suspended between the breath of the world elsewhere, inhaled in the web, and the grip of societies at once immobile and terrifying”; necessary pathways and funds for support in the period of transition from minor to major; educational poverty strongly affects the possibility of undertaking study and work pathways and therefore to avoid expulsion at the age of 18 years old	2

As seen in Table 7, regarding 2020, we immediately note that there is no mention of educators, but of projects to promote inclusion and dissemination of knowledge of the phenomenon among minors and citizens, also to combat fear, mistrust, and discrimination. The arrivals of UASC increase again, for economic reasons. It is said that a more complex reading of migration is necessary because it is necessary to grasp those experiences suspended between expectations and reality that are defined as “immobile and terrifying”. There is also talk of educational poverty as a condition that affects the possibility of integration and support in the transition from minor to major age.

#### 4. Conclusion

The main outcome of the research is the confirmation of the hypotheses about the invisibility and unclear representation of UASC and, especially, educators. Therefore, we can state

that silence and devaluation of educators have been confirmed, as well as the hypothesis that minors are most talked about when they are untraceable or criminals and when they represent a structural and economic management problem.

Limitations include the analysis of only two sources, albeit with many products, and the choice, albeit reasoned, of reference years constitutes the boundary of the research. Relevance is determined by the fact that since there is not a large body of literature, the research provides a point of reference and an initial approach to the issue of media representation of UASC and educators. Furthermore, the research indicates the importance of investigating with other sources as well and recommends that the results serve to guide new ways of media communication attentive to giving visibility to these categories of people.

To conclude, we can state that the findings appear congruent with the statement emerged from the 2018 research on invisibility of UASC (Milani, 2020), which we report below:

“Can the work of the operators be itself defined as ‘invisible’? Yes, it can. In the eyes of the community and often also in the eyes of the children. [...] the media, political and public commitment focusing on what does not work with respect to what is done”.

“How do you consider your profession? Visible or invisible? The profession of educator should be more visible. To become more recognized, it is necessary that every educator exercises this difficult task with extreme professionalism. That is the only way to become visible people who help those who are invisible become people”.

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