

The American University in Cairo

School of Global Affairs & Public Policy (GAPP)

**The Journey of Death: Suicide or Salvation?
Irregular Egyptian Migration of Unaccompanied Minors to Italy**

Submitted to the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Master of Arts
in Migration and Refugee Studies

Hend A. F. Hafez

under the supervision of Dr. Ray Jureidini October/2010

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ABSTRACT

The Journey of Death: Suicide or Salvation? Irregular Egyptian Migration of Unaccompanied Minors to Italy was submitted to the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies at the American University in Cairo School of Global Affairs & Public Policy (GAPP) in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Migration and Refugee Studies. The study was conducted by Hend Hafez and supervised by Dr. Ray Jureidini.

The irregular migration of Egyptian unaccompanied minors to Italy was a recent development within the migration flow between the two countries. The alarming rate of increase since 2007 of Egyptian boys under the age of 18 arriving in Italy unaccompanied and the lack of information explaining this phenomenon necessitated research in the field. The study reviewed the reasons behind this type of migration, recent policy developments in both countries, the problems experienced by the social workers and operators in Italy when managing the boys and the dilemma facing the boys because of this migration. The study relied mainly on primary sources for its findings. Literature on unaccompanied minors in other parts of the world and studies on irregular Egyptian migration to Italy provided background information for the study.

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INTRODUCTION

Italy has always had a special place in my heart. My first memories as a child were in Rome, where my father was posted and where I spent the first four years of my elementary education. My father was a diplomat in the Egyptian Foreign Service. I remember how anxious I was to discover the new world around me, the many fears and frustrations that I had to endure, as well as the innumerable pleasures that until today I cherish. I remember struggling with the language and trying to make myself clear to other children so that they would allow me to play with them, but to no avail, until I learned to speak like them. I recall my mother's comforting embrace in those early days promising me that things will be fine and that it will just take some time for everything to fall back into place, time to fit in, to feel at home. In the meantime we always had each other.

This was not the case for the irregular Egyptian unaccompanied migrant minors that I found myself studying in Italy decades later. They did not come with their mothers nor with any member of their immediate families. They came alone. They did not come to play or go to school or make friends, like I had. Instead, they came to make a living, to support their families back home to forge a future that was deemed hopeless had they not made such a journey across the sea. Their concerns were far beyond their years and the circumstances in which they found themselves are the subject of this study.

Migration has become a major issue in Egypt's economic policy with the outside world. Since the 1970s, Egypt's policy has been one of promoting migration as a means of solving some of its economic problems such as unemployment and foreign exchange. Through the export of surplus labor, primarily to oil producing Gulf States and Libya

(GCC countries), Egypt sought to reduce its foreign exchange deficit by increasing remittances. Recently, however, perhaps due to the reduction in demand for Egyptian labor in traditional Arab markets - because of war in the Gulf, the recent economic crisis, replacement by Asian workers and fluctuating oil prices - a new type of migration has been witnessed, namely, irregular migration to Europe, also known as *illegal migration* or *suicide migration*.

Definitions

All three terms refer to the same type of migration. “Irregular labor migrants are those migrants not responding to a formal demand for labor and who do not fulfill all the legal conditions of entry, stay and/[or] employment and therefore maybe considered undesirable by the government of the country in question.”¹ *Illegal migration* refers to the clandestine nature of the process, emphasizing the fact that this type of migration is against the law and therefore a criminal act. The term “suicide migration” is used to connote the high risk involved in such migration, highlighting the perilous boat journeys that have lead to the death of many young Egyptians who have solicited the help of smugglers and human traffickers in the hope of reaching the Italian shores.

What has become even more alarming in this type of migration is the phenomenon of under 18 year old children embarking on this journey from Egypt to Italy without any parental or adult supervision, left to fend for themselves under circumstances that are extremely difficult even for adults to manage on their own. These children are vulnerable, unprotected and uninformed about the situation in which they find

¹ Shahira Samy, *Irregular Migration in the South Eastern Mediterranean: Socio-Political Perspectives*, 2008. Pg. 3. <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/10114>

themselves. They do not speak the language and they are entirely unfamiliar with the culture that surrounds them, while at the same time they are burdened by the debt which their families have incurred as a result of their journey. Therefore, not only are they faced with adult issues but also psychologically, they are burdened by responsibilities that are far beyond their years.

This thesis focuses on the issues involved in the irregular migration of Egyptian minors to Italy. How do they perceive their circumstances? Why and how do they find themselves in this situation? What are the hurdles that they face and how do they manage them? What are both governments doing in order to manage this phenomenon? What are the laws that protect the minors? And finally, is there anything that would convince them not to make this journey?

Background

The arrival of irregular unaccompanied minors to the shores of Italy is of major concern to both Italian and Egyptian authorities. According to Italian law, minors are children first, whether they are legally or illegally on Italian territory and they are entitled to certain rights. Among them are protection, education and, most importantly, the right not to be repatriated unless they are accompanied by a legal guardian or voluntarily choose to return home. There are both international and domestic laws to be considered - ones that are designed to protect Europe, while others that are designed to protect the best interests of the child. The system by which these children were managed upon their arrival in Italy and what happened to them afterwards was reviewed in this thesis. New policies established as of August 2009 were identified and the consequences of these

policies on the current circumstances of unaccompanied minors in Italy were analyzed from various perspectives.

A Memorandum of Understanding for Bilateral Cooperation on Unaccompanied Minors between the Italian Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Policies and the Egyptian Ministry for Family and Population was negotiated as recently as December 2009. In August 2009, Italian law pertaining to irregular migration was also changed and the criminalization of irregular migrants was put into force. In addition, prerequisite condition for minors' presence in Italy reinforced a minimum stay of three years, two of which entails the enrollment of the child in an integration program that includes Italian language classes.

This thesis was based mainly on primary sources in both Italy and Egypt. Interviews were conducted in Rome with Egyptian Embassy officials and irregular migrants, as well as officials in the Italian Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Policies, staff members at ANCHI, the Association of Italian Municipalities, which is responsible for allocating the unaccompanied minors in various 'structures' or 'homes' throughout the different municipalities in Italy. Officials from the IOM (International Organization for Migration) in both Rome and Cairo were interviewed, as were program officials in the Ministry of State for Family and Population in Egypt. During a second trip to Italy, the focus of the interviews was on the 'structures' in which the unaccompanied minors were housed, the circumstances in which they lived and their perspectives on the situation in which they found themselves.

However, in order to understand the irregular migration of unaccompanied minors in particular, research was conducted on irregular migration of Egyptians to Italy in

general. Interviews were held in the village of Tatoun in Fayoum governorate in Egypt home to a large number of irregular migrants to Italy. “I have 6,500 young men in Italy one third of them don’t have permits. Every house in Tatoun has one or two people there in Italy. They all go to Milan mostly, but now the ones with permits are beginning to move around to France and Austria because of the E.U. There are around 1000 boys under the age of 18 years old most of them had a similar experience as my nephew. They went to Catania, Barbarossa, Sicily, Rome and Milan, these five areas,”² said Hag Mekkawy Ahmed Said El Zoghby, Development Specialist and Head of Rural Development in Tatoun.

The Ministry of State for Family and Population in Egypt in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Welfare conducted a public awareness campaign entitled: *Promoting Safe Migration and Positive Alternatives for Egyptian Youth; Challenge yourself, don’t challenge the sea!* The campaign was held in Fayoum governorate from October through December, 2009, to inform residents about legitimate migration routes and alert them of the consequences of irregular migration. In addition, workshops were conducted by the Ministry of Family and Population in cooperation with the Social Development Fund and the Local Development Foundation from January till March 2010 as a follow up to the awareness campaign. The workshops provided information on alternatives to funding potential projects that would entice investment and employment opportunities in the governorate. Fayoum was identified as the first recipient of the vocational training and development program to be implemented by the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood (NCCM) along with the International

² Interview with Hag Mekkawy Ahmed Said El Zoghby, Development Specialist and Head of Rural Development in Tatoun, Fayoum on February 23, 2010.

Organization for Migration (IOM). During the workshop it was announced that the Etsa Industrial Vocational School will be opened as of Fall 2010, it will be a three year program, after completing middle school, or secondary school, and it will provide students with an accredited diploma that can be used both in Egypt and Italy. The school will provide Italian language classes as part of it's curriculum in order to better prepare students for potential work opportunities in Italy using the quota system. In this manner both governments hope to promote legitimate migration routes for adults and dissuade unaccompanied minors from migrating before the age of 18. Moreover, a training center inside the school for people 18-35 years of age, was also announced, however, no details on the potential curriculum was discussed. Hence, interviews were conducted in February 2010, during and after the above mentioned workshops with citizens from Tatoun in order to incorporate the perspective of sending families of irregular migrants in Italy and to get their feedback on the awareness campaign and the proposed projects.

The main goal for both Italian and Egyptian authorities was to put and end to irregular migration in general and that of unaccompanied minors in particular. Italian laws were based on the premise that the migration of Egyptians to Italy was of a permanent nature and accordingly focus on integration policies. However, the main purpose identified by all informants during interviews in both Italy and Egypt for the irregular migration was to save enough money to improve their families' standard of living back home. All informants stated that the migration was temporary, regardless of duration of stay. They all intended to return home after achieving a certain amount of savings that would ensure their ability to provide a decent standard of living for themselves and their families. All informants identified employment as the set target for

their migration. In addition, all informants cited the inability to access legal migration routes as the reason for opting for this form of migration.

In the early 1970s, families developed coping mechanisms in order to survive financial hardship by sending heads of households to the Arab states with legitimate work contracts. In the mid-1990s and more so in the beginning of the new millennium, when this was no longer available, older siblings over the legal age of 18 migrated irregularly to Italy for the same purpose. When the risk of deportation increased, younger siblings under the age of 18 who could not, by law, be repatriated made their way unaccompanied. According to information provided by the Commune di Rome municipality in 2004, only two Egyptian minors were reported in the ‘shelters’ provided by the Rome municipality whereas in 2007 that number increased to 53 children and in 2008 there were 116. Finally, in 2009 the reported number of under age Egyptian boys placed in shelters by the Rome municipality alone was 249!³

In response to the increased inflow of irregular unaccompanied migrant minors, the Italian government rigidly enforced, as of August 2009, restrictions on minors’ ability to legitimize their residence in Italy after they reach the legal age of 18, by requiring them to prove that they had remained in Italy for at least three years prior to that age, two of those years with compulsory enrollment in a formal integration program through the Italian school system and one year to fulfill the Italian language requirement. Minors must be registered in any one of the eligible shelters or houses approved by the municipalities for the duration of their stay in Italy in order to be granted the necessary permit. It remains to be seen whether such policies will help reduce the number of

³ Statistics provided by the Commune di Rome, Dipartimento Promozione dei Servizi Sociali e della Salut, U.O. Minori e Famiglie

unaccompanied minors or indeed lead to even more and younger migrants making the journey.

Thus, it was deduced by this study that the easier adults' access to legal job opportunities abroad, with set contracts that enable them to ensure a decent standard of living and fulfill family obligations, the more likely it will be that the burden of this responsibility will be lifted from the shoulders of minors. From the interviews conducted with migrants and their families, both in Egypt and Italy, it became clear that the migration of Egyptians was for the vast majority only temporary.

It is therefore concluded that, in the interests of both receiving and sending countries, more viable alternatives that would address the 'push factors' leading to the irregular migration option were necessary. One such scheme has been the idea of circular migration.

The Communication from the European commission on *Circular migration and mobility partnerships between the European Union and third countries* issued in May 2007 (COM(2007) 248 final) defines circular migration as 'a form of migration that is managed in a way allowing some degree of legal mobility back and forth between two countries.' It applies, both to third-country nationals who engage in an activity in their country of origin while retaining their main residence in an EU member state, and on to 'persons residing in a third country who come to the EU temporarily for work, study, or training on the condition that, at the end of the period for which they were granted entry, they must re-establish their main residence and their main activity in their country of origin.'⁴

As evidenced during all the interviews held both in Italy and in Egypt with Egyptian migrants, minors and adults, the above definition of circular migration would fulfill their main requirements for staying in Italy. During all interviews, the most important goal after making money was that of receiving proper documents, "papers" that

⁴ Philippe Fargues, *Circular Migration: Is it relevant for the South and East of the Mediterranean?* 2008. Pg.1. http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/e-texts/CARIM_AS&N_2008_40.pdf

would allow them to travel back and forth between Egypt and Italy. Repaying the debt incurred by the expenses of the journey and financially supporting the family were the priorities identified. Once that was accomplished, the goal became one of finding a way to legitimize their stay in Italy in order to continue providing for their families.

All the young men interviewed intended to return home once they decided to get married. Most of them said that they would leave their wives to bring up their children back home and they would go back and forth. None of them agreed with the suggestion of bringing their wives to Italy to settle, preferring to have their wives in Egypt to bring up the children while they would travel back and forth every six months. In Tatoun, marriage was identified, by the men interviewed, as a main priority in life that was becoming unattainable because of the inflationary circumstances that, in their opinion, were mainly due to the remittances sent from Italy. Therefore, most of them mentioned that if they had the opportunity they would also migrate in order to make enough money to come back and live comfortably in their village. Hence, circular migration was not only seen as a viable alternative to irregular migration but it was already common practice for those who were previously irregular and became documented. In other words, the 'success stories' according to the people interviewed in Tatoun and Rome were those who managed to achieve circular migration schemes that allow them to earn their living in Euros and spend them on families back home in Egyptian pounds.

Process

The initial focus of the thesis was on irregular Egyptian migration to Italy in general. Upon further research, the issues involving irregular unaccompanied minor migrants kept coming to the forefront of the inquiries and became the main theme of this

in-depth qualitative study. Research studies by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS) of the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy (an academic unit of the Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research (CARIM) which studies migration flows from Southern Mediterranean countries to those in the north) provided background information for this thesis. Given the clandestine nature of the subject matter, there was a lack of concrete data and statistics to identify the real scope of the migration process, since the numbers calculated were of those irregular migrants that were apprehended and not the total that either left Egypt or that made it to Italy. However, informative data was provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Rome of boat landings in Southern Italy coastal areas from 2007 to 2009, revealing the number of Egyptian minors among those that were caught. Information was also provided by the Department of Migration in the Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) as well as by the Italian Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies.

A snowball technique was used to identify key individuals that were interviewed for the policy aspect of this study. Amb. Ashraf Rashed, Egyptian Ambassador to Rome, was approached for guidance. Upon his request Nabila Wassef, Consul at the Egyptian Embassy in Rome was interviewed. Wassef pinpointed the need to gear the study on unaccompanied minors since they were the focus of the current debate and concern with irregular migration. She provided access to Embassy personnel and interviews were initially conducted in the reception area of the Egyptian Embassy in Rome where all the migrants, regular and irregular alike, went to complete their paperwork at the Embassy, such as renewal of passports or giving the power of attorney to someone back home.

Twelve interviews were conducted with irregular migrants five of which were minors. Moreover, an interview with Yehia Amin, Labour Consular at the Egyptian Embassy provided insight on the issues of irregular migration from the Egyptian Ministry for Emigration and Labour perspective. Furthermore, Wassif arranged the meeting with Germana Viglietta, Director General for Immigration, Chief of Unit at the Italian Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies.

Viglietta was interviewed briefly and provided access to two members of her staff: Stephania Cogna, and Anneilla Husha, who explained the current system in Italy and highlighted some of the major concerns of the Italian government when it came to dealing with unaccompanied minors. They in turn provided a connection with ANCI where Virginia Costa, who coordinates the activities of the program for unaccompanied minors along with Francesca Zotta and Cristina Passacantando, who work for the protection system for asylum seekers, were all interviewed. In addition, three members of IOM staff were interviewed in Rome, Simone Moscarrielle, Migration Legal Expert, Ugo Melchionda, Labour Expert and Flavio Di Giacomo, Public Information Specialist.

In Egypt, more interviews were conducted with the Ministry of Family and Population. Minister Moushira Khattab was interviewed briefly as was Dr. Azza El Ahmawy, General Director Anti-Trafficking in Children Unit/Adolescent Reproductive Health. Subsequently, interviews were carried out with Sara El Azzazy, Programs Coordinator at the Cabinet of the Minister and Naser Ahmed Mesalam, Senior Researcher of Planning and coordinator of the project, *Promoting Safe Migration and Positive Alternatives for Egyptian Youth*. A two-day symposium held in the University of Fayoum, was the backdrop for an introduction to the issues faced by sending families.

Twenty-two interviews were conducted with people from the village of Tatoun over a period of three days. Most of the participants were young men who wanted to migrate. Some had attempted unsuccessfully to take the sea route while others had actually migrated and returned home after a period of time. Each one of the people interviewed had at least one family member or more in Italy. In the course of the symposium a key person was identified who organized the third day of interviews inside the village of Tatoun. Hag Mekkawy Ahmed Said El Zoghby, Development Specialist and Head of Rural Development in Tatoun, was seen as a trusted member of the village elders and had three sons of his own in Italy. His input to the study was indispensable. Moreover, Piera Solinas, Program Manager at the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Egypt was also interviewed along with Roberto Pitea, Regional Research Officer at IOM, Egypt.

Finally, a second trip to Italy was organized to incorporate the perspectives of the irregular unaccompanied migrant minors that were in the ‘structures’ of Italy. Once again, the Egyptian Embassy was extremely helpful in setting up connections with the Italian authorities. An initial interview was conducted with seven members of the Commune di Rome, the local authority that manages unaccompanied migrant minors in the district of Rome. They in turn organized visits to four locations which housed several shelters that hosted Egyptian boys under the age of 18. In total, 28 boys and 6 administrators were interviewed during these visits.

Since the events and policies regarding issues dealing with irregular migrants in general and minors in particular were very recent, articles from Egyptian newspapers were used as secondary sources. In addition to Kristina Touzenis’ book on

Unaccompanied Minors Rights and Protection, a publication by ANCHI in Italian entitled: Minori Stranieri Non Accompagnati Secondo Rapporto Anci-2007 by Monia Giovannetti [loosely translated: Unaccompanied Foreign Minors Second Report Anci-2007] were used as references, along with statistics provided by the IOM. Moreover, the Constitution of the Italian Republic and specific regulations and laws that govern legal migration to Italy were provided in a booklet entitled: Immigration how, when, where: The Handbook for Integration published by the Italian Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies, September, 2009.

All interviews conducted with informants, other than state officials, were kept anonymous, using only pseudonyms in order to protect their identities. Informants reinforced both the network theory and cumulative causation theory as key strategies used in their migration schemes. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

In conclusion, after reviewing the literature on Egyptian migration trends since the 1970s, the irregular migration of Egyptians to Europe was identified as a significant development in recent migration flows. Italy being the number one destination for this type of migration due to its' geographical proximity to Egypt became the focus of this study. In the course of the research conducted for the study, a recurrent theme was highlighted by officials in both governments, namely the alarming increase in the number of Egyptian unaccompanied minors arriving in Italy over the last two years. An information gap was identified in the literature on irregular migration of Egyptian minors. Hence, research was conducted in both Egypt and Italy with irregular migrants, adults and minors, sending families and public officials from both countries in order to provide an in-depth study of this phenomenon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand the recent irregular migration of Egyptian unaccompanied minors to Italy, a review of the literature on Egyptian migration trends since the 1970s was conducted. The first section of the literature review focuses on articles that analyze these trends, highlighting the Egyptian migration of the early 1970s to the Gulf Arab States and Libya, identifying the reasons behind the migration and the consequences to Egypt's economic development. The second section of the literature review covers articles that pertain specifically to the irregular migration of Egyptians, identifying cumulative causation and network theories as the foundations for this type of migration. The concept of circular migration will also be reviewed in this section. Finally, the third section of the literature review identifies articles on non-Egyptian unaccompanied minors in particular who migrate to both Europe and the United States in order to understand aspects of this particular phenomenon. In conclusion, an analysis of the gap in the literature on the irregular migration of Egyptian unaccompanied minors was identified, justifying further research in this field.

Historical Background

A report prepared by Zohry (2003) for the Intergrated Migration Information System provides the most comprehensive historical overview of Egyptian migration trends since the 1950s. The first part of the report reviews the shift in government policy from the post-revolutionary Nasser era, which restricted travel of Egyptians abroad to the promotion of emigration to oil producing Arab states. Following the third Arab Israeli Conflict in 1967 and the ensuing rise in oil prices a shift in policy favoring emigration was noted: "During this phase, migration was a top priority for the following reasons: to

solve the unemployment problems, to use remittances in order to repair payment deficits and to finance private projects; to supply Arab countries with required labor and to relieve pressure caused by political and economic factors.”⁵ Not only were barriers to emigration eliminated through government policies but the ‘right to emigrate’ was established as part of the 1971 Constitution in Article 52. As a result there was a steady increase in Egyptian migration to the Arab oil producing states up until the late 1980s.

After the second half of the 1980s, the Egyptian migrant labor force faced a number of problems related to domestic and international factors such as: the end of the first Gulf War; the fall in price of oil; the decline in the demand for construction workers in Arab countries; the policy of replacing foreign labor with national labor force undertaken by the Arab oil-producing countries. The Egyptian government responded to these constraints with the promulgation in 1983 of the Emigration and Sponsoring Egyptians Abroad Law no. 111. [The main law governing Egyptian migration policy]...The Iraq-Kuwait War, or Second [First] Gulf War, directly influenced the conditions of immigrants in these two countries. In fact, almost all the Egyptians in Iraq and Kuwait returned to Egypt. In the wake of the Gulf Crisis and with a return to normality in the area, migration rates practically recovered the status quo ant. Receiving countries reconsidered the issue of immigration but with more regularized policies...This has motivated labor-exporting countries to explore the hypothesis of opening new job markets. As a result, the presidential decree no.31 of 1996 shed light on the need to restructure certain ministries. As a consequence, the responsibility for migration issues and Egyptians abroad has been undertaken by the Ministry of Manpower and Emigration.⁶

Zohry described the function of the various Egyptian authorities involved in migration policy along with the laws and regulations that have led to their establishment and provides statistical data of Egyptian migrants in the different Arab oil-producing countries, such as the number of contracts given to Egyptians over the period 1991-2001. In reviewing the type of occupations for which Egyptians were hired in the region, differences were found between statistics from Egyptian sources and those found in receiving countries.

⁵ Dr. Ayman Zohry, prepared report for Integrated Migration Information System, Research Unit, Contemporary Egyptian Migration 2003, p.31.

⁶ Ibid. pgs. 32-33.

It is important to question the reliability of national estimates regarding the number of Egyptians abroad, especially those related to the permanent or semi-permanent migrants who migrate to non-Arab countries. The numbers given by CAPMAS [Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics] are simply estimates relying on reports from Egyptian Embassies abroad, cross-border flows from the Ministry of Interior, work permits from the Ministry of Manpower, and some other sources and international estimates. The estimates of Egyptians in major receiving countries differ from those made by CAPMAS. According to Italian estimates for example, there are 35,000 Egyptians in Italy while the national estimate calculated by CAPMAS acknowledges 90 thousand. National estimates by CAPMAS may need to be revised and matched with estimates from receiving countries according to data availability. On the contrary, the estimates carried out by CAPMAS of Egyptians abroad (temporary and permanent) are lower than those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). The two differ by 1 million.⁷

Zohry also focused on Egypt as a receiving country for migrants, arguing that it was not significant except to identify that the “the net migration for Egypt is ‘positive’, that is to say that the number of immigrants exceeds the number of emigrants.”⁸ The fourth section of the report reviewed the results of the study released in 2000 conducted by Cairo Demographic Center (CDC) and CAPMAS which collected data from 1,943 households throughout Egypt, looking at household size, education level of migrants, gender, age group, networks available to migrants prior to departure and access to information regarding destinations. The results of the study indicated that:

With respect to the characteristics of migrants in general and compared to non-migrants in particular, migration can be perceived as a selective phenomenon. More frequently, migrants come from large households, they often perceive their financial situation as insufficient and they are predominantly younger, educated men when compared to non-migrants. The main reasons for first-time emigration from Egypt are “work-related” for the majority of male international migrants whereas most female migrants move for family-related reasons. In the case of male migrants, the principal reason for the last migration is to generally improve standards of living, followed by insufficient income from work to support the family. For female migrants the main reason for the last migration is to accompany the spouses.⁹

⁷ Ibid. pgs. 53-54.

⁸ Ibid. pg.67

⁹ Ibid. pg.101

Migrants attained their information from family and friends in destination countries, namely through their networks and most were able to arrange entry visas and work permits in the country of destination. “Only about 6% entered or stayed without the required papers, mainly by overstaying their visa.”¹⁰

On remittances, in 2001 Egypt ranked fifth in the top ten of developing countries with \$2.876 million. “As one of the main sources of foreign currency, remittances count for 3% to 4% of Egyptian GDP. The largest amounts of remittances arrive from the United States and Saudi Arabia (34.5% and 22.1% respectively). Remittances from Western Europe represent about 15% of the total remittances abroad.”¹¹

Finally, the report recommended the development of training centers in Egypt for vocations that were in demand abroad using the nurses in the Philippines and Indian information technology professionals as successful examples for the export of labor. An integrated policy incorporating civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) was also suggested as a tool for future migration strategies.

During research conducted for this thesis it was evident that government policy was shifting towards the above recommendations, as plans were announced for the vocational school in Fayoum governorate, funded by the Italian government in cooperation with the Ministry of Family and Planning.

Even though Zohry’s study provided invaluable background information for this thesis it did not foresee the importance of the irregular migration trend that was to come in the last few years. Although he identified the importance of intra-regional relations such as the Association Agreement between the European Union and Egypt that included

¹⁰ Ibid. pg. 101-102

¹¹ Ibid. pg. 106

migration provisions,¹² at the time of Zohry's study the phenomenon of irregular Egyptian unaccompanied migrant minors was non-existent and therefore could not be addressed. Also, irregular migration to traditional Arab destinations did not occur and migration to the west was seen as permanent and adhering to regular migration schemes. Thus, irregularity was not factored in.

Sell's (1988) study on Egyptian International Labor Migration also reviewed the history of Egyptian migration to the Arab Gulf states, drawing on Piore's dual labour market theory.

The social process migration model, particularly as presented by Piore (1979), begins with the assumption of a two sector national labor market: a primary sector of good jobs with high pay and stability and a secondary sector of low paying jobs with high variability. This model presumes that modern firms, mainly because of the expense of on-the-job training, maintain a relatively constant and pampered primary work force for their core and unfluctuating activities, and rely upon a marginalized secondary workforce for fluctuating labor demand. In Piore's presentation, homo economicus migrants from the employer's point of view, are the ideal secondary labor force. Only at the community formation stage when migrant status itself becomes blurred would we expect to find migrants in the primary labor force.¹³

However, according to Sell, Egyptian migration did not fit completely within the primary/secondary labor structure model. At the time, Arab destination countries were neither industrialized nor developed along the western labor market structure model. In addition, Egyptian migrants were initially the educated professionals that fell within the primary labor force.

In core capitalist countries, the primary/secondary distinction parallels wage and security distinctions. High wages and security both occur in the primary sector and both are absent in the secondary; in Egypt this is not the case. The secure public sector has lower wages than the variable but better-paid private sector, although, to be sure, reality makes this more complex in that public sector

¹² Ibid. pg. 110

¹³ Ralph Sell, Egyptian International Labor Migration and Social Processes: Toward Regional Integration, 1988. Pg. 99. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2546586>

employees have other jobs to supplement their pay and private sector workers have some legal rights to secure employment.”¹⁴

Hence, Egyptian migration did not adhere completely to the classic social process model since Egyptian migrants were seen to fall within both sectors. Sell’s study focused on three main countries to which Egyptians were migrating at the time, namely Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Many of the issues that were brought up were applicable to Egyptian migration trends in general regardless of destination.

Initial migrants are predominantly target earners, with the firm intention of returning to their homeland. This monetary target is not the end in itself, but represents a means to a goal based in the origin community, variously a stake to buy land, housing, vehicles for personal use and/or income generation, debt repayment, family and/or religious obligations, capital for farm or workshop improvements, marriage necessities, etc. This orientation makes these migrants relatively rare examples of homo economicus, motivated by the single goal of making money and demanding little in the way of social prestige, recognition, power and/or amenities from their employment. This helps explain much of the social disorganization observed during early phases of migration processes, since rarely do people so willingly allow themselves to be cast in the role of totally alienated economic object.¹⁵

The above quote could easily be applied to irregular migrants in Europe. The study highlights both the theory of cumulative causation and that of network theory although it does not address them as such. Sell emphasises that the success of migrants abroad create both a temptation for others to replicate the experience as well as provide networks upon which future migrants can rely. Migrants end up staying longer due to a rescheduling of initially set targets and therefore begin forming communities that in themselves allow them to extend their stay.

Although Sell’s study was focused on non-European migration routes and was written 22 years ago, it need not be considered dated, nor exclusively applicable to those

¹⁴ Ibid. Pg. 100.

¹⁵ Ibid. Pg.88.

particular Arab states which it covered, since Sell's prediction of potential future migration trends were very close to today's reality.

To the extent that the widely-viewed slowdown in economic development in oil rich states takes effect, the difficulties will occur for Egyptians next in line to migrate. Opportunities for them will be restricted and this will add to existing labor market frustrations. That the preceding generation had it better because labor migration could be used to accumulate quickly the cash necessary for a marriage and/or a flat will not create optimism for the future, especially among young people joining the labor force. But the shock occurring in this fashion will be greatly buffeted, in contrast to the situation which would occur if a large proportion of those abroad returned at about the same time. The symbol of a successful migrant will not depart as easily as the opportunities themselves. Frustrated potential migrants will look elsewhere and information needs to be gathered about the role of alternative destinations in contemporary migration processes.¹⁶

More recently, Roman (2008) has provided an overview of the recent irregular migration trends from Egypt to the EU and specifically to Italy. She defines and describes "irregular migration", a term that has recently supplanted "illegal migration" in order to avoid the criminalized category of "illegal migrant".

The term "irregular migration" is commonly used to describe a variety of different phenomena involving people who enter or remain in a country of which they are not a citizen, in breach of national laws. These included migrants who enter or remain in a country without authorization and those who are smuggled or trafficked across international border. These different forms of irregular migration are often clustered together under the alternative headings of unauthorized, undocumented or illegal migration.¹⁷

Roman analysed the reasons behind the irregular migration of Egyptians, reviewing the policies set by the EU and Egypt to tackle the phenomenon, highlighting the economic discrepancies between sending and receiving countries in terms of 'push/pull factors' for irregular migration, where "the limited capacity of the labour market to absorb the annual cohorts of job seekers productively turns them into potential

¹⁶Ibid. Pg.101.

¹⁷ Howeida Roman, Irregular Migration of Egyptians, 2008. Pg. 1. <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/10113>

emigrants. Poverty is the push factor, while the enhanced living conditions in the countries of the North are a pull factor.”¹⁸

Roman acknowledged the lack of available data on irregular migration as a drawback in any study of irregular migration. She referred to several newspaper articles that highlight the capturing and capsizing of boats carrying irregular Egyptian migrants off the coast of Libya as evidence of the current trend. As a response, the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower and Emigration conducted a study of potential migrants to determine the push factors. Collaborating with the IOM and the Italian government, a report entitled ‘Attitudes of Egyptian Youth towards Migration to Europe’ looked at the socio-political and economic environment of migration decision making.¹⁹

Fieldwork for the survey was conducted in eight Egyptian governorates that were identified as the highest regions from which regular and irregular migrants to Europe arrive. The survey included young males between the ages of 18 and 40 years old, more than half were single while 42.3 % had a technical secondary certificate or a university degree and 38.2% of those surveyed were unemployed. According to Roman, “The results of the survey indicated that the prime desired destination for Egyptian youth who wish to migrate is Italy; more than one-half of the study population (53.4 percent) stated that Italy was their preferred destination. France came second with almost a quarter of respondents. Then other countries included the U.K., the Netherlands, Greece and Sweden.”²⁰

A limitation of the study, according to Roman, was the method by which the number of undocumented migrants in Italy was determined.

¹⁸ Ibid. Pg. 2

¹⁹ Ibid. Pg. 3

²⁰ Ibid. Pg. 3

According to the Egyptian official data in 2000, 10.9% of permanent Egyptian migrants live in Italy, which means around 90,000 people. However, the OECD reports a stock of only 32.8 thousand residence permits held by Egyptians in Italy for the year 2000. This discrepancy between the Egyptian and the OECD figures on the number of permanent Egyptian migrants in Italy suggests the existence of a high number, around 60,000, undocumented Egyptian permanent migrants, though, of course there is no official data on this subject. This is clearly related to the very strict migratory policy enforced by the Italian government, which makes it extremely difficult to obtain a residence permit or a work permit. In terms of trends, the number of residence permits held by Egyptians in Italy has increased substantially in the last decade, from 7 thousand in 1985 to 32.8 thousand in the year 2000.²¹

The survey concluded that economic push factors in Egypt were the main reasons for respondents' desire to migrate, citing lack of job opportunities, lower standard of living and lower wages as the main three. Information regarding destination countries was attained through family and friends. The lack of information dissemination regarding migration decisions from any formal government sources was noted as a shortcoming of policy at the time.

Friends and relatives are the main source of information regarding the desired country; more than 80 percent of respondents rely on their relatives and friends to sketch a hypothetical picture of conditions prevailing in the country of destination. The role of the media is less than 10 percent, while the role of the internet, general readings, embassies and the Egyptian authorities is negligible. The vast majority of respondents (94.7) mentioned that they never heard about deported illegal migrants. Almost three-quarters of the respondents were aware of the consequences of illegal migration, yet 78 percent of the respondents believe that legal migration to Europe is not easy.²²

Roman's paper reviewed the existing routes taken by irregular migrants, the costs and risks involved in each option. The paper identified EU policy objectives, which according to Roman have been focusing on protecting Europe rather than targeting the route cause of irregular migration namely insufficient economic development in sending countries. The Egyptian policy on irregular migration focuses on raising public awareness of the consequences and risks involved in such migration, providing legitimate

²¹ Ibid. Pgs. 3-4.

²² Ibid. Pg.4

alternatives through both legal migration methods and development opportunities in sending regions. “In sum, greater efforts should be made to create jobs and sustainable livelihoods in developing countries, so that citizens of such states do not feel compelled to migrate,”²³ concluded Roman.

Circular Migration

Nassar’s (2008/9) more economic analysis of the trends of Egyptian migration post-1950s, focused on the period between 1989 through 2006. Although Nassar identifies the distinction between temporary and permanent migration in Egyptian legislation its significance was not reflected in remittances of more than three and a half million Egyptians abroad:

The large scale of remittance transfers suggests that emigrants remain in very close contact to their home societies. Emigration is clearly extremely significant at the national level. Egypt’s principle migration legislation, law number 111 of 1983, makes a clear distinction between permanent and temporary migration, though in practice the distinction is simply a geographical one with all migrants to Arab states defined as temporary, even though some have been there many years, and all migrants to Europe, North America or Australia defined as permanent, including those who have arrived very recently.²⁴

The purpose of Nassar’s study was to illustrate that most Egyptian migration whether permanent or temporary can be seen to a certain extent as circular, evidenced by the intent of return. She points to the fact that the larger proportion of Egyptian migrants are found in other Arab states, hence considered temporary even though they could have been there for decades yet most Egyptians intended to return. “In some cases, where temporary migrants resided for decades Egypt is experiencing, what is called the

²³ Ibid. Pg. 9

²⁴ Heba Nassar, Temporary and Circular Migration: The Egyptio[a]n Case, 2008/09. Pg.1.
http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/e-texts/CARIM_AS&N_2008_09.pdf.

*permanence of temporary migration as they always intended to return back. In spite of the difference between temporary and circular migration we might come to the conclusion that most of the Egyptian is temporary migration and part of temporary is likely to be circular.”*²⁵

Gathering data on the characteristics of Egyptian migrants from several governmental and international sources the study indicated that the majority of migrants were male and there was a strong age selectivity that showed younger migrants between the ages of 18-34 were more likely to migrate than their older counter-parts over the age of 40. Over 60% of migrants were married although the majority traveled alone, leaving families in Egypt. The survey showed that migrants tended to have higher education than their non-migrant counter-parts, reflected in the number of those who completed secondary and higher education. Saudi Arabia remained the number one destination for Egyptian migrants followed by Kuwait and Libya in the Arab world while in the West the U.S. was the preferred destination followed by Italy.

Year 2005 represents the peak for return migrants, nearly one fifth of the return migrants came back. Over the period 1996-1999, the trend of return migration witnessed a continuous increase to reach 16.67% in year 1999. However, the trend slowed down in 2000-2001 then it took off again to reach 11% in 2002.²⁶

Most return migrants identified by the study in 2006 were returning from Saudi Arabia and Iraq, 198 and 137 respectively, whereas only three migrants were identified as returning from Italy. This was due to the fact that irregular migrants were not a part of the study but only mentioned in passing, that, “Egypt is witnessing now a phenomenon of illegal migration from a few numbers to countries like Italy, Malta and Cyprus, the number of these migrants are increasing but in the range of hundreds. However, no one

²⁵ Ibid. Pg. 2

²⁶ Ibid Pg.5

can predict its trend whether permanent or temporary and no consistent information is available.”²⁷

Nassar discussed the effect of remittances on Egypt’s development strategy. She distinguishes between what the individual considers as an investment from what the government view of investment, noting that half of rural-origin returnees and 42% of urban-origin returnees invest their money in housing. Although this generated employment in the short term it was not considered by the government as an income generating productive investment in the long-run. “A continuous yield is preferred than a promising yield, which means that return migrants are not innovators, who aim to alter a life style or change economic or social status but rather conservative migrants, who want to retain a certain life style.”²⁸ The potential impact of migration on the economy are summarized thus:

Labour migration, whether temporary or permanent migrants, can effect the national labour market through many ways. It reduces the size of the labour force by the number of migrants. It can reduce the number of unemployed by the same number either directly, if those who migrate were unemployed before their departure, or indirectly if they had been employed but were replaced by drawing from the unemployed. Migration affects labor force and the level of employment in other ways as well. The flow of the remittances increases effective demand by increasing consumption and investment expenditure of the migrants and their families, which would inevitably be reflected in an increased demand for labor and a reduction in unemployment or at least in the level of unemployment that has revealed in the absence of migration. The greater availability of foreign exchange through remittances may also encourage expansionary policy, which would have the same result. Migration may also increase the productivity of migrants if they acquire new work experiences and skills abroad and may through their savings and willingness to take risk add to supply of entrepreneurial abilities after their return to home country. On the other hand, migration may have a negative impact on specific sectors on the economy as a whole in so far as it creates shortages of certain skills that are not easily replicable.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid. Pg. 3

²⁸ Ibid. Pg. 9

²⁹ Ibid. Pg.7

In conclusion, Nassar proposes instruments by which legal labor movements can help alleviate the negative consequences caused by increased unemployment. She suggests using Mode 4 of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) that govern the temporary movement of natural persons (TMNP) as an option to be incorporated into migration policy schemes that eases regular recruitment, restricts irregular recruitment and encourage subcontracting, particularly in the construction sector.³⁰

A limitation of this study was that although it was advocating the concept of circular migration using data on returnees to illustrate the points being made, statistics from Western nations and specifically Italy seemed to defy the point being made. For example, the table illustrating the number of return migrants in 2006 showed the number returning from each western country as under 5 returnees, whereas those returning from Arab countries each ranged over 40, and in the case of Saudi Arabia they were 198. This could be used to interpret that circular migration may work in the case of inter-Arab migration yet might not be successful given results from Western countries, which would be defeating to her suggestion of extending GATS Mode 4 schemes to include TMNPs as mentioned above. Another weakness found in the study was the contradiction between identifying one of the advantages of migration as enhancing the migrants' skills and their willingness to take risks in entrepreneurial endeavors and yet it was stated that return "migrants are not innovators."³¹ The fact that irregular migrants were not a part of the study was a limitation in itself. Despite this, Nassar's study was crucial in understanding

³⁰ Ibid. Pg. 10

³¹ Ibid. Pg. 9

the economic dimension of circular migration and the behaviour of Egyptian temporary migrants in general that were applicable to some extent on irregular migrants as well.

Fargues (2008) was another source that advocated circular migration as a viable option between Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (SEM) countries and their European neighbors to the North. Fargues places the following criteria for circular migration:

- Criterion A Being temporary: periods of stay are limited in duration;
- Criterion B Being renewable: several periods are possible;
- Criterion C Being circulatory: freedom of movement between source and host countries is fully-enjoyed during each period of stay;
- Criterion D Being legal;
- Criterion E Being respectful of the rights of migrants;
- Criterion F Being managed in order to match labour demand in one country with supply from another country.³²

Given the need for labor faced by European countries with a shrinking and aging population and the surplus found in SEM countries that have the opposite problem, the paper identifies the benefits found in promoting circular migration for all the parties involved. “In the case of SEM countries where high unemployment rates prevail among young people with higher education, the facilitation and the orderly management of circular migration among skilled persons may bring more benefits than costs.”³³ Fargues suggests easier access to return home and re-entry to host countries in order for the circularity to be successful.

Because it has been found that success, rather than failure, in host countries favours a constructive return home, the intensity and quality of ties established with host countries are critical to circular migration. For this purpose, temporary contracts need to be long and flexible enough to enable migrants both to recover the financial costs associated with migration, and to save enough money to establish businesses upon return. Obstacles to cross-border circulation must be removed and circular migrants should be allowed to re-enter their destination country, to apply for renewable stays, and to change their employers (Agunias and Newland 2007). Pro-circular migration policies in SEM countries

³² Philippe Fargues, Circular Migration: Is it relevant for the South and East of the Mediterranean? 2008. Pg. 2. <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/8391>

³³ Ibid. Pg. 4.

should target young adults. Owing to a combination of local pressure on labour markets and delayed age at marriage, many of these are open to a migratory experience.³⁴

Fargues cites successful circular migration in India with returnees from Silicon Valley as an example of circular migration helping to promote development in sending countries. While stringent visa requirements and policies that were designed to promote return from European countries only caused potential temporary migrants to remain in host countries for fear of losing their foothold in that labor market, instead bringing their families over through reunification schemes, as was the case of Turks in Germany.

Promoting circular migration is increasingly viewed as a solution for addressing labour shortages in the ageing, and the soon-to-be shrinking, populations of Europe, while avoiding the social and cultural problems arising from permanent migration; for offering developing countries a pressure valve for saturated labour markets and an alternative to massive irregular migration; for optimizing the development impact of migration on source countries; for gaining their commitment to cooperate with Europe on what is seen as one of the most difficult challenges of the day.³⁵

A limitation of this study was the scarcity of empirical evidence. Although the theoretical arguments were very solid they needed to be re-enforced with actual numbers.

Another article on the Egypt-Italy migration nexus by Roman (2008) also promotes circular migration policy as the viable alternative to irregular migration.

Several conditions in the contemporary world are highly conducive to the international circulation of labor, both skilled and unskilled. The development of transportation has meant that money and time costs of travel have dramatically decreased, which will not only facilitate the international “journey to work” but also enable migrant workers to return readily to their home nation in an emergency and for frequent visits. The intimacy of contact with the family based in the home nation is enhanced by the cheapening of international telephoning, emailing, and faxing. All this is at a time when demographic and economic differences between nations are widening, especially between the so-called “labor surplus” and “labor shortage” nations.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid. Pgs. 4-5.

³⁵ Ibid. Pg. 11.

³⁶ Howaida Roman, Italian-Egyptian Model in Managing the Emigration from Egypt to Italy, Dimensions and Prospects, 2008. Pg.1. <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/8339>

Roman reviews recent policy between Italy and Egypt that was aimed at promoting legitimate migration mechanisms while reducing illegal migration routes. Italy it was argued, has been the preferred destination for irregular Egyptian migrants since the 1990s. Using Zohry (2007) Roman offers the following reasons for irregular migration:

- High unemployment rates among Egyptian youth
- The difficulty to find employment opportunities in the Arab Gulf countries due to the massive number of cheap South East Asian labor
- The geographical proximity between Egypt and Italy
- The ease of traveling to Libya where most of the boat journeys to Europe usually start.³⁷

In order to combat this type of irregular migration, Italy and Egypt signed the Labor Agreement in 2005 and a Re-admission Agreement in 2007. The policy aimed at providing Egypt with a quota for job opportunities in Italy.

The Italian-Egyptian cooperation model has been effectively realized through the IMIS (Integrated Migration Information System) and IDOM (Information Dissemination on Migration) projects which are financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Cooperation for Development and implemented in partnership with the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower and Emigration and IOM. Such projects have respectively allowed the match-making of demand and offer as well as the institutional capacity building and the dissemination of information, through the Egyptian mass media, concerning the dangers of illegal migration practices. Within this framework, a “free toll number” has been set up to provide information on the legal procedures they must go through to enter Italy.³⁸

The problem, as identified in the study, was that the quota system made available by the Italians was not fulfilled due to the skill levels of job applicants. Therefore, a more integrated approach, which provides Italian technical assistance to help develop human resources to meet the available job requirements was proposed.

In the framework of occupational mobility, the components needed for the activation of a win-win scenario between the origin and destination countries require: first, facilitating the acquisition of basic skills in order to raise the

³⁷ Ibid. Pg.3

³⁸ Ibid. Pg.4.

occupational possibilities (e.g. linguistics skills), second, allowing the comparability and transferability of qualifications and certificates, third, activating partnership in the field of education and training so as to establish common educational standards.³⁹

Despite all the benefits of circular migration identified in this study, an underlying pre-requisite of developing local skills to the level of international market expectations was made clear.

Although there are 1200 training centers in Egypt, the scarcity of skilled manpower is still noticeable. In this framework, it is important to orient the educational and training offers according to a demand-driven approach, by assessing the needs of the labor market and by organizing training sessions in terms of didactic methodologies and curricula. The integration and greater synergies between schools and the entrepreneurial world are the key to improve Egyptian competitiveness. Such integration is linked to the capacities of the country to provide training courses in line with what is required by the international labor markets, and it is also connected to the necessity of cooperating with the destination countries in terms of bilateral agreements and technical vocational partnership for job creation.⁴⁰

A limitation of this study was the difficulty of deciphering enacted policy versus suggested policy. Roman shifts back and forth between systems and suggestions so that at certain points it is difficult to tell what has been proposed and what has been implemented.

More recent work by Zohry (2009) explores migration patterns from Egypt to both Italy and France, including the new stream of irregular migrants. Following a brief review of the history of Egyptian emigration to Europe, Zohry asserts that “Egyptians in the West are perceived as being better educated than migrants to the Arab Gulf.”⁴¹ Two different types of Egyptian migrants were identified in the study. The first group of migrants was the educated, highly professional and skilled labor that traditionally migrated to Europe since the Egyptian Revolution in the 1950s. The term ‘established

³⁹ Ibid. Pg.6

⁴⁰ Ibid. Pg. 6

⁴¹ Ayman Zohry, *The Migratory Patterns of Egyptians in Italy and France*, 2009. Pg.5.
<http://hdl.handle.net/1814/12253>

migrants' was used to identify this group in the study, consisting of doctors, university professors and scientists who chose to remain outside of Egypt in order to avoid Gamal Abdel Nasser's socialist regime. The second group of migrants, referred to in the study as 'contemporary migrants', was the irregular migrant that started arriving in Europe as of the 1990s. These migrants were less professional and less educated than their predecessors and they were the focus of the study.

The objectives of the small qualitative study, (conducted in Paris and Milan in October 2008) were to reveal the patterns of migration of Egyptians to Italy and France in order to understand the scope of the migration and in turn to identify the discrepancies found in the numbers provided by different authorities in both sending and receiving states. In addition, the study reviewed the living and working conditions of current Egyptian migrants in both Italy and France, along with the policies that govern them.

The mean age for participants in the study was 35 years old, with those in France being slightly older by three years than those interviewed in Italy. Most of the migrants interviewed had some form of vocational secondary degree. Those interviewed in Italy, 17 in Milan, were from Fayoum and Dakahlyia governorates while those interviewed in France, 19 in Paris, came from Gharbyia and Menoufyia governorates.

The study identified two types of work, regular and irregular, as well as two types of entry to Europe, regular and irregular. It revealed the four possible combinations of entry and work whether regular or irregular, stating that the most common combination was the irregularity of both, with the second most common being regular entry and irregular work, and the least common being regular entry and work. The study found that irregular entry with regular work was not a possibility.

Law 111 was recognized as the main law governing migration issues in Egypt and the following five policy objectives were identified by the study, namely:

1. Encouraging emigration to ensure equilibrium in the domestic labor market;
2. Fighting illegal migration;
3. Maximizing the economic benefits of migration and increasing migrants' remittances;
4. Ensuring the welfare of emigrants; and
5. Meeting labor demand in receiving countries.

Zohry (2009) argued that, although the legislation called for more targeted migration policies, no programs in practice address global demand for particular skills and industries; and no pre-departure orientation or skills training exist.⁴² The study enumerated the various ministries and authorities that were responsible for migration issues in Egypt, giving detailed analysis of their functions. In addition, it reviewed the bilateral relations between Egypt and Italy, referring to the Memorandum of Understanding and the Information Dissemination for the Prevention of Irregular Migration project (IDOM) that aimed at raising public awareness about the risks involved in irregular migration.

Zohry summarized the fieldwork in Milan by giving an overview of the way Egyptians manage their lives. He described the coffee shops owned and frequented by Egyptians on a street where many other Egyptian businesses were established such as telephone shops and butchers. A large number of Egyptians work in the construction field and many who have managed to secure residence permits have established successful businesses in which they employ other Egyptians from their villages. Zohry explained how families maintain ties with Egypt and attempt to bring up their children with their ethnic backgrounds intact. Several of the interviews highlighted the increase in

⁴² Ibid. Pg.11.

numbers of irregular migrants arriving in Milan as having had a negative effect on both business and employment opportunities caused by the surplus in cheap labor.

Egyptians in Paris were doing better than their counterparts in Milan according to the study. Unemployment rates were lower and there was a strong support network evidenced by the existence of the Association of the Sons of Gharbiya (NGO) whose head quarters provided a center for networking among the Egyptian migrants. Egyptians in Paris mainly worked in two fields - interior decoration and in the fruits and vegetable markets. One disadvantage was the inability of Egyptians to speak French and so were disadvantaged compared with other Arab migrants from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Nevertheless, successful Egyptian migration from Meet Badr Halawa contributed to development back home.

The contributions of Meet Badr Halawa's workers in Paris to their Egyptian home are documented in Saad (2005 and 2007). In her study on Egyptian workers in Paris, Saad indicates that the development impact of migrants from Meet Badr Halawa is critical in their village; the most important of which is the establishment of a sewage system, in addition to a school, and a health unit. Indeed, the previous Mayor of the village used to make special trips to Paris in order to collect money from the migrants for these matters.⁴³

Zohry noted that due to better conditions in France "there was an evolving migration stream from Italy to France. Those who fail to find any job in Italy due to the saturation of the labour market in Italy re-migrate to France to find jobs there."⁴⁴ Some also intended to cross the English Channel to the U.K. The study found that most of the contemporary Egyptian migration used irregular entry, was male dominated and sought to maximize remittances. "Moreover, they state that Europe to them means working hard

⁴³ Ibid. Pg.18.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Pg. 18.

and remitting money to their families in Egypt. It is clear that the true home of Egyptian migrants in Paris – as well as Egyptians in Milan – is back in their villages in Egypt.”⁴⁵

Zohry’s study concluded with a proposal to open new markets for Egyptian labor, through bilateral agreements. It suggested increasing the budget for the Emigration Sector of the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower and Emigration to incorporate research and data analysis in order to understand and improve migration management policy.

The limitation of the study was that only 36 migrants were interviewed, too few a number to base generalizations upon. Given more time and resources, perhaps with several researchers covering the fieldwork aspect of the study, a wider range of migrants would have given a stronger base to this study. However, one of Zohry’s suggestions in the conclusion of the study was just that. He proposed that the Egyptian government should fund more research in this field, rather than have most of it depend on foreign aid.

Venturini’s (2009) work on irregular migration tackled the issues, from the perspective of each of the four actors involved namely, employers, society, institutions and employees. Describing irregular workers, Venturini states:

Irregular workers must often work irregularly: they have no choice . They might be refugees waiting for status recognition; they might be migrants fleeing poverty; labourers who were not able to regularly and legally enter a country; individuals in transit for a final destination, who look for occasional income while they finalize their projects; ‘over-stayers’, that is foreign nationals who remains in destination countries after the permit (of work or residency) has expired; or even circular migrants (e.g. valise migrants in Turkey).⁴⁶

The purpose of the study was to explain the reasons for continuing increases in irregular employment throughout the world and identifying ways in which such behavior can be influenced. The study used examples from Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Lebanon

⁴⁵ Ibid. 19.

⁴⁶ Alessandra Venturini, *Irregular Migration: Incentives and Institutional and Social Enforcement*, (2009) Pg.2. <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/10796>

as well as Southern Mediterranean countries to illustrate its' points. Venturini highlighted the importance of enforcing existing laws and attaching negative social stigma along with punitive measures that would dissuade an employer from hiring an irregular worker. In addition, social protection measures such as education and health care were identified as instrumental in the decision making process from the irregular workers' point of view. Thus availability or lack there of, in these social protection measures have a direct influence in the feasibility of stated policy. The study implied that if the irregularity was not unsafe or uncomfortable enough, for the migrant in question, then it would continue being a tempting option for potential migrants.

Among the benefits of irregular employment for the worker were the flexibility of the hours, in which the employee can presumably work as long as was physically possible in order to make as much money as possible. Another benefit regarding flexibility in work schedule was the possibility of seasonal work, in which for example, the irregular worker can return home to his/her country of origin for three months at a time only coming back when there was work. Venturini stated, "The rigidity of formal contracts does not satisfy many migrants who would like to work night and day for a period and then go back home for, say, the agricultural season. It must also be said that irregularity is not always a choice, and the migrant finds him or herself without rights at the mercy of an employer and society in the host country."⁴⁷

The study suggested that policy was often advocated for political purposes only whether for domestic campaigns or international relations whereas the actual seriousness in implementing a law necessitated a commitment from all parties involved. "If there is not the clear perception of illegal practice, even if an act is, in fact, formally illegal, then

⁴⁷ Ibid. Pg.3

society will not enforce the law and it will encourage illegality... If institutional enforcement were strong with high penalties and frequent checks, even if society per se did not consider the law appropriate, then society would respect the law because it would be too costly to ignore it. If institutions are serious about the enforcement of a law then there is the possibility of educating the citizen in appropriate behavior, even if the citizen does not, in principle, wish to comply with the norm.”⁴⁸

In conclusion, the study proposed flexible legal work contracts in order to circumvent irregular labor migration flows that would in turn reflect in irregular employment. It stated that, “even more importantly, the EU needs to promote a legal culture and a life-expectancy approach among its neighbors. Without social enforcement it is too costly to enforce a law institutionally which limits employment and income access to legal workers in societies where irregular employment is common practice.”⁴⁹

Venturini’s work rang true in the case of the three year requirement for unaccompanied migrant minors as admitted by the social workers interviewed for the current study on the phenomenon of irregular Egyptian unaccompanied minor migrants. During interviews conducted with social workers in the Commune di Roma as well as with operators in the structures visited in the second trip to Rome, it was clear that the law was in existence prior to August 2009 yet it was not enforced. They all stated at one point or another during interviews that the law requiring minors to have been in Italy for three years before their minor’s permit could be changed to a work permit or a residence permit after the age of 18 was always there; however, the policy was not strictly implemented before that date. Hence, children arriving at 17 years old were able to

⁴⁸ Ibid. Pg. 5

⁴⁹ Ibid. Pg. 7.

legitimize their stay easily once they turned 18. This was done with the assistance of the operators and the social workers themselves as part of their role as guardians to estranged minors. However, this was used as a loophole for irregular migration flows that were being strangled by bilateral agreements that allowed the repatriation of Egyptian adults arriving to Italy through irregular means. As a result there was a noticeable surge in the arrival of Egyptian minors' to Italy over the last two years that led to the re-enforcement of existing laws on a much stricter bases.

Unaccompanied Minors

There were no studies found specifically addressing the issues pertaining to unaccompanied Egyptian irregular migrant minors, therefore a review of the phenomenon of unaccompanied minors in general was summerized in the following section. Hopkins and Hill (2008) conducted a study of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in Scotland. The purpose of the study was to highlight the scarcity of information regarding the transnational migration of children and the importance of reviewing their pre-flight experiences from their own perspective in order to better identify their needs. The study focused on unaccompanied minors under the age of 18, defining them as follows:

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are 'defined as those who are younger than[n] 18 years old who have been separated from both parents and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, has a responsibility to do so' (UNHCR 2005). Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC's) are also often referred to 'unaccompanied children', 'unaccompanied minors', or 'separated children'.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Peter Hopkins and Malcolm Hill, Pre-flight experiences and migration stories: the accounts of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, August 2008. Pg. 258. <http://www.informaworld>

The qualitative in-depth study used the snowball method to identify other organizations and potential sources for conducting the research. “Overall, more than 70 service providers and 30 unaccompanied minors were included in the study.”⁵¹ Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of those interviewed. Some children were reluctant in discussing their previous experience due to the traumatic conditions that were forced upon them back home. Most of the children were from war torn countries whether the conflict was an internal civil war situation or a cross border international conflict. Therefore they were either refugees or asylum-seekers.

It has been recorded by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) that, in early 2005, 109 unaccompanied minors seeking asylum were living in Scotland, most in Glasgow, with over 180 arriving in Scotland since 2001. Nearly all are aged over 14 with most being 16 or 17. Approximately two-thirds are male. The majority of the children are from Africa with smaller proportions from Asia and Eastern Europe. The largest group of unaccompanied minors in Scotland are originally from Somalia. Overall, the sample recruited represented almost one third of the population of unaccompanied minors and a significant sample of service providers.⁵²

Among the findings of the study was that the children interviewed did not have a say in their departure nor did they know where they were going. Secrecy was a key component in their pre-flight experience followed by a reluctance to discuss the experience. Most of them had an ‘uncle’ whether he was a blood relative or a close family friend was not clear, but this was the person who arranged for the journey. The children received assistance for the journey itself from the adult figure accompanying them but none upon arrival.

Hopkins and Hill’s clarified the difference between ‘smuggling’ and ‘trafficking’ mentioning that some of the social workers interviewed used the terms interchangeably,

⁵¹ Ibid. Pg. 259.

⁵² Ibid., pg. 259.

which emphasized a lack of understanding when it came to the definitions. According to the study,

Human smuggling is the process whereby immigrants and asylum seekers pay people to help them enter a country illegally. Many pay large amounts for the services of the people who help them to evade border controls, but, fundamentally, this is the extent of the relationship; the smuggler is paid to bring the client into a country and, once this is complete and they have arrived at their destination, the smuggled person is free. (UNICEF 2003)⁵³

According to Hopkins and Hill, service providers were not clear on the definition of trafficking. They cited the Palermo Protocol which outlines the following common definition:

Trafficking in persons' shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of person, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at the minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal or [f] organs. (UNICEF 2003, p.4)⁵⁴

Not only did the study identify the traumatic pre-flight experiences faced by the unaccompanied children which in many cases entailed war, starvation and violence but it also revealed the stress involved in the complete change of environment after their arrival in Scotland.

However, moving from countries in Africa and Asia to Scotland involved changes in language, cultural norms, level of economic development and welfare provision as well as a climate. Thus, traumatic events in the place they regarded as home and an anxious, mysterious journey to a totally unfamiliar part of the world produced major changes in virtually every aspect of their lived environments.⁵⁵

The limitation of the study was that it intentionally did not include economic migrants as part of the scope of the study even though they were unaccompanied minors

⁵³ Ibid. p. 265

⁵⁴ Ibid p.265

⁵⁵ Ibid p. 267

as well. Instead the study viewed their reasons for the journey as a choice rather than a necessity and therefore did not respect their rights to be considered children first. In that sense, the study neglected to identify the trauma involved in shouldering adult responsibilities at such a young age, that entailed traveling alone under clandestine circumstances, seeking a job and finding shelter in unfamiliar territories.

Bhabha's (2009) study on Ardent's Children reviewed the legal position of unaccompanied minors from a human rights perspective. The purpose of the study was to illustrate that unaccompanied minors were falling between the cracks of the humanitarian legal system, due to both a lack of advocacy on their behalf and lack of enforcement of existing rights. Bhabha identifies unaccompanied minors as 'Arendt's children', viewed technically as 'stateless', because there was a lack of enforcement of their human rights by states in which they found themselves: an "ambiguous position between inalienable and unenforceable rights."⁵⁶

Arendt's children had certain defining characteristics. They were minors separated or about to be separated from parents; they were non-citizens themselves or, if they were citizens, their parents were not; hence they risked either being deported along with their parents or had to remain in a country without them.

Therefore, the group includes children in a variety of circumstances: migrant children who have traveled alone across borders; first-generation citizen children whose immigrant parents have been deported, citizen or migrant children living in so-called "mixed status" or "undocumented" families, and unregistered or stateless children living in the country of their birth with their immigrant parents...When combined, each of the three characteristics that define Arendt's children brings with it the potential for some kind of rightlessness.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Jacqueline Bhabha, *Arendt's Children: Do Today's Migrant Children Have a Right to have Rights?*, 2009. Pg.412.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Pg.413-414.

Case studies illustrated specific incidents in which unaccompanied children suffered human rights infringements in both Europe and the U.S. highlighting their ‘rightlessness’ But there was considerable variation between states in providing these children with certain rights, such as education, health care and guardianship protection. It criticized the methods used for determining the age of a child and the poor conditions of detention centers, which often included placing children with unrelated adults, until bureaucratic procedures were completed. The study revealed the ineffectiveness of an international system that focuses on political acceptability rather than enforceability of rights. Finally, it advocated the right of these children to have rights, suggesting that:

Bottom-up mobilization is essential for the success of top-down litigation because without the former the latter is trumped by nativist and xenophobic sentiments, particularly in a post-9/11 climate of suspicion. Thus rights believers have their work cut out for them as opinion-formers, whistle-blowers, and concerned members of civil society. Most of all, they have an obligation to raise and stimulate discussion of the difficult and contentious issues that arise in actualizing migrant children’s right to have rights. They need to address the ambivalence that policymakers feel, torn between sympathy and hostility, between a concern to protect and a pressure to punish, rather than minimize or ignore it. Human rights instruments will never deliver on their aspirations without the political honesty and the mobilizing muscle that transform them into live demands. Alas, there are no short-cuts to justice.⁵⁸

The main problem in this study was the scope of the definition of Ardent’s children. It was inclusive of a large group who were related by only two common denominators - their age and that fact that they were alone. The study advocated policy that was more rhetorical than implementable.

Another article by Bhabha and Schmidt (2008) reviewed policies and laws specifically in the U.S. concerned with children seeking asylum and reported on a research project conducted by the authors entitled “Seeking Asylum Alone.” The study

⁵⁸ Ibid. Pg. 451.

compared the experiences of unaccompanied minors seeking asylum in the United Kingdom, Australia and the U.S.

Whatever the reasons, the number of children arriving in the U.S. is significant. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) arrested 7,787 children last year. Following arrest they pass into the bewildering inner workings of the immigration and asylum system. Our study reveals that there is a void in U.S. law, which results in children being funneled through an adversarial system that violates their human rights and ignores their best interests. It also shows that there are moves to change this, to draft policies that address the problem, and to rectify some of the system's most egregious child protection failures.⁵⁹

The study revealed that in the United States of America children were treated in exactly the same manner as adults under the immigration law, evidenced by the fact that children were detained in the same centers as adults for prolonged periods of time until their status was determined and faced the same penalty of deportation as adults. Furthermore, the study identified the lack of state-funded legal representation of children as a weakness in the system since without it the child's chances of gaining asylum were very slim. The lack of legal guardianship was another shortcoming of the existing system. The difficulty for an unaccompanied child to prove 'fear of persecution' on his/her own in order to fulfill the criteria set by the legal definition of a refugee was yet another problem.

In fact, the U.S. immigration court's first child-specific set of guidelines, which are discretionary rather than binding, was issued only as recently as September 2004. Other well-meaning efforts at reform have also been ad hoc "add-ons" rather than a comprehensive restructuring. The "Child Status Protection Act" of 2002, for example, was passed to protect children from losing age-based benefits as a result of bureaucratic delays, correcting an omission in the original law. The pending "Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act," which sets out to enhance representation and restrict detention of children, rectifying other flaws within the system, exemplifies another add-on legislation intended to correct longstanding oversights.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Jacqueline Bhabha and Susan Schmidt, *Seeking Asylum Alone: Unaccompanied and Separated Children and Refugee Protection in the U.S.*, 2008. Pg.129.

⁶⁰ *Ibid* Pgs. 129-130.

The study stressed the inadequate availability of information on unaccompanied minors in the U.S. Little or no studies have been done on the effect of the system on asylum seeking minors regardless of whether their claim was accepted or rejected. Although there was a noted increase in the world-wide phenomenon of children seeking asylum on their own, according to the study this has so far gone unnoticed by U.S. authorities. Bhabha and Schmidt stated that,

Government record-keeping is slim to non-existent, official attention to the problem is ad hoc, and there is no senior administrative individual or entity charged with overall responsibility for children within the system. As a result, no one has been willing to own the problem, or to take full responsibility for addressing it. Yet given the complexity of the immigration system, the multiplicity of avenues by which children come into it, and the scale (both geographic and demographic) of the problem, a coherent and coordinated response is essential.⁶¹

The study concluded by questioning the legality and fairness of the curtain asylum seeking system in the U.S. which does not take into account the specific vulnerability of this particular group even though in the U.S. both criminal and family law ensures special treatment for minors.

Children need and deserve protection, and where that is available in the home country, normally that is the best place for children to be. Accordingly we believe that the U.S. has a right to return to their homes children who are not entitled to protection in the destination state and who have safe and suitable child care environments to return to where their human rights will be fully respected. In this sense, ours is not a call for a ban on return of all unaccompanied or separated children. Indeed we believe that in many cases a more child focused asylum system, which carefully elicited the views of the unaccompanied or separated children it processed, would establish relatively early on the viability of return where it exists.⁶²

Derliyn and Broekaert (2005) analyzed the situation of unaccompanied minors traveling through Belgium heading for the U.K. The study entailed a review of 1,093 files of unaccompanied minors apprehended in and around the port of Zeebrugge between

⁶¹ Ibid. Pg.131.

⁶² Ibid. Pg. 136.

January and April 2004. The shipping police contacted the researcher each time an unaccompanied minor was apprehended, at which time she used participatory observations inside the police station in order to collect data for the study. Interviews were conducted when possible with minors after having received their oral consent. An analysis of the data was presented in the study along with policy recommendations.

A review of the system and procedures in Belgium of managing unaccompanied minors was an integral part of the study. It revealed that once police intercepted an unaccompanied minor an identification process was set in motion. First the persons' name, age, and nationality were taken followed by their fingerprints, photograph and iris scan. Finally, the police seized all documents and other belongings of the person. Then the Belgian Aliens Office was contacted to determine what kind of document the child received, either he/she were ordered to leave Belgian territory immediately or they were given five days to do so or they were allowed to remain. Since Belgium ratified the International Declaration on Children's Rights giving minors the right to be protected, this entailed that the police must contact the child protection officer, and as of May 1st, 2004, the Guardianship Office became responsible for appointing a guardian for each unaccompanied foreign minor. The officer in charge was responsible for determining whether the child was to be sent to an institution or was allowed to leave the police station without any protection measure being taken.

The reception and care system for unaccompanied refugee and migrant minors in Belgium is split up in two main parts due to the Belgian constitutional structure. In general, we can state that the Belgian Federal Government is responsible for the reception and care of all unaccompanied minors who apply for refugee status (the asylum seeking unaccompanied minors), and the Communities (Flemish- or French-speaking Communities) are responsible for the care and reception of all unaccompanied minors who don't apply for refugee status. Thus, the unaccompanied minors this study is dealing with are mainly the responsibility

of the Flemish Community, as these minors rarely make an asylum application. For the moment, the Flemish Community has created two specific centres for the reception of these unaccompanied minors, which now have a total capacity of 32 places. For the unaccompanied asylum seeking minors, the Belgian Federal Government has created 499 special places in asylum centres or specific reception centres for these minors.⁶³

Among the findings of the study 67.2% of the cases in which an officer was contacted no child protection measure was taken and they were allowed to leave the premise of the police station along with others that were apprehended with them. According to the sample study minors that were intercepted several times were more likely to be given documents that did not oblige them to leave Belgium versus first timers who, in more cases, were asked to leave immediately. The study also noted that officers were contacted more often when the minors were younger and the Guardianship office or the protection officer was more likely to place younger migrants in institutions while older ones were more likely to be ordered to leave Belgium. Most of the unaccompanied minors in the study were from Eastern Europe and Asian countries. The main reason why they want to go to the U.K. was to improve their standard of living and assist families back home. Their destination was based on having family members or relatives in the U.K.

Results of the study identify the scarcity of available reception places to provide proper care for unaccompanied minors as a short coming of the migration system in Belgium at the time.

In many cases, the child protection officer is forced to make the decision to let the minor leave because there is an important lack of available reception places for these illegal unaccompanied minors in Flanders. In our study, only 200 minors - a relatively small percentage of the whole group - have been effectively transferred to an institution; most (70%) to crisis reception centres (e.g. military

⁶³Ilse Derliyn and Eric Broekaert, *On the Way to a Better Future: Belgium as Transit Country for Trafficking and Smuggling of Unaccompanied Minors*, 2005. Pg.35.

hospital), only 44 (22%) could be placed in a specialized centre for illegal unaccompanied minors.

It is astonishing that the right of these unaccompanied minors on protection and care cannot be guaranteed due to a lack of reception places created by the Flemish Government. Moreover, the care provided in the crisis reception centres is often very limited, and this lack of appropriate care might, therefore, also be an incentive for the minors to leave the centre and try again to reach the UK.⁶⁴

Among the suggestions proposed by the study were that government personnel and authorities dealing with unaccompanied minors should receive training that would assist them in dealing with children. Also, the availability of interpreters in order to assist with communication between authorities and minors was seen as essential to the efficiency of the process. In addition to providing the minors with a clear explanation as to what was happening around them it would help reduce their fears and anxieties allowing them to share their stories and preferences. The study raised questions regarding what happens to those minors that were not placed in institutions and yet were simply let go from police custody. It also suggests that there needs to be clear cut criteria by which the Aliens Office and that of the Guardianship Office bases its decisions regarding these children. Finally the study found,

It is absolutely necessary to increase the number of reception places for unaccompanied minors without legal documents. Moreover, the care offered in crisis reception centres should be intensified, and priority should be given to inform the minor in-depth about the different possibilities he has for his future life. Finally, much effort must be taken to establish a good guardianship system, as this too could be helpful to let the minor make the right choice and help avoid dangerous situations, such as exploitation networks.⁶⁵

One limitation identified in the study was the fact that the interviews were conducted in the premises of a police station, which may have lead to suspicions on the part of the interviewees, and may have created a lack of trust in some instances. The language barrier was another drawback faced by the researcher, since it was difficult for

⁶⁴ *ibid.* Pg. 47.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Pg.49

the minors to express themselves fully in a foreign language. This placed a limit on the magnitude of the in-depth interviews that could have been more informative in the presence of an interpreter. A final limitation identified by the authors was the possibility of double counting the same person since the study included information provided from police files that could have contained duplicates, that is, referring to the same person but with slightly different names. It would be interesting if this study was duplicated again to review the developments in this field with remedies to the above limitations.

Hunter (2001) reviewed U.K. policy on the rights and treatment of refugee and asylum seeking children in the U.K. The purpose of the study was to identify the role of the European Union in protecting the rights of unaccompanied minors, clarifying the extent to which this framework was applicable to the U.K.'s domestic legislation and international obligations, using the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR). They found that no special consideration was given at the time to children asylum seekers as an especially vulnerable category.

The asylum determination process in the United Kingdom is set out in a mixture of law, procedural aspects and discretion exercised by the Secretary of State of the Home Department. The way in which the discretion is exercised is set out in the Asylum Directorate Instructions which are issued to the decision makers within the Home Office.

Rule 334 of the Immigration Rules states that a person, which includes a child, will be granted asylum in the United Kingdom if they meet the Refugee Convention definition. Rule 349 defines a child as someone who is – or who, in the absence of documentary evidence appears to be – under the age of 18. The next three rules set out when and how unaccompanied minors can be interviewed and how their claims should be considered. These rules set a minimum level of good practice in relation to child asylum seekers but are broad leaving wide discretion to the decision maker. In particular, they do not give any guidance as to how children who have to appear in court should be treated.⁶⁶

⁶⁶Alison Hunter, *Between the Domestic and the International: The Role of the European Union in Providing Protection for Unaccompanied Refugee Children in the United Kingdom*, 2001. Pg. 319.

Further, the Immigration and Asylum Act of 1999, aimed at dealing with the increasing numbers of asylum seekers did not give special consideration to children in the asylum seeking procedures. On the contrary, according to the study it was a missed opportunity for addressing such oversights.

Many sections of the Act have implications for children including the extended provisions on carrier's liability and the criminalisation of those who seek to enter by deception. In amending the appeals process there is no mention of how it could be made more child focused and consistent with other court settings for children. There is also no consideration of a more child friendly asylum procedure, guidelines or provision for access to legal representation. Children under this Act continue to be allowed to be detained under wide powers granted to immigration officers and the family reunion provisions have not been changed in any way to make them more child orientated.⁶⁷ Among the drawbacks of the system identified by the article was the process of determining whether the person in questions was actually a minor or not, it was up to the officer from the Home Office to make such a significant assessment.

In practice, and in the absence of acceptable documentary evidence, it would normally be appropriate to give the applicant the ~~fit~~ benefit of the doubt unless the applicant's physical appearance *strongly suggests* that he is over the age of 18. This highly subjective approach gives an untrained official a large amount of discretion which has led to some children being detained due to a dispute over age.⁶⁸ The Immigration Act has lead to the detention of children based on officers' questions regarding their true age, despite the guidelines that the child should be given the benefit of the doubt. Such detention violated Article 37 of the Convention of the Child, as well as both the UNHCR Handbook and the UNHCR Guidelines on Refugee Children, in addition to ExCom Resolution 44.

Although short term support was provided by the Children's Panel at the Refugee council to all unaccompanied minors upon their arrival, this was deemed limited by the study since only 30 advisers were available for all those children needing far more

⁶⁷ Ibid. 391.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 392.

support than was available. Therefore the lack of proper guardianship for unaccompanied minors was another shortcoming of the U.K. system.

Finally, the article reviewed the European Council Resolutions on unaccompanied minors and how they can be used by the U.K. to raise its' standards of dealing with asylum seeking and refugee children, keeping the best interest of the child as its priority. Among the suggestions were: providing proper training for all personnel who deal with minors, having CRC as the minimum standard of guidance to protecting the interests of children, allowing for provision of guardianship and reducing if not eliminating detention of children. The article suggested taking the example of member states that have established best practices regarding the issues of unaccompanied minors rather than the bare minimum standards.

The measures adopted in the past have read more like a list of protection measures for the Member States rather than for the individual fleeing persecution which in turn affects child refugees as well as adults. Currently within European Member States there is a culture where paramount importance is given to immigration control rather than protection of the child, as can be seen by the example of the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the European legislative provisions so far which would lead one to believe that this will change significantly when the European Union gains more competence in this field.⁶⁹ The limitation of this article was its datedness, since a lot of the issues that were brought up have already been address by the Council of Europe in Recommendation CM/Rec (2007)9 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on life projects for unaccompanied minors and adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 12 July 2007 at the 1002nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies. However, it was because of such articles that policies were reviewed and amendments were added, therefore even though this was seen as a limitation for this current study it was not a shortcoming of the article itself at the time.

⁶⁹ Ibid Pg. 410

Terrio's (2008) reviewed the situation of unaccompanied migrant minors in France focusing on Romanian juvenile delinquents. The article highlighted the debate on the question of childhood and the whether the definition of a child was the same in all circumstances. On the one hand it pointed to the vulnerability and need for protection for such minors given the humanitarian responsibility of upholding international obligations found in the CRC while on the other hand analyzing the persistent delinquency of such youth that brought to the forefront concepts of agency and accountability. Evidenced by their lack of respect for the law, not appearing in court during proceedings and trials, their continuous escape from institutions and shelters that they were placed in; not only placed a strain on the legal justice system but also made it increasingly difficult to apply protection mechanisms that took as a premise the definition of 'childhood' from a middle-class white sub-urban context which did not necessarily apply to these unaccompanied minors.

Unaccompanied minors involved in criminal activity were deeply threatening to court personnel and state officials. Their mobility blurred the accepted boundaries between the child and the adult highlighting their marginality and agency. Their visibility and transgressive behaviors posed a challenge to middle-class mainstream norms associated with the proper upbringing, control, and place of children. They also posed a challenge to the judicial consensus on child victims as passive, vulnerable, and without autonomy.⁷⁰

France was a signatory of the CRC in 1990, and according to the article, in 2001 "Judges were proud of the legal protections afforded unaccompanied minors in French law."⁷¹ However, this changed:

In April 2001 a Romanian sociologist, Dana Diminescu who studied undocumented migrants in the greater Paris region came to meet with judges at court. She disrupted the widely held view of Romanian street children as

⁷⁰ Susan J. Terrio, *New Barbarians at the Gates of Paris? Prosecuting Undocumented Minors in the Juvenile Court—The Problem of the 'Petits Roumains'*, 2008. Pg. 881.

<http://0-muse.jhu.edu.lib.aucegypt.edu>

⁷¹ Ibid. Pg. 881.

unprotected victims completely separated from their families by affirming that only 20% were unaccompanied and exploited in criminal rings. She reported that 80% of the Romanians she had interviewed lived with, at least periodically, or had contact with someone from their immediate or extended family or natal village. She outlined migratory flows organized for economic reasons and produced photos of the "dowry homes" or home "additions" constructed with the cash sent back by irregular minors. One of the juvenile judges was shocked and angrily asked the sociologist if Romanian parents and authorities knew that the money financing home improvements was stolen in France?⁷²

Although unaccompanied minors had the legal right to the protection offered by local Child Welfare Agency according to the article, between 1999-2001 many case-workers, guardians and legal representatives refused to work with these children claiming that they were outside their jurisdiction and expertise.

The head of the Paris juvenile prosecutor's office, Yvon Tallec, had strong views about the criminality of the young Romanians and their status as juvenile offenders. He believed the juvenile court was well within its purview to punish minors, unaccompanied or not, who broke the law. Although 'it was noble to want to provide humanitarian assistance to this population,' he firmly insisted, 'we do not have the means to do so.'⁷³

In 2003 a study commissioned by the Secretary of State for the Fight Against Poverty and Exclusion, Dominique Versini, concluded that the best interests for the child in these cases were to return to the country of origin. It also advocated placing limitations on "legal advantages said to be attracting foreigners under article 21-12 of the French civil code which permits any 'child raised by a French national or registered with the Child Welfare Agency' and residing in France the right to declare French nationality at eighteen years of age. This recommendation was incorporated into the new law on immigration control and foreign residence that imposed new restrictions on naturalization."⁷⁴

⁷² Ibid. Pgs. 882-883.

⁷³ Ibid. Pg.884.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Pg. 885.

The article highlighted the difference between the perception of children as vulnerable and moldable according to social norms while in the case of unaccompanied Romanian minors in France they were depicted as completely outside such definitions. In an interview with the heads of the Paris Social Service and Probation Office (SSPO) and the Child Protection Brigade, Terrio explains how she identified the difference between these children and others stating that, “They were very mature, hardened, not like our children. They are here to make money.”⁷⁵ While during another interview with Terrio a Romanian caseworker, Manuela Neagu, described the “economic value children had for their families...[referring to a] ‘remittance culture’ and the ‘cult of cash’ that demanded consumer goods as tangible symbols of family honor and professional success.”⁷⁶

Three methods used to reduce the inflow of unaccompanied migrant minors were identified in the article. The first was the arrest, detention and prosecution of under age migrant minors in Court L, a court that was established in 2001 to handle their particular cases. Although it was established in order to deal more humanely with their cases in reality the court became an instrument that justified the warehousing of these children, by placing them in state institutions, foster homes, residential facilities as well as pre-and post detention in juvenile prisons until which time they could be repatriated. The second method used was the unlawful restriction on welfare benefits, such as delays in: opening a case file, placement in foster homes, appointing court guardians or legal assistance. It even went as far as denying them enrollment in schools and training programs based on their weak proficiency in French.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Pg.886.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Pg. 886

The goal to drive back increasing numbers of economic migrants and asylum seekers entering France illegally was pursued by confining them in legal limbo in "holding" centers outside airports or train stations while eligibility for admission to France was considered, denying high numbers of asylum requests once admitted to France (only 34% of the 949 requests were granted in 2003 by the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless People [OFPRA]), and legislating restrictions on other forms of legalized status through residence permits and French citizenship. Legislation voted on November 26, 2003 denied unaccompanied migrants the right to declare French citizenship who had not registered with child welfare services for three consecutive years before their eighteenth birthday. Since 60% of Romanian migrants arrive after sixteen, this effectively excluded the majority from acquiring French nationality.⁷⁷

The third strategy used was redefining minors as irregular migrants and adults using bone x-ray tests to determine their age.

In Paris prosecutors continued a longstanding practice of contesting minors' underage status and subjecting them to mandatory and controversial scientific assessments of bone development to determine age. The clinical examination includes a wrist x-ray and a comparison with samples of a large study conducted in the 1930s among an upper-middle class, white North American population. Taking these tests to be definitive, discounting personal narratives of family origin or ignoring current living conditions, prosecutors declared these minors to be adults. They denied them not only the dispensations normally extended to immature teenagers but also the eligibility for welfare benefits. These declarations had potentially devastating effects such as immediate trials in adult court, incarceration in over-crowded adult prisons, and denial of social services.⁷⁸

The article used interviews and case studies to present its' overview of the condition in which Romanian unaccompanied migrant minors found themselves in France at the turn of the 21st century. The irony and contradiction of policy and laws whose initial intent was to protect minors yet ended up being another source of their demise. The shifting public opinion and its influence on legislation and implementation strategies was made clear. Terrio writes, "Now that Nicholas Sarkozy is president of France and his justice minister, Rachida Dati, is overhauling the statutes governing

⁷⁷ Ibid. Pg. 889.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 890.

juveniles to make them more accountable, the category of criminal vagrants so useful in prosecuting the *petits Roumains* may well be applied to more groups of unwanted Others.”⁷⁹

The main limitation of this article was that it did not provide any information on other unaccompanied minors that were not Romanian or that were not delinquent. The policies that were reviewed and the shift in strategy was explained within the context of its’ influence on these particular minors yet since legislation and policies were implemented across the board it would have been interesting to review the effect of this discourse on other unaccompanied children that were in need of the protection and may have been dramatically influenced by default. In addition, given that Romania has become a part of the European Union since 2007, the influence of these restrictive strategies on other unaccompanied migrants demand further investigation.

Finally, Touzenis’ (2006) offered an extensive overview of the international laws, regulations, conventions and policies that constitute the legal instruments, which provide protection for under age minors be they refugees, asylum seekers or unaccompanied minor migrants in the world to date. Of particular importance to this study was the chapter on migrant children, which reviewed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, (CRC), the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families, as well as the UN Resolution 55/79 on the Rights of the Child. In addition, Touzenis highlighted the focus of European Union migration policy as one of security and protection from irregular migration rather than prevention of exploitation.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 895

The European Council Resolution of 26 June 1997 on unaccompanied minors who are nationals of third countries establishes that Member States may, in accordance with their national legislation and practice, refuse admission at the border to unaccompanied minors in particular if they are without the required documentation and authorizations. In this regard, Member States should take appropriate measures, in accordance with their national legislation, to prevent the unauthorized entry of unaccompanied minors and should cooperate to prevent irregular entry and irregular residence of unaccompanied minors on their territory.⁸⁰

However, minimum guarantees were also identified, establishing the minor's identity through interviews conducted by trained persons was a priority. "The fact that the Resolution establishes that children are entitled to the necessary protection and basic care, irrespectively of their irregular or regular status is a positive step. This protection and care, however, is to be provided in accordance with the provisions of national law, which leaves some doubt as to which national law is to be applied, national law regarding children in general, which mean that immigrant children benefit from the exact same protection as national children, or national law restricting protection to certain groups."⁸¹ Another priority for Member States was tracing the unaccompanied minor's family with the intent of reunification. The Resolution also established the need for Member States to provide the minor with legal guardianship as soon as possible in order to ensure their well being and proper representation. Moreover, providing appropriate medical care for the child's immediate needs was another obligation on Member States.

In cases in which a minor is not allowed to prolong her or his stay in a Member State, the Member State concerned may only return the minor to his country of origin or a third country prepared to accept her or him, if on arrival there – depending on her or his needs in the light of age and degree of independence adequate reception and care are available...As long as return under these conditions is not possible, Member States should in principle make it possible for the minor to remain in their territory. The 'in principle' is highly

⁸⁰Kristina Touzenis, Unaccompanied Minors Rights and Protection, 2006. Pgs.183-184.

⁸¹ Ibid. Pg. 185.

unfortunate and any insecure repatriation may be a violation of the prohibition of inhuman treatment.⁸²

The Tampere European Council in October 1999 was established in order to provide a common migration policy that would manage migration flows, set guidelines for the treatment of foreign nationals and develop criteria for asylum issues. It also addressed illegal immigration by focusing on the punishment of both traffickers and those who employ as well as exploit migrants. In addition, Tampere regulations “...make an attempt to establish regular channels of migration into the Union...Migration rules generally concern exclusively how best to restrict access. Unfortunately, the Tampere regulations focus strongly on the need for labour in the Union, favouring the needs of the Member States but not considering the needs of migrants and States of origin.”⁸³

In conclusion, restrictive policies that only take one side of the equation are doomed to fail. Touzenis summarizes it best as she writes:

To date, European legislation gives evidence of having other priorities, such as border control and blocking migration. But valid reasons exist for people deciding to leave their homes – lack of work, indecent standards of living, lack of education, political instability and natural disasters for example. And there are valid motives for people trying to reach another place to live: work, conditions of life (better from those in one’s home country), stabilized immigration routes, high expectations. These factors remain despite the European Union’s focus on boarder controls and security and on limiting regular migration (which means rendering regular migration impossible). Immigrants, whether children or adults, do not disappear: because the conditions which create emigration and immigrants persevere. And they will not go away just because the European Union focuses on borders and penalties instead of on persons. People find other ways of arriving – jeopardizing their lives yet again. Migration, smuggling and trafficking are separate but inter-related issues. Migration may take place through regular or irregular channels. The fact that many governments have adopted tight immigration controls and restrictive migration policies have in fact an effect of promoting or facilitating trafficking. Experience and studies show that the tightening of border controls and the restriction of opportunities for legal immigration create opportunities for smugglers/traffickers and force candidates to migrate into more vulnerable situations. As a result, would-be migrants resort to increasingly risky

⁸² Ibid. Pgs.186-187.

⁸³ Ibid. Pg. 189.

means or rely on smugglers and traffickers to access destination countries. This also occurs for minors. Governments have responsibilities to protect all foreign unaccompanied migrant children against abuse but, far too often, they fail to meet those responsibilities.⁸⁴

Conclusion

In summary, the literature on Egyptian migration trends illustrated that migration was always part of the solution for economic problems faced by Egypt since the early 1970s. There was a high demand for Egyptian labor in the Arab oil producing states at the time and government supported migration schemes served domestic Egyptian policy by alleviating unemployment, foreign exchange deficit and standards of living. Circular migration schemes were in response to both supply and demand needs of labour.

In a similar manner, irregular migration to Italy was spurred by push factors such as unemployment and lower standards of living. However, this flow was initiated by job seekers who had given up on waiting for legitimate job opportunities either at home or abroad, they sought out smugglers who facilitated their journey for large sums of money that would be paid upon arrival to destination countries. Despite the lack of official demand for labor, there was the potential for work evidenced by the success of predecessors in Italy. Using network theory, irregular migrants followed their fellow villagers to destinations that proved successful in fulfilling their dreams. Friends and family contacts provided initial assistance upon arrival also re-enforcing network theory.

Cumulative causation theory meant that remittances sent by migrants abroad, be they regular or irregular, lead to even higher inflationary prices back home. This led to still higher cost of living in sending villages. Therefore those that did not migrate or have a member of their family as a migrant in Italy, found themselves even poorer than their

⁸⁴ Ibid. Pgs.193-194.

neighbors. As almost all of the migrants mentioned during interviews in the course of the research for this study; they were standing still while everyone else in the village was moving quickly forward, making an already difficult situation unbearable.

Even in the irregular migration flows, circular migration was the aim for Egyptians. All those interviewed for this study reiterated their desire to attain legitimate documents that would allow them to work in Italy while marrying and keeping their families in Egypt. However, the stricter the restrictions became on exit and entry the more difficult it was for the circularity to occur as Fargues (2008) suggested.

What has been alarming both Italian and Egyptian officials recently over the past two years was the incredible rate of increase of arrivals of irregular Egyptian unaccompanied migrant minors. Perhaps in response to the stricter restrictions on adult migrants or maybe due to the bilateral agreements between Egypt and Italy that allow the latter to repatriate the formers' adult citizens, while permitting minors to remain until the age of 18, or perhaps the situation in the villages has become so desperate that children are now the irregular labor force that are making the 'journey of death' across the Mediterranean to fulfill what was once the job of the head of household. Whatever the case, literature on this aspect of irregular migration from Egypt is scarce and therefore the following study was conducted in order to begin to fill the information gap found in this field.

METHODOLOGY

In order to understand the scope and reasons for the irregular migration of unaccompanied minors from Egypt to Italy the following study was conducted over a six-month period from November 2009 till April 2010. The study was divided into three sets of interviews based on location and content. Two trips to Rome each lasting one-week provided the main content of the field research. The first trip was held in November 2009 while the second trip was held in March 2010. In addition, interviews were conducted in Egypt in both Cairo and Fayoum governorates during February 2010.

This was an in-depth qualitative study, which used both unstructured, and semi-structured interview formats. The snowball sampling technique was used to identify key individuals for the policy aspect of the study. Irregular migrants' interviewed during the first trip to Rome were chosen from those present at the Egyptian Embassy on the day of the interviews. Participants in the focus groups and individual interviews in Fayoum were identified by community leaders from the village of Tatoun during a three-day trip to the governorate. Social workers at the Rome District Office arranged all interviews with unaccompanied migrant minors in Rome, as well as interviews with operators that managed the "structures" in which unaccompanied minors resided. Most interviews were on a one to one basis while some were held in a group discussion format, such as those conducted during the information seminar held in Fayoum and the interviews with the social workers at the department dealing with unaccompanied migrant minors in the Rome District Office.

The anonymity of participants was maintained throughout the study for confidentiality purposes given the clandestine nature of the situation in which irregular

migrants find themselves; however, interviews with officials both Egyptian and Italian were not.

At the beginning of each interview the researcher explained the purpose of the study which was for a Masters thesis at the American University in Cairo, participation was voluntary and interviews could be stopped at any time with no explanation necessary on the part of participants. Field notes were taken throughout the research process and a tape recorder was used when possible with the consent of those being interviewed. All information in English, Arabic and Italian was transcribed, translated and analyzed by the same researcher in order to protect confidentiality and ensure the integrity of the final product, culminating in the following study.

First Rome Trip

An initial reconnaissance trip to Rome between November 19 and 26, 2009 highlighted the main issues involved in the irregular migration of Egyptians to Italy. Interviews with Egyptian Embassy personnel and members of staff at the Italian Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Policies provided a lead into the issue of unaccompanied minor migrants that were of particular concern to policy makers on both sides of the Mediterranean. Individual interviews were conducted with the Egyptian Consul in Rome, Nabila M. Wassef, Labor Consular Yehia Amin and Harb Saber, Administrative Attache at the Egyptian Embassy in Rome. Although the Egyptian Ambassador Ashraf Rashed was unavailable during the first trip to Rome, he provided access to the Embassy and its personnel who were indispensable to the study. During the second trip to Rome however, the Ambassador met briefly with the researcher to follow up on the progress of the study.

Wassef provided contacts with the International Migration Organization (IOM) in Rome and the Italian Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Policies. In depth, individual interviews were conducted with Simone Moscarrielle, Migration Legal Expert, Ugo Melchionda, Labour Expert and Flavio Di Giacomo, Public Information Specialist at the IOM offices in Rome. They explained the function of the IOM as an intergovernmental organization, the differences between it and the UNHCR, the situation in Lampedusa, issues concerning unaccompanied minors, and the repatriation of Egyptian irregular migrant adults.

Germana Viglietta, Director General for Immigration, Chief of Unit at the Italian Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Policies was interviewed briefly and provided access to two members of her staff working in the Inter-ministerial Committee for Unaccompanied Foreign/Migrant Minors; Stephania Cogna, interning at the committee and soon to be a head of unit according to Viglietta, was interviewed together with Anneilla Husha, member of the technical secretary of the Committee since 2000. They both explained the current system in Italy and highlighted some of the major concerns of the Italian government when it came to dealing with unaccompanied minors.

The Ministry in turn provided contacts at the Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) that added to the Italian policy perspective. Virginia Costa, coordinator of activities of the program for the reception of unaccompanied minors was interviewed along with Francesca Zotta, specialist in non-asylum seeking minors and Cristina Passacantando, specialist in the protection system for asylum seekers, including both minors and adults. They defined the term ‘unaccompanied minor’ explaining the difference between those that were asylum seekers versus those that were irregular

migrants. They also clarified that, “the minors that are not asylum seekers are under the Ministry of Welfare while the asylum seekers both adults and minors are under the Ministry of Interior.”⁸⁵ During the interview an explanation of the responsibility of municipalities towards minors on their territory was given along with a clarification of the hurdles they face and the intervention provided by ANCI to assist in alleviating such burdens.

Twelve irregular migrants were interviewed during the first trip to Rome. These interviews were held in the reception area at the Egyptian Embassy in Rome where field notes were taken without the use of a tape recorder. Participants were chosen on the basis of their availability and their acceptance of being interviewed. It must be noted that the location and circumstances of these particular interviews were seen as a limitation in the study. Since participants were at the Embassy on the day of the interviews in order to finish personal paperwork, interviews were limited in time according to the waiting period for each participant.

In addition, an initial suspicion towards the researcher was noted at the beginning of each interview. This was seen as one drawback in the choice of location for the interviews since it may have reflected on the researcher as a member of staff in the Embassy or associated with the Italian government and hence the intent was of a questionable nature according to the migrants. A second limitation of the location was the lack of privacy available in the reception area in which the interviews were conducted. Often in the middle of an interview, the participant would be joined by one or two of his friends that would take over the dialogue. In one way this was informative

⁸⁵ Interview November 24, 2009 ANCI headquarters in Rome, Virginia Costa in Italian translated by Francesca Zotta in English.

since it added to the study, but in another way it was distracting because interviews were redirected constantly. However, another advantage of this was that participants were more comfortable talking once their friends participated as well. After a couple of hours participants were handing over the interviews to each other while they finished the work for which they came. This made participants less weary of the interviewing process.

Cairo and Fayoum

The second sets of interviews were conducted in Egypt throughout January and February 2010. A short interview with H.E. Moushira Khatab, Minister of State for Family and Population was conducted on January 14, 2010 at the Ministry headquarters in Cairo. On the same day interviews were held with Sara El Azzazy, Programs Coordinator Cabinet of the Minister, at the Ministry of State for Family and Population in Egypt and Naser Mesalam, Senior Researcher of planning, Coordinator of the Project *'Promoting Safe Migration and Positive Alternatives for Egyptian Youth'* as well as Dr. Azza el Ashmawy, General Director Anti-Trafficking in Children Unit/ Adolescent Reproductive Health.

During the interview with Azzazy and Mesalam particular areas that send migrants from villages in Egypt were identified giving the target districts that they migrate to in Italy and the jobs that they tend to work in, reinforcing concepts found in network theory. Tatoun village in the Fayoum governorate was “identified by the Italian Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Welfare,” according to Mesalam “as the largest exporter of irregular migrants especially minors to Italy and specifically to Milan where

they work in construction.”⁸⁶ Accordingly, a public awareness campaign in Tatoun was implemented by the Ministry of Family and Population with the cooperation of the Italian Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Welfare and the Italian Embassy as well as the IOM in Egypt, in order to inform people of the consequences of irregular migration while at the same time promoting legal alternatives.

The researcher was invited by Mesalam to attend a two-day information seminar, February 17th and 18th, 2010, in Fayoum on developing small scale enterprises with guest speakers from the Social Development Fund and the Local Development Fund addressing 40 young men ages 17 to 35 from Tatoun and neighboring villages. The seminar was part of a series of information workshops held in Fayoum as part of the second phase of the awareness campaign targeting different segments of society in order to influence the flow of irregular migration from this area. The Ministry was providing information on how to start a small-scale enterprise and how to go about receiving a loan from the Social Development Fund and the Local Development Fund in order to enhance work opportunities in the district. The seminar provided the backdrop for two focus group discussions with nine young men debating the effectiveness of irregular migration versus the possibility of developing small-scale projects in their district. During the dialogue the reasons for irregular migration were made crystal clear, the obstacles faced by participants in achieving their goals were enumerated and their skepticism towards the possibility of change was noted. Again, participants were chosen based on their willingness to get involved; interviews were recorded and field notes were taken. In

⁸⁶ Interview with Naser Mesalam, Senior Researcher of Planning and Coordinator of the Project ‘*Promoting Safe Migration and Positive Alternatives for Egyptian Youth*’, Ministry of State for Family and Population, Cairo, Egypt. January 14, 2010.

addition, three civil servants from the local development office commented on issues regarding irregular migration giving their perspective as the elders in the village of Tatoun.

The third day of interviews was on February 23rd, 2010 in the office of Mekkawy Ahmed Said El Zoghby, Development Specialist and Head of Rural Development in Tatoun, who organized the participation of 11 ex-migrants to Italy. Participants were chosen based on their experience of irregular migration. Some of them had successfully migrated and returned to their village after a number of years working abroad, while others had attempted several times but failed to reach the shores of Italy. These interviews were conducted on an individual basis; participants revealed their reasons for migrating and their personal experiences on the journey.

Finally, an interview was conducted at the IOM office in Cairo on January 27th, 2010 with Piera Solinas, Program Manager and Roberto Pitea, Regional Research Officer IOM, Egypt. The focus of the discussion was on the irregular migration trends from Egypt and the phenomenon of the migration of unaccompanied minors' within that scope.

Second Rome Trip

During the second trip to Rome March 8th till 14th, 2010 more extensive research was collected specifically pertaining to the Egyptian unaccompanied migrant minors in that municipality. A brief interview with Amb. Rashed in his office at the Egyptian Embassy in Rome highlighted the cultural differences that cause migrants to be resented by the Italian hosts. A follow up interview with Wassef revealed the hurdles faced by both the Embassy and the unaccompanied minors themselves.

The Embassy facilitated contact with the Rome District Office, which was responsible for all unaccompanied migrant minors in the municipality. A focus group discussion with eight social workers clarified the existing system in which the minors were placed. They identified the issues faced by operators dealing specifically with Egyptian minors elaborating on the problems that occur and the dilemmas that exist for both operators and minors alike. The discussion was held in Italian with translation provided through one of the social workers that spoke English. The discussion was recorded and transcribed by the researcher. A table of the numbers and nationalities of unaccompanied migrant minors registered in the Rome municipality alone from the year 2004 till the year 2009 was provided by the Rome District Office for reference.

It was interesting to note that during a coffee break with three of the social workers, the researcher found that they were very keen on understanding certain aspects of Egyptian culture to help them cope with situations that arise with the boys in their care. They had many questions and seemed more at ease with the researchers' broken Italian than having a translator in between, although the translator was among them. Perhaps it was the lack of a tape recorder or the fewer number that allowed them to open up, or maybe it was just speaking in their own language that allowed them better expression of their concerns. In any case, this was useful for the researcher in later interviews conducted with the operators in the structures, two were in English and the rest were in Italian. It was far more comfortable working around the fluency issues without the use a translator since everybody had a lot more to say and were very keen on clarifying their points.

The social workers' responsibility included placement of minors in available housing within the district, managing all the immigration papers necessary for the minor to remain in Italy, including helping him attain the necessary documents from the Egyptian Embassy in order to complete Italian immigration procedures that culminate in a minors' permit. In addition, the social workers follow up with operators of the centers in which the minors were housed in order to ensure that they follow the integration policies that include the minors' attendance of the middle school as well as language classes. Further details of the group discussion will be found in the following chapter. It is important to note that the social workers' gave permission for the researcher to interview the minors in the houses and centers that they were found. They were the ones who set up the following four days of interviews, contacting the operators in the various centers and houses, having them bring in the minors from around the areas that were visited not just the ones found in the particular houses. This ensured legal access to minors as well as allowing the researcher to conduct interviews with the operators who discussed their grievances regarding Egyptian boys in particular. Interviews were conducted with 28 boys in total and 6 operators, in four different locations in the outskirts of Rome. All interviews with the boys were conducted in the privacy of an office made available by each center, the one-on-one interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated from Arabic to English by the researcher. It was noted that at the outset of each of the interviews the boys seemed suspicious and limited in their responses but as the interviews went on they became more relaxed seeming to be grateful for the opportunity to share their story and vent about the circumstances in which they found

themselves between the requirements of their family obligations and all the regulations and expectations placed upon them by the system.

Campino

The first house visited on March 10, 2010 was in Campino, it was referred to as a “casa di famiglia” which translates to ‘a family house’ this was different from other structures or centers of initial arrival, in that the house was run similar to a family. Meals were prepared and eaten together at certain times of the day, the operator provided the boys with a small allowance approximately 5 Euros each week which was used for cell phone credit in most cases, all clothing, haircuts and medical expenses were taken care of by the operator of the house just like a family system. However, unlike a foster home there was no real family living on the premises, the only adults present were employees of the operator. The social services in Rome, in turn paid the operator a fee for each child in his care, it was a business. Each room housed two or three boys, three eight-hour shifts of administration personnel ensured that there was someone responsible on the premises 24/7. This particular operator ran several houses in the area, he mentioned three, the one where the interviews were held, housed nine residents while the other two, housed seven residents each, at the time of the interview. Residents included all nationalities not just Egyptians.

The initial hoodlum attitude witnessed by the researcher during lunch, as had been discussed by the social workers earlier that day was noted. It was clear that when they were in a group, these boys were typical teenagers with an image to maintain that included a rebellious attitude. However, this impression was replaced at the end of the interviews with genuine sensitivity and concern. A sense of familiarity and mutual

respect developed between the researcher and the boys. During the interviews it was observed that the young men were not at all living the lives of 'children', on the contrary their preoccupation with their families back home and the sense of responsibility towards their well being was more in line with the patriarch of the family, rather than childish concerns. The fact that they risked their lives, knowing full well that there was a 50/50 chance of survival, during the initial boat journey was evidence of their sense of martyrdom. Each boy had an individual story to tell yet all of them boiled down to the same elements which will be reviewed in the following chapter.

Riserva Nuova

The second structure that was visited by the researcher was one in which the boys got taken as a first stop, it was referred to as a "centro di prima accoglienza", center of first or initial welcome. As was explained by the social workers during earlier interviews, there were two stages of housing to which the boys were assigned: the first stop was the center of first resort in which the boys got sent after their initial apprehension. They remained in these structures until they were placed in the second stage housing known as the 'casa famiglia', family house, as the one mentioned above. However, some boys that were about to exit the system due to their age, remained in the initial structure. The system was explained more clearly during the interviews with administration and social workers.

Casa di Tom

The third day of interviews was in a structure in Atina, it was the farthest house visited. Again the researcher was met at the end of the metro line that had been taken the previous day, but this time the social worker from the District Office drove the researcher for approximately an hour and a half on the highway outside the city in an extremely remote mountainous area. The structure where the boys were housed was at the edge of a tiny town in an extremely isolated location. Six boys were interviewed in total and three operators, as well as an extensive recorded discussion with the social worker during the trip to the location in which a more detailed explanation of the working of the system was provided. It was observed that the boys in this area were the saddest of all those interviewed and posed more problems for both operators and social workers alike. The operators had various complaints regarding the Egyptian boys in particular, which they shared with the researcher during the interview. Whether they were in this particular location as a punishment for their bad behavior or their bad behavior was a result of being placed in such isolation was not clear but there was a definite correlation between attitude and location as observed by the researcher.

Citta dei Ragazzi

The last of the interviews in Rome was in a boarding school set up, the structure was approximately 15 minutes by cab from the center of Rome. It was on a beautiful 90 hectar estate that was established in 1953 by an Irish priest, Monsignor Carroll Abbing who left the structure to the Vatican when he passed away nine years ago. It was a private organization with a president, Italian-American benefactors fund raise and finance the organization. In order to ensure sustainability, approximately 55% of funding was

dependent on private donations from the Italian Diaspora in the U.S. among others and 45% was financed by the municipality through the allocation of the unaccompanied minors.

After an extensive interview with the director of the elementary section of the center, the researcher had lunch with the Egyptian residents. There were children from all nationalities in the dining hall, however interviews were conducted with seven Egyptian boys. The boys interviewed in this structure were the youngest of all those interviewed, among them was a thirteen year old who was extremely shy, even the older boys were physically smaller, thinner and more fragile looking than the other boys in the houses visited earlier that week. They were keener on following regulations despite a few indiscretions identified by the operator; overall the integration process was adhered to more willingly as observed during interviews. Boys spoke in Italian with each other over lunch and during the tour of the grounds as observed by the researcher, unlike the other structures visited where a major complaint by operators was that the boys consistently spoke in Arabic to the exclusion of everyone else in the houses. Boys at the Citta dei Raggazi were involved in football tournaments and extracurricular activities such as stain glass making as witnessed on the day of the visit which happened to be on a Saturday.

Limitations

The most prominent limitation of the study was that the Egyptian irregular migrants that were interviewed in Rome came mostly from Gharbeyya, whereas the interviews in Fayoum identified Milan as the preferred destination for irregular migrants from that particular region. Therefore, if the study were to be repeated it would be beneficial to either interview migrants in Milan or residents in Gharbeyya specifically the

district of Kafr Kela El Bab from where many of the migrants interviewed came. However, due to the existing contacts of the researcher in Rome and Fayoum these locations were chosen for the research study.

Other limitations of the study included time, finance and scope of work. Due to academic deadlines there was a time limit imposed on the research aspect of the study that needed to be respected and could only be postponed to a certain extent. In addition, the financial cost of the trips to both Rome and Fayoum as well as all other expenses were covered by the researcher alone and therefore were limited to a certain extent as well. Finally, the scope of work was limited to the ability of one researcher alone. It would be beneficial for both the Egyptian and Italian governments for this research to be repeated using several more researchers covering the four specific locations in Egypt from which irregular migrants originate to the particular destinations in Italy that are popular due to existing networks. It would also be of use to conduct such a study incorporating minors from other nationalities as well in order to identify issues that arise due to cultural differences verses those that exist by virtue of the circumstances.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of unaccompanied minors migrating on an irregular basis from Egypt to Italy has increased at an alarming rate over the past couple of years. This study was conducted in order to reveal the various aspects involved in this migration flow. Interviews with Egyptian and Italian officials provided the policy perspective of both nations bringing to the forefront the fears and concerns that follow this type of migration. While interviews with Italian social workers and operators focused on the problems faced at the receiving end of this route; interviews with migrants and return migrants both in

Rome and Fayoum enumerated the push factors leading to the growing popularity of this method of migration. Finally, extensive interviews with underage Egyptian boys living in the shelters outside of Rome, highlighted the circumstances that they faced, at home, during their journey and in Italy. The following chapter will summarize excerpts of these interviews and will include observations made during the research process.

RESULTS

The 'journey of death', as it is known among irregular migrants, refers to the migration of Egyptians from the southern shores of the Mediterranean to the European continent using smugglers to enter irregularly with the purpose of finding work opportunities that promise higher rates of return for families back home in order to relieve economic hardships faced in certain villages. Due to the clandestine nature of the migration the risks involved in departure are very high. More often than not, the journey requires the traversing of the Mediterranean sea by unsafe boats which carry far too many passengers at one time increasing the possibility of capsizing - hence the term, 'journey of death'. The phenomenon of irregular migration of unaccompanied minors from Egypt refers to those migrants under the age of 18 years old making such a journey alone without adult family supervision under the above circumstances and for the same reasons.

According to information provided by the Italian Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Services as of November 15th, 2009 there were 864 registered Egyptian unaccompanied migrant minors in Italy, not including those posing as other nationalities such as the 396 Palestinian and 173 Iraqi minors, who according to sources at the Ministry, as well as staff members at ANCHI and the IOM in Rome were in actual fact Egyptian disguising themselves as Palestinian or Iraqi in order to have a higher chance of remaining in Italy. Further evidence of a staggering increase in the phenomenon of Egyptian unaccompanied minors in the Rome district alone was illustrated in statistics provided by the Rome District Office showing the number of Egyptian minors over a six-year period with 2 minors registered in 2004, 3 minors in 2005, 2 minors in 2006, 53 minors in 2007, 116 in 2008 and finally ending with 249 registered in 2009, thus making

Egyptian minors currently the highest nationality in numbers among those registered in Rome, surpassing those from Afghanistan, Romania, Moldavia and Albania who previously held the highest ranks.

This study was conducted to understand the recent phenomenon from various perspectives incorporating views from a sample of unaccompanied minor migrants and irregular adult migrants in Rome as well as return migrants and potential migrants alike from Tatoun village in Fayoum. In addition, the perspective of the social workers from both Egypt and Italy were reviewed in interviews with the Rome District Office and the Ministry of Family and Population in Egypt, as were the views of government civil servants in the Italian Ministry of Labor, Health, and Social Service, ANCHI, Egyptian Embassy personnel and members of staff at the IOM in Rome and Cairo. Finally, the perspectives of the operators in the Italian centers that house the Egyptian unaccompanied minors provided an insiders view on the cultural differences and hurdles which these boys endure as a result of their migration. Highlights of the interviews conducted will be presented in this chapter to reflect each perspective covered.

Perspectives from the Migrant Receiving country, Italy

An initial interview with the Egyptian Consul Nabila Makkram Wassef in Rome highlighted the situation of irregular Egyptian migrants in Italy, first by identifying the locations from where they come in Egypt namely: Kafr Kela El Bab (Kafrikia El Bab, as it was pronounced by some of the migrants) in Gharbeyya, Tatoun in Fayoum and Borg Meghzal in Sharkeyya. “Previously, the main route was through Libya to Lampedusa but recently, Libya has cracked down on established routes and now more boats are leaving from Alexandria to Lampedusa, for example the trip starts from Damanhur to Rashid on

the Delta where the migrants wait for an unknown date when they are taken to the fishing boats and depart for Italy.”⁸⁷ Wassif explained that the irregular Egyptian migrant throws away his passport and assumes another nationality such as Palestinian or Iraqi in order to seek asylum since he is not able to do so as an Egyptian. This was reconfirmed during interviews with staff members both at ANCI and IOM, Rome. For example, “now there is a repatriation agreement between the two countries, Italy provides Egypt with patrol boats and financial assistance in order to help them control the illegal migration flow coming out of Egypt to Italy.”⁸⁸ Moreover, two labor agreements were signed between the two countries whereby Italy made available 8,000 job opportunities for Egyptians to work legally on a temporary basis. “However, there are criteria that need to be met such as knowledge of the Italian language and laws of the country that the migrant needs to be familiar with, this of course takes time to establish. Mostly the jobs available are for cooks and truck drivers.”⁸⁹

Unlike adults, unaccompanied minors under the age of 18 cannot be repatriated. They are allowed to remain in Italy by law.

Italy has ratified the New York Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989. The position in Italy, as in most European countries, is that minors are first of all minors, then they are foreign and then they are unaccompanied and so on. The big difference in the law is that you cannot repatriate minors. This is the big difference, unless they voluntarily want to go back but if they don’t want to, they must remain. If they are accompanied it is different. Now we have a law, to get permission to stay here legally after they are 18 years old, they have to stay here three years and to have a program of social insertion

⁸⁷ Interview with Nabila Makkram Wassif, Egyptian Consul, Egyptian Embassy in Rome, November 20th, 2009.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

(integration) of two years during the three-year period. So they must arrive here by the age of 15. This is a big problem even at a European level because you push young people to leave their country earlier. But on the other hand you can't allow people arriving at 17.5 years to pretend having permission.⁹⁰

The memorandum of understanding for bilateral cooperation on unaccompanied minors between the Italian Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Services and the Egyptian Ministry for Family and Population was signed in December 2009. Its purpose was two-fold: first, to stop the flow of irregular migration of unaccompanied minors from Egypt through awareness campaigns in sending areas that inform Egyptians about the reality of circumstances in Italy and risks involved in using such irregular routes; and second, to assist in the development of vocational training programs and language courses in these areas so as to prepare Egyptian youth for a more competitive job market whether in Egypt or abroad, developing skills in accordance with market demand. Funding for the above activities are to be provided by the Italian party seeking the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) acting as the executive body. “We always try to find organizations that already work in the origin countries, that know very well the country of origin so they can suggest more effective policies on how to persuade,”⁹¹

So we are orientated to collaborate with origin countries to spend the money in the country of origin, so the minors can use the funds to be specialized in the country of origin with the projects financing from us and they can come here in Italy through migration flows but in the adult age. Because when a minor comes here in Italy we put them in the community and for every minor we do a ‘project of life’. The first thing to do is the tracing, family tracing. So we have an agreement with international organization that in this moment is IOM, so they do this family tracing in the country of origin and give us some ideas what to do with

⁹⁰ Interview with Stephania Cogna, Intern at the Interministerial Committee for Unaccompanied Minors at the Directory General for Immigration Office in the Italian Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Welfare, on November 23rd, 2009.

⁹¹ Ibid.

the minor if they accept to go back to the country of origin. [Whether they will require] professional courses or small business.

Q: They research what will get the minors to go back to the country of origin?

Yes. So the professional assistance in Italy after the first speech with a minor interview is to understand which is his project in Italy. To understand what this minor wants to do in Italy in the future, after this interview, they have this information from the country of origin. With minor they do a project of life they have two possibilities to come back to the country of origin or to stay here in Italy. But to stay here in Italy [it] is important to explain [to] them what are the possibilities. So if they don't have the possibility to stay here, there is this possibility to come back. They can follow this project with assistance from us; we pay them to go back, we assist them with the project. We don't give them money but our cooperator in the country of origin, IOM follows the project in that country step by step.⁹²

On average, it costs a municipality 100 Euros per child per day to provide for the needs of unaccompanied minors, costing Italy approximately 250 million Euros a year. This was identified as a big economic problem by any standard but more so for small communities such as those found in Sicily that can receive 25 minors at a time which was an unaffordable burden for them; hence the Committee enlisted the assistance of ANCHI, the National Association of Local Communities, which developed a network of municipalities spread throughout Italy in order to manage the distribution of unaccompanied minors in a more coordinated manner.

The National Association of Local Communities, ANCHI

At ANCHI, the definition for unaccompanied minors referred to those under 18 years old arriving on Italian territory without any responsible adult regardless of the manner in which they arrive. Virginia Costa, who coordinates the activities of the program for the reception of unaccompanied minors was interviewed along with Francesca Zotta and Cristina Passacantando, who work for the protection system for asylum seekers. Two possibilities were identified: either these minors were asylum

⁹² Ibid.

seekers that sought a permanent solution, in which case they fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Interior; or they were not asylum seekers but sought temporary status and therefore fell under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Welfare. ANCHI had two separate programs that dealt with each of the possibilities above. One was the National System for Asylum Seekers that started in 2001. It handled both minors and adults alike and the other was the Program for Unaccompanied Minors that started in 2008. ANCHI itself, over a hundred years old, was an association that had an institutional role but it was not from the government, it was a network of municipalities. It was explained that there were 8,000 municipalities in Italy.

The municipalities are the most important level of territorial government in Italy. Because by law the municipalities have to pay for the reception of these minors (who are either Italian or foreign it doesn't matter). They have to pay and they have to grant all the assistance they need. We don't have a law just for foreign minors. We have a whole law about minors, separated minors, unaccompanied minors first. Now we have to deal with unaccompanied migrant minors that we deal with in the same way within that law. We don't have a law about asylum. Lots of papers and documents, but no law.⁹³ This was the first time that the central government allocated money for the territories to pay for immigrant minors through ANCI. Participation by the municipalities was on a voluntary basis and the percentage paid by the government was different for the two programs. For asylum seekers and refugees, the program funded 80% of the total cost per year up until the minor reaches 18 years old. The case for unaccompanied minor migrants was completely different. The municipality received funding for reception activities, legal assistance and a list of services for an average of ten weeks only. The municipality then continues being responsible for the minor without any further financial assistance from the government. "This program has the purpose not

⁹³Interview at ANCHI headquarters in Rome with Virginia Costa, November 24th, 2009.

only for helping with the financial issues of the municipalities but with creating a system for reception at the national level.”⁹⁴

In return for the assistance, it was explained that the municipality, which chose to participate, was expected to reserve accommodation for minors in their housing program, to be allocated by ANCHI since some municipalities have an overload of minors whereas others have fewer numbers. In this way, the redistribution of minors throughout the Italian territories was possible; “In some way, it’s a disadvantage because once this minor has come to your municipality and this minor is 15 years old then the municipality will pay three years of support but they only get ten weeks of assistance.”⁹⁵ That explained why “just 26 municipalities out of the 8,000 were participating.”⁹⁶

Municipalities that have large communities of particular nationalities end up with large numbers of minors from that same nationality due to the existing networks that have been established and that provide work opportunities and potential support after the minor reaches the legal age. Therefore, Rome and Milan, for example, have become target destinations for Egyptian unaccompanied minors who often escape from houses and centers in the South of Italy to which they were assigned after their initial arrival.

International Organization for Migration, IOM

Simone Moscarrielle, Migration Legal Expert at the IOM in Rome described the shift in function of the organization since its inception in 1951 as an intergovernmental organization.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Interview with Zotta, ANCHI, November 24th, 2009.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

We've been working in Italy for more than fifty years... We used to carry out resettlement programs, transit assistance and travel arrangements. It was basically a movement organization. But then during the past twenty years the entire organization changed a lot, because we started dealing with all migrant issues and carrying out specific programs like counter-trafficking programs and labor migration programs and of course voluntary return is still a big part of the work of the organization.⁹⁷

Moscarrielle described the Praesidium Project that started in 2006 and was funded by the European Union, the Commission and the Italian Ministry of Interior in order to provide legal information to migrants that arrived on the Island of Lampedusa. The project initially was carried out by IOM, UNHCR, the Italian Red Cross and in 2008 they were joined by Save the Children.

In this case we were requested by the Italian government to establish a presence in Lampedusa Island inside the reception center to provide migrants with legal information regarding the consequences of their illegal entry, about the Italian legal system and about migration. Also, another task was to identify vulnerable groups such as victims of trafficking and other exploited migrants, unaccompanied minors and the other task was to monitor reception conditions in the center. When we arrived, the Italian government had been kind of fined by the European Court for Human Rights for mass deportations. Also in 2006 there had been a journalist who entered into this center pretending to be a migrant and wrote [a] very bad article on reception conditions in the Center and about the attitude of police inside the Center. So the government decided to open the Center to these three organizations in order to improve reception conditions and to monitor the handling of the migrants. Actually, that experience worked very well and in 2007, we extended our role in Sicily, in the big Island lets say, again in other reception centers close and open reception centers and also inside the unaccompanied minors' communities. This experience was very interesting because we noticed that the situation there was really bad. Not only in terms of the reception of unaccompanied minors but also in terms of legal information to them and legal protection to them.

In Italy unaccompanied minors cannot be expelled. But the point is when you receive a 15 or 16 year old child, you have to take care of him not only in terms of board and lodging but you have to take care of him giving him legal and comprehensive information and also care and protection. You have to speak with the judge, you have to talk with the central police station to release him a residence permit. You have to take care of everything. But these things were not even started before 2007, minors were in the community but when we arrived there with UNHCR we noticed that very few of them, we are talking about

⁹⁷ Interview with Simone Moscarrielle, Migration Legal Expert at IOM, Rome, November 25th, 2009.

thousands, got the guardianship decree which is the main problem. Because you have to speak with a judge as soon as you receive an unaccompanied minor, you have to register him, you have to tell the judge I have this minor so you have to know and you have to identify the legal guardian of this minor. If you don't have a legal guardian you cannot have a legal residence permit. So once we arrived there, none of this was done previously. So we started going to the judge and explain[ing] the situation. Everything was done in an emergency manner but not in a structured way, especially for minors from Egypt. They arrived there and after a few days they just escaped, they went to the North or to reach the uncle or the friends, whatever, because they knew that in those communities they didn't have a chance to get residence permits. The problem was at that time migrants had the possibility to be regularized but because of the incompetence of the people running these centers they decided to escape. Especially the Egyptians, others also but especially the Egyptians, feel this responsibility to send the money home.

Q: Because they owe money for the trip?

Yes, but not only because of the trip, behind an Egyptian minor there are two or three families investing in him. They send the minors because they know they couldn't be expelled, even if they were traced without guardianship decree they cannot be expelled. You can see that they are minors. But they have to send money because their family needs this money to go on. These are minors but in reality these are young adults. They are 13/14 [years old] unaccompanied Egyptian minors who are still minors you can see they want to enjoy themselves, they want to play Play-Station but they feel a responsibility. Their families are asking them: 'why are you still there? You have to go and send us some money.' So they feel this responsibility, that's why they didn't stay in these communities, at the end they just escaped. Also because of the incompetence of these communities, they understood that if they remain in these structures they didn't have any chance. So they arrive in Sicily and then they escape to the North. And now the situation has changed because we stayed for one year going around the centers with UNHCR and the unaccompanied minors' structures but then we found that we needed some help, so we asked Save the Children to join. We needed an organization that had to take care about this fight only, because the file of the unaccompanied minors is very big.⁹⁸

In December 2008, 2000 Tunisians arrived in Lampedusa and the Minister of Interior decided he had to deport them directly from there to Tunisia and they were stuck in Lampedusa for months. This led to a shift in Italian migration policy as of April 2009. "Thanks to the agreements with the Libyan government, the Italian government started to

98 Ibid.

push back the migrants at high seas. This was criticized by the organizations, because in high seas you cannot carry out any form of identification of vulnerable groups. In those boats there aren't only asylum seekers like Eritreans, Somalia's and so on, but also victims of trafficking, unaccompanied minors, people in need. So we asked the government to stop this push back but we were not successful,"⁹⁹ stated Moscarrielle sarcastically.

As of July 2009, IOM left Lampedusa and increased their presence in Sicily by two teams due to the shift in migration flows in that direction with more and more irregular migrants being stopped in Libya.

As you can see there was this increase in 2008, but it also existed in 2006 and even earlier but there's always more and more minors. The trend of more Egyptian unaccompanied minors is increasing because it is due to the fact that adults are easily repatriated to Egypt because of the agreements that the Italians have with the Egyptian government. You see it's very easy for Italians to repatriate the Egyptians, it's the easiest nationality to be repatriated they have special agreements. They have a certain number of people that they can accompany every month; I don't know exactly what these agreements are they are agreements between states. Also identification of them is very easy to make, I don't know how, I think there are Egyptian policemen going to Sicily and other places to collect these migrants. So that's why the Egyptians started sending the minors more and more because they knew that the adults were repatriated very easily. It was very frustrating also for us to see that the only people being repatriated were the Egyptians. In Lampedusa you would see the police collecting all the Egyptians on one side just them, everybody else gets to stay; because the other governments don't cooperate with the Italians. It's just a matter of identification, if the government doesn't cooperate for the identification of its nationals the police, or the Italian government cannot send back if they don't know their nationality.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Unaccompanied Migrant Minors' Identification Dilemma

Due to the regulations described above, Egyptian irregular migrants got rid of their passports during the boat journey. This placed unaccompanied irregular migrants in a specific dilemma. Passports were issued or renewed at the Egyptian Embassy under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs based on the National Identification card. However, the National Identification card could only be issued at the age of 16 by the Ministry of Interior in Egypt. Given the requirement mentioned above by the Italian government that minors needed to have been in Italy for the duration of three years in order to be able to change their status legally from a minors' permit to a working permit with a legitimate contract a 'catch 22' situation occurred. The minor who could potentially legitimize his stay in Italy after the age of 18 was stuck in illegality since if he managed to fulfill all the requirements of the Italian integration program, it meant that he had to arrive in Italy by the age of 15. Despite a potential contract requesting his employment, he was unable to do so without a passport and he could not make a passport without an Egyptian National ID.

In interviews with minors in March 2010, I discovered that the way they currently went around this problem was that they obtained a passport in Egypt before they left the country but they left it at home. Then, once they were settled in Italy they had their family mail the passport to them. Thus they managed to fulfill the paperwork requirements for both countries. However those who traveled without taking this precaution were stuck.

Among the requirements for minors attaining an Egyptian National Identification card at the age of 16, was the need for a parent's presence during filing procedures to the

committee responsible for issuance. The minor was also not allowed by law to give the power of attorney to anyone back home in order to take care of this for him, again due to his under-age status. This meant that both parent and child needed to be present in the same country in order to comply with the requirements which, once again, was not a possibility for the unaccompanied minor.

Finally, there was the issue of the draft, which posed another hurdle for the unaccompanied minor. Once he reached the legal age, the Embassy could only renew his passport, presuming he had one, once for the duration of one year only. He then needed to return to Egypt and declare his position from the conscription office which was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defense. Among the common obstacles to circular migration identified by most of the men interviewed was the fear of being incarcerated for skipping out on the draft. Those who were eligible for the draft intended to remain abroad until they reached the age of thirty when they could pay a fine instead of doing the time.

“No National I.D., no renewal of passport, no issuing of passport, no power of attorney to help deal with all of this including the conscription status, he is stuck in his illegality.”¹⁰¹ Despite the opportunity for legitimizing his position in Italy after a certain point again, the irregular Egyptian unaccompanied migrant finds himself unable to do so like his compatriots from other nationalities.

There are trust factors that are being built. The boy has left Egypt I am sorry to say hating the country and when he comes here, he hates it even more because I am unable to help him. But if I can help him by providing him with a passport or meet his needs then a type of relationship that is built on trust of some sort will begin to develop between the Embassy and the boy, so he can feel like

¹⁰¹ Interview with Egyptian Consul Nabila Wassif in the Egyptian Embassy in Rome, March 9th, 2010.

we are helpful. This may lead him to consider going to Egypt to visit family then come back. But if everything is NO, NO, NO, then there's no way. He only comes out with a silly information certificate that is also based on certain documents. I will not issue one out based on the birth certificates that they come with because I cannot be certain of it. I cannot create paperwork for someone who I am not sure is who he says he is. I need a national ID or a copy of a passport so that I can know that this paperwork or birth certificate belongs to this particular person. But you can come and tell me this is my birth certificate and there's no way for me to make sure. How can I be certain, if they are all coming on a boat that perhaps tipped over and someone took someone else's identity by taking his birth certificate, there's no way I can tell. It is very dangerous because I issue an official document so I'd be creating another person. So they are very frustrated. The one who has a passport with a picture or a national ID with a picture will receive a certificate other than this I cannot issue one...

There will come a time when he grows up and he will come to the Embassy to do something I will have to ask him who are you? You are not documented in Egypt. And he can't make a nationality here either.

Q: When they come to deport him how will they deport him to Egypt if he is undocumented as an Egyptian?

What happens is that the Ministry of Interior here sends me asking if this person is Egyptian, he also sends to the Moroccan and Tunisian Embassies asking if this person belongs to them since he is Middle Eastern looking. What happens is that I don't answer, he is undocumented. The Ministry hands him deportation papers that require him to leave the country and when he doesn't they put him in jail for six months. In the school, he has a permit for minors once he is over the legal age they let him out of the school informing him that in order to stay he must exchange his current permit from one of minor to a work permit which requires a job contract. They have nothing to do with it, it's not their responsibility. He goes and doesn't transfer to a work permit, the police stop him and if he doesn't have proper papers he is detained for six months after sending to the different embassies and no one answers. The police hand him the deportation papers with a three day time period to oblige, if he doesn't leave then he'll be imprisoned again if he's caught.¹⁰²

The main concern, however, was for the growing numbers of minors because of their vulnerability, since they often escaped from the initial shelters in which they were placed in order to join family members, cousins and uncles, in other areas of the country where they had established networks. Along the way, they were susceptible to all kinds of persuasion. Having no documents yet, and seeking to earn money as soon

¹⁰² Ibid.

as possible in order to repay the debt incurred by the family for the trip, they became easy prey for recruitment in the illegal labor market. The threat came from two directions: either they became over-worked and under-paid in black market jobs where employers used them as cheap manual labor with no contracts or security, which was the more common scenario; or, they became recruiting grounds for organized criminal elements, which was an even greater threat, but this was not yet a common case for Egyptian minors as it was for Romanian minors throughout Europe a few years ago. Meanwhile, irregular adult migrants were repatriated according to agreements between Egypt and Italy.

Minors, on the other hand, often escape from the homes they are placed, within a couple of weeks in order to join a relative in Milan or some other destination. But along the way, they can end up anywhere, they can be recruited by anyone. There are traffickers everywhere that can use them for various illegal purposes. They are undocumented, vulnerable and corruptible at a very impressionable age. This is an area where organized crime is prevalent, home to the original mafia, great recruiting grounds. There is a whole generation of these kids. I'm afraid of the consequences to Egypt in the future.

The most dangerous thing in irregular migration is that of the minors. Grown ups are arrested and deported but with minors it's a very dangerous situation.¹⁰³

During the second trip to Rome for the research of this study, one of the social workers I met at the Rome District Office, Alessandro Uberti, put it very eloquently, in an interview on the way to visiting one of the houses that hosted unaccompanied Egyptian minors:

It's like my professor at university used to say, "Think of it like a bus, these children get on and they look for a seat, they will sit where ever they can find a place. If the system does not accommodate them in the legal manner and the criminal organizations have a place for them, then they will go to that empty seat. It's not like they have a choice, our bus is full. If we

¹⁰³ Interview with Nabila Wassif, Egyptian Consul in Rome, November 20th, 2009.

want to keep them with us we have to find a way of accommodating their needs as well as ours.¹⁰⁴

The restrictions forced them to go in the wrong direction explained Uberti.

There are criminal elements that are just waiting to recruit anyone and they know who is good at what. Eastern Europeans are better at managing the prostitution scene, while Egyptians are better in the market at buying and selling so they are better for drug dealings. Since the minors get one-third the punishment of an adult it is more profitable to use a minor for such transactions. Then the syndicates put up for the lawyer and the child starts feeling that they have his back, more so then the social worker and in this case we loose, everybody loses.¹⁰⁵

Unaccompanied minors found themselves caught between a rock and a hard place in another sense as well, namely between the requirements placed on them by their families from a financial aspect and those placed on them by the system which required adherence to the rules and regulations. The two requirements often posed a conflict of interest for the child who, after all, only had so many hours in the day in which he chose to either go to school and learn the Italian language or work and earn desperately needed hard currency to send back home. If he was to fulfill the requirements of one, he was sure to falter on the other. This was made very clear by the interviews conducted with all the unaccompanied minors during the second trip to Rome. It also led to all the problems that occurred between the boys and the operators of the houses and centers they were staying in, evidenced by the complaints cited by the operators during interviews.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Alessandro Uberti, Professional Educator, Rome District Office. March 12, 2010.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

Applied Network Theory and Cumulative Causation Theory

Network theory explained why people from the same villages in Egypt were located in certain regions in Italy.

When someone leaves from a certain area then contacts people back home and tells them ‘you have no problem when you come, you will have a place to stay with me for a while,’ the migration is easier. Then there’s a collection or meeting point whether of illegal migrants that later develop into legal migrants or legal migrants to begin with. The migrant is convinced that there’s no problem once he gets to Italy, his problem is reaching Italy in the first place, that’s all. Because in Italy, he will find his relative that will help get him a job, perhaps fund his initial trip and provide him with a place to stay for a given period of time, so he has no problem. The problem is reaching there. The risk is in the route but once people reach their destination this confirms to others that the route is successful and the situation is not so difficult as they say.

A lot of people take the risk because of cumulative causation. This person migrated and sent enough money back home to build a house, than the other person wants to do the same in order to build a house as well. So this has become incorporated with the image of Italy, I want to go to Italy to make enough money to buy the things I want just like everyone else.¹⁰⁶

This was reconfirmed by Harb Saber, Administrative Attache at the Egyptian Embassy who pointed to the difference in the education level of some of the migrants and their spouses. According to his observations, some of the migrants were able to marry above their social class simply because they have a presence in Italy and were able to earn in Euros. “The migrant can barely sign his name and it was obvious that someone else filled out the forms for him yet his wife was a doctor or a college graduate. You can tell this was not a love story. She was married for the money.”¹⁰⁷

Eman Eid Fathy, an employee of the Fayoum Governorate from the village of Tatoun reiterated the same concept during a discussion on the influence placed upon the social structure of the village of Tatoun from the migration flow to Italy.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Egyptian Labor Consul Yehia Amin, Egyptian Embassy in Rome. November 25th, 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Administrative Attache Harb Saber, Egyptian Embassy in Rome. November 25th, 2009.

They might be illiterate but they get married to women with a higher social standing and a better education level, like a medical degree because they can provide her with better financial means. The least amount of dowry now is a quarter of a kilo of gold, 250gm of gold, which is a lot of money. She has an education and he has the money. The youth that left to Italy still prefers to marry from here in the village. Those who got married there [in Italy] was just for legalizing their position. There is a social effect to this migration, it has changed the whole structure. This migration began in the early 1980s, they used to go to Libya and no one was minding the borders then, there was no problem. Then the network system began to take place each one dragged another couple of people. They've effected the economic situation in Fayoum, it has raised the price of land and rents. In order to buy a house here it will cost too much, you can't get a nice place for less than a quarter of a million pounds anymore, whereas in Faisal Street in Giza you can get a very nice apartment for LE120,000 or LE 150,000.¹⁰⁸ These issues were raised repeatedly throughout interviews in both Italy and Egypt

during the research process. During the first trip to Rome, I interviewed twelve migrants on a random basis in the reception area of the Egyptian Consulate. All of the migrants were between the ages of 15 and 34 years old. They all came to Italy to work. They all came from moderate backgrounds in Egypt. They all stated that they came to Italy to make money in order to have a chance at a better life back home. Some of them quoted very low salaries, earned by their parents that were not enough to meet the needs of what they considered as an 'acceptable future', which included such things as marriage or a car or getting a place of their own. For example, one young man quoted his mother's salary as a school principle after working in education for 25 years, as LE350 per month while another young man explained that his father worked for the National Security Services which was a prestigious position yet he only made LE500 per month after decades of employment. Therefore, they all remitted money home to their families in order to help with daily living expenses or marriage requirements of sisters and the educational needs of siblings. All cited the difficulty or impossibility of getting an equivalent paying job in

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Eman Eid Fathy, public service employee at the Fayoum Governorate, Information Symposium University of Fayoum. February 17th, 2010.

Egypt. They all chose the illegal route because the legal one, according to them, was next to impossible, citing the difficulty in attaining the proper paperwork necessary for legitimate visas including the bank statement requirement.

All of the migrants seemed to agree that Italians respected Egyptians and appreciated their hard work. They unanimously agreed that Egyptians stayed out of trouble, they did their jobs and in general, followed the law, and therefore they were not harassed by the authorities. When asked about the new law criminalizing illegal migration, they said they had no idea or worries about it because they did not feel unwelcome and the authorities treated them well.

I did not get the impression that most of the migrants resented Egypt. On the contrary, it seemed that Egypt was in all their plans as a final destination once they accomplished the financial goals that they had set for themselves. They were all waiting to legitimize their position in Italy, in order to guarantee the ability to go back and forth between the two countries. The two major hurdles to circularity cited were military conscription and accessibility to legal visas.

Mohamed was a 25 year old from Gharbeya, Kafr Kel el Bab who came to Italy in 2004 using the irregular route from Alexandria to Greece and then to Italy. He was a senior at the College of Trade when he left in his final semester before completing his degree. He cited the military conscription as the reason for leaving when he did. At the time he said he paid LE50,000 for his journey. He stated that none of his townsmen remained in Greece, according to his estimates there were 5,000 of them in Italy.

I work in a vegetable shop; I make 1,600 Euros a month. I send home 1,200 Euros. I only use 400 Euros here to live it's not difficult. I share an apartment with 4 other guys the rent is 700 Euros we divide it amongst us. I spend about 80

Euros a month on food and stuff, the owner allows us to take home some produce that helps. I miss my family most.

I'm applying for a residence it'll be 7 to 10 years before I go down [to Egypt] I need 20,000 to 25,000 Euros for a project I have in mind here then I can go down. I work from 5am till 10pm. Egyptians have a reputation of gold here we work hard, we save, we behave and we don't get into trouble. We think of back home first before we think of ourselves. I'm here on a mission. Other nationalities think of living, they go out and buy a car, we just work and save.¹⁰⁹

Tolba was 16 years old from Gharbeya he came to Italy only three months earlier by boat from Alexandria to Sicily. The trip cost him LE55,000.

I was going to second year college. Here, I'm just in school to learn the language. I'm in the Embassy to get an Egyptian passport, so that I can get the Permesso [permit for minors], I'll go back home when I get proper papers. My family is the only thing I miss. There's nothing there. We were about 120 people on the boat.¹¹⁰ [*Tolba was one of the few who didn't seem to want to go back to Egypt at all.*]

Ahmed was turning 18 in two months, he was from Gharbeya as well, and had been in Italy for three months.

I was in high school. *When asked why he left? He simply answered*, apartment, marriage, my sister wants to get married. I wasn't intending to come here I was heading for France. But I met a lot of guys and decided to stay. The military conscription is a big hurdle, I can't go back now because of it even if I have my papers here, they'd take me away and wouldn't allow me to leave. The worst thing in Egypt is the unemployment.¹¹¹

Mohamed S. was from Mahala in Gharbeya, he was 17 years old. He used to be a driver in Egypt. He had 3 sisters to take care of and he needed to pay back the debt incurred by the trip. He had a financial responsibility to marry off his three sisters.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Mohamed, irregular migrant, Egyptian Consulate in Rome, November 23rd, 2009.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Tolba, unaccompanied minor, Egyptian Consulate in Rome, November 23rd, 2009.

¹¹¹ Interview with Ahmed, unaccompanied minor, Egyptian Consulate in Rome, November 23rd, 2009.

Hossam from Kafr Damanhour was 16 years old.

I was a farmer back home. They don't know how to treat people, they treat workers badly. So I came here. I met these guys in the Italian school.

I want to get the money I spent. I was in debt for the trip. We discovered that if you turn yourself in to the Italians they put you in school, they pay for your food and give you a place to live and take care of everything. So it's much better than being in more debt here to find a place to stay till you get a job than you'll have debts back home and debts here as well. So we stayed at the school. If I have papers than I'll go down see my family then I'll come back to start serious work for 2 or 3 years then when I save I can see. [Mohamed and Hossam agreed to this plan].

Eid was 31 years old, he arrived in 2004 from Monofia. He had a vocational diploma. Previously, he went to the Emirate for 5 years but he couldn't save enough money. He never heard of the 8,000 job opportunities that were available for Egyptians as part of the quota system according to recent bilateral agreements cited by the Egyptian Counsel and the Labor Attache during interviews. He said, "You need money to get a regular visa, more money than I had to pay the broker! The visa price is too expensive you can't even reach that way."¹¹²

Tarek was from Monofia, he came in 2004 with a visa, which he overstayed for three years. Then he got a contract from a restaurant where he worked. He then returned to Egypt and got a proper visa based on the work contract. As a result, he returned to Italy where he applied for and received his residence. Tarek lived with his two brothers who also work in Rome, one as a cook and the other as a cleaner. His brothers were both married and their families visited during summer vacations only, while the rest of the

¹¹² Interview with Eid, irregular migrant, Egyptian Consulate in Rome, November 23rd, 2009.

year they lived apart. The residence helped him go back and forth easily, usually every 6 months.

Abdel Salam was 23 years old from Gharbeyya. He spoke fluent Italian including the hand gestures yet his Arabic connoted a heavy country accent. He made the journey four years ago from Egypt to Libya then to Sicily. He left Egypt in order to help improve his own situation over that of his parents. He also helped them financially. He had a college diploma in trade and was currently working in the vegetable market in Rome. He said his father worked in internal security in Egypt making LE500 a month.

If I send him 500 Euros a month he'd be very happy, he'd probably stop working. Here you work you get something, while in Egypt you work you get nothing. I got a residence permit now. I applied with a work contract and I got it. I farmed in Italy for ten months when I had to, I didn't just sit around waiting for a job.¹¹³

Yasser was 34 years old from Menya. He had been in Italy since 2002.

I came with a three-month visa and stayed. I paid a guy to say I have a job, so I got permission for a contract, which allowed me to get the residence. I've been working in the same restaurant for four years. The owner is Egyptian and I am proud when people come to our restaurant and like the food and service, it feels good.

I return home every year now, I'm not married. My problem is money; I used to work on Nile cruises between Luxor and Aswan. The employees with diplomas were paid more they got LE280 while those like me with vocational training got LE180 even though we did the same job and often the ones without diplomas worked better. I'd go back home at the end of 45 days with LE500 pounds in my pocket feeling very happy and secure then within a week the money is gone and that's it, never enough.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Interview with Abdel Salam, migrant, Egyptian Consulate in Rome, November 23rd, 2009.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Yasser, migrant, Egyptian Consulate in Rome, November 23rd, 2009.

Said was 25 years old from Behera he came by boat. He was a fisherman by profession but was currently out of a job for the past six months. He spent three and a half years in Italy and he worked a total of one year, several months at a time. Currently he wished to return to Egypt but he did not have the means do so. He wanted to be deported and came to the Embassy to see if they can help.

Hani was 27 years old and worked in construction. He explained that in Arab countries recently they started calculating salaries according to the exchange rate in Egyptian pounds, which made working in Italy financially more rewarding.

The last young man I interviewed on this trip epitomized the story of unaccompanied minors. We were both waiting outside the Egyptian Embassy offices in Rome, taking a break in the garden and we started talking. He saw me conducting the interviews and was curious what I was doing, so I explained the study to him and asked if he was interested in participating, which he did.

His name was Mohamed, He was a 15 year old from Mansoura. He told me he came over a year ago on October 20th, 2008, he walked from Marsa Matrouh to Libya and then took a boat to Lampedusa where he was placed in a reception center. He paid LE30,000 for the journey which he made with 40 other passengers and two guides. His mother did not want him to leave but he said she knew he was in Italy because he called her all the time. He said that he was currently in a house in Sicily that did not provide anything but room and board, there was no work opportunity, nor language classes nor any sort of educational component in this place. When I asked why he doesn't complain,

he said that he did and they told him if he didn't like it he was free to leave. But he wasn't going to leave without getting a minors permit first so he came from Sicily on his own to see about his papers in the Embassy. He asked if I could contact someone and let them know about this place that they were not providing any services since I was conducting this study. He said the guardian was paying from his own pocket to keep the place open and they might have to shut it down.

At that point we were both called inside for further interviews, when I came out, to my surprise the young man was still there and willing to continue our conversation. He did however, seem more distracted and disturbed, so I turned off the tape and asked where he was going. He said he needed to go back to Sicily but he didn't know where to go. Some guy named Ahmed from the men working on the renovation at the Embassy told him he would take him. At that point the Embassy guard came yelling at him, "What are you still doing here?" The boy said, "I'm waiting for Ahmed." "Ahmed who?" yelled the guard. "Ahmed here," said the boy pointing to the edge of the Embassy wall, "the guy in the back, I don't know his last name." He took the guard and showed him Ahmed, which made the guard leave us alone. So I asked the boy, "What are you going to do now?" He said, "I don't know. I must go back to Sicily." I explained that he might need to ride a train not a bus to Sicily since it was a long way. Then, he looked like he was going to cry! And all of a sudden, the cigarette smoking, macho attitude faded in front of my eyes and I saw the little boy in this young man, so far away from home and on his own. He defined unaccompanied minor right there and then for me. I had to find some way to help him, I had to hand him over to someone responsible and I did. The Egyptian Consular's secretary Sara Gangale took charge of him and when I returned on the

following trip I asked her what ever happened to Mohamed. She told me that the Ambassador's wife personally paid for his return ticket to Sicily and made sure he arrived safely.

Mohamed's story inspired me even more to dig deeper into the reasons for the irregular migration of Egyptians especially the minors. I went back to Egypt and conducted interviews with government officials and villagers from Tatoun to gain a wider understanding of the push factors that lead Egyptian youth to seek a future elsewhere.

Circumstances in the Sending Country, Egypt

Government Response and Development Plans

I started at the Egyptian Ministry of Family and Population, which was established in March 2009 and consisted of a number of councils and committees, one of which was the National Council for Childhood that deals with everything that has to do with minors in Egypt. Sara El Azzazy, Programs Coordinator at the Cabinet of the Minister in the Ministry of State for Family and Population was interviewed together with Naser Mesalam, Senior Researcher of Planning and Coordinator of *The Project for Promoting Safe Migration and Positive Alternatives for Egyptian Youth*. "The issue of irregular migration of minors to Italy is specifically under our auspices since the ministry deals with everything that has to do with children between the ages of 0 to 18 and therefore it is directly within our jurisdiction... We are concentrating more on the issue of

minors, to prevent the occurrence of irregular migration from the very beginning,”¹¹⁵ explained Azzazy.

She referred to two memorandums that were signed targeting the issue of irregular migration of Egyptian minors. One of the memorandums had to do with a media campaign that had been completed on March 31st, 2009 and the second had to do with developing training centers and Italian language courses.

The Italians are either going to build new centers or refurbish existing centers and that will be especially in Fayoum governorate in the town of Tatun, because it has the highest percentage of migrants to Italy. [They will be] vocational training centers mainly for construction because that’s what the migrants work in when they go to Italy. And it will have Italian language classes. What we are trying to do is get trainers from Italy so that they can develop the curriculum in order to match the skills with the demand in the Italian labor market. The idea is to keep the young Egyptians here until after they are 18 years old and develop their skills so that when they migrate they can access the legal channels. Our target group is not just the children but also the families, schools and all the elements that cause them to flee. When we looked at the situation overall from outside, it seems that their families push them forward to migrate instead of stopping them. They are encouraging them...It is closer to child labor rather than trafficking.”¹¹⁶

At the time of this interview, in January 2010, it was not yet clear whether vocational schools and training centers were going to be built or refurbished for the program. However, in the course of the research a decision was reached and Mesalam made the following announcement during the information seminar that was held in Fayoum on February 17th, 2010:

The assistant to the Italian Prime Minister met with Minister Moushira Khattab today along with Amb. Hussein El Sabry, Consultant to the Ministry and based on their visit and that of the Italian specialist the following was decided: Itsa Senior Vocational School will become Tatoun Senior Vocational School. The school will be completely renovated it will be specialized in construction

¹¹⁵ Interview with Sara El Azzazy, Programs Coordinator at the Cabinet of the Minister in the Ministry of State for Family and Population, Cairo. January 14th, 2009.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

with technical and mechanical departments. It will be managed by the Don Bosco Technical Institute, and based on the Egyptian educational system requirements for accreditation but the teaching will be based on Italian curriculum that is Arabized with Italian teachers from the Don Bosco Institute and the technical and scientific studies will be supervised by the highest caliber teachers not necessarily from Fayoum. Teachers will be tested and they can be brought from outside the governorate. Both Arabic and English studies as well as the subjects as per the Egyptian curriculum will be offered. Italian language will also be available. Instructors from Don Bosco Institute, an Italian training center in both Alexandria and Cairo specialized in teaching in Italian will be brought in. The school will provide a five year program at the end of which the student will receive an above average diploma. The management will be highly trained Egyptian and Italian engineers. Graduates of the school will not only be technicians but also assistants to engineers. The school will provide the potential for its' highest honor achievers the possibility of continuing on to engineering schools in Egypt and in Italy.

[In addition] the Hotel School in Quroun will be renovated and restructured, the kitchens, the hotel rooms and the conference rooms will all be renovated according to Italian standards. The school will be based on European standards of education. The school will remain a five-year program, there will also be a training center for hotel service provision, the technical school will also have a technical training program.

The training centers will accept students between the ages of 18 and 35 years old. However, the schools will be for those under 18 years old because the aim of the project are children...

So instead of using up the money for building, we will renovate existing schools and invest the money in the equipment and the caliber of education. It doesn't make sense to have two technical schools within a five-kilometer radius. Therefore, since a school already exists and has huge grounds we can use it. Whoever goes to the Hotel school in Fayoum will be bused free of charge back and forth from Tatoun to Fayoum City. People will need to be hard working and be of high academic standing in order to train in these programs. Regular tuition for the Don Bosco Institute are approximately LE3,000 per year, whereas these schools will be free of charge based on grades. There will be a foreign language component in the training centers that will only require literacy skills.¹¹⁷

The village of Tatoun in Fayoum was identified by the Italian Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Welfare as the source of the largest number of irregular Egyptian

¹¹⁷ Naser Mesalam, Senior Researcher of Planning and Coordinator of the Project for Promoting Safe Migration and Positive Alternatives for Egyptian Youth during a presentation in an information seminar on funding for small scale enterprises at Fayoum University on February 17th, 2010.

unaccompanied minors according to Mesalem. Hence the projects that were being implemented targeted this area in particular.

They decided to do a project inside Egypt, because based on Italian law any child that has not reached 18 years of age cannot be repatriated to their country. So they have to provide him with protection and training in order to integrate him within the Italian society. First they provide Italian language classes. Second they place him in vocational schools in order to train him for the job market. Third they spend approximately 100 Euros on him per day. In this case, I can't choose who is coming to me, I don't have the right to pick and choose who comes. Each one that arrives in Italy has the same rights. So they decided to make a project inside this town to develop a vocational training center to provide skills that are required for the jobs that are available in Italy.

Q: But Tatun is one among several towns that export migrants, it's not the only one according to my research in Italy Kafr Kela el Bab also has a lot of people in Italy?

Yes, the towns that provide the highest number of irregular migrants to Italy are: Kafr El Gazar in Benha Kalubeyya governorate, Kafrikia El Bab district from Santa city in Gharbeya governorate, El Azzizia in Menya El Amh Sharrkey governorate, and there's a fourth town in Kafr el Sheik called Borg Meghezal in Borolous in Kafr El Sheik Governorate. These are the largest exporters of irregular migrants to Italy from Egypt.

There are other districts that are specialized in the export of irregular migrants to other countries in Europe. For example, there's a town in Gharbeya, Meet Badr Halawa, it specializes in migration to France. In Fayoum, there's a town called Sheedymo it specializes in migration to Germany and Austria. So each area has a specialty destination!

Q: Most of the migrants I interviewed worked in the vegetable trade and they were all in Rome, I didn't go to Milan.

Vegetable traders are not from Tatoun those are from Kafr Kela el Bab, from Santa in Gharbeyya and Kafr el Gazar in Kalubeyya those are to be found in Rome. And they are very successful. Tatoun are in Milan working in construction, those from Borg Meghezal are fishermen in Sicily and Sardinia.¹¹⁸

The migration flow has had a direct impact on the price of land in Tatoun, whereas the going rate for a meter of land in the capital of Fayoum was LE3,000, according to Mesalam in Tatoun it was closer to LE5,000 based on supply and demand.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Naser Mesalam, Senior Researcher of Planning and Coordinator of the *Project for Promoting Safe Migration and Positive Alternatives for Egyptian Youth*, Egyptian Ministry of State for Family and Population, Cairo. January 14th, 2010.

The advent of high-rise buildings and private villas replacing traditional village houses in Tatoun was evidence of the increased wealth in the area resulting from remittances. However, this was identified by young men interviewed from Tatoun as one of the major problems facing them. Due to the inflationary prices caused by remittances from those migrating, those who did not migrate felt even poorer. This was reiterated by the unaccompanied migrants from Gharbeyya interviewed in Rome on the second trip for this research study.

The project in Tatoun was two-fold, the first part was the awareness campaign and the second was the training and education component. Even though the aim of the project was to reduce the irregular migration of unaccompanied migrants, the awareness campaign incorporated all facets of the population in order to inform them on the risks of irregular migration and its' consequences.

When we first arrived we worked on the public awareness campaign, which lasted for three months. We address parents, men and women, we addressed children in schools and clubs, addressed the youth in community associations as well as religious leaders in both mosques and churches alike. Based on our communication with the official and inherent leadership, among the religious community and those in charge of youth organizations in Tatoun we developed a committee on a volunteer basis, to assist our project. The committee consists of forty members that are key community leaders, among them are religious figures such as priests and sheikhs, as well as youth who have successfully migrated to Italy and returned while others' whose migration experience has failed. Also public officials on a district and town level participated. We started in October 2009 and we did all this in three months only.

Q: Was funding for the project all from Italy?

Yes, the funding is all from Italy. We cooperate in the implementation of the project among several stakeholders within the project. The Italian Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Welfare, the Italian Embassy (International Cooperation Section within the Embassy), the implementing partners are, the National Organization (Committee) for Motherhood and

Childhood in the Ministry of State for Family and Population in addition to the IOM and Fayoum Governorate.¹¹⁹

Lack of skills in both language and work qualifications were cited as one of the main reasons migrants chose the irregular route as opposed to going through the regular job market. According to Azzazy, migrants were aware of the 8,000 job opportunities offered in the Italian job market however they did not fulfill the necessary qualifications required to apply. “We are not telling them don’t migrate; it’s not our place to say that. If you tell them don’t migrate they’ll walk away from you immediately. We tell them you have to acquire skills whether for the Italian job market or for the Egyptian one. You then have the choice to go or not after you have acquired your skills.”¹²⁰ That was why the second phase of the project was aimed at providing such skills through the development of vocational training centers and language proficiency courses. There are no guarantees of job placement once they graduate from the training centers however they will receive skills and based on their achievements they will find a demand in both local and international markets.

Azzazy: The only agreement that was signed was two weeks before Christmas. It is a program that will last for a three-year period; they will develop a vocational center that is similar to the Italian system. The pilot project was finished as of the 31 of December 2009. But what Nasser [Mesalam] is doing is to carry on some form of a presence in the area so they don’t feel a drop all of a sudden in activities. That was just an awareness campaign to alert people to the existing problem. But once the funds arrive we will begin in the rest of the project.

Q: Are you going to do this project only in Tatoun or will you extend it to the other areas as well?

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Interview with Sara El Azzazy, Programs Coordinator at the Cabinet of the Minister in the Ministry of State for Family and Population, Cairo. January 14th, 2009.

Mesalam: We are only doing it in Tatoun according to our funding agent that is our scope of work.

Q: But the EU is investing a lot of money in Egypt that can be used in a successful project like this one.

Azzazy: We are using Tatoun as a pilot project, it is not a pilot project but we are using it as an example for other governorates to emulate. If we succeed here then we can ask for other grants for different areas.

Mesalam: Save the Children are considering something like that but they won't implement it in Fayoum.

Azzazy: That's why at the end of the three-year project we can have an impact assessment of the project to see how successful we were.¹²¹

When I addressed the question of the National Identification problem that was mentioned by the Egyptian Consul in Rome, which placed unaccompanied minors in a quandary. Azzazy stated, "Those who left are not our business; those who stay are our business. We deal with those who are here. We can only deal with internal affairs, the ones that are here, not the ones that are abroad.

What we are trying to do is keep them here. We have no say in anything that goes on over there, outside [the country], we cannot interfere outside our territory. What we try and do is persuade them or help them while they are here in Egypt."

Later on in the interview Azzazy mentioned that perhaps when the Embassy is unable to provide the necessary paperwork for minors to legitimize their position due to the above mentioned problems this might lead to a reduction, in the long term, of the number of minors going to Italy. Although she admitted that it would not solve the problem for those that were already in this dilemma, it might dissuade many others from ending up in that position.

During a brief interview with H.E. Moushira Khatab, Minister of Family and Population, the situation was clarified even further.

¹²¹ Azzazy and Mesalam interview at the Ministry of Family and Population January 14th, 2010.

There is a conspiracy regarding the illegal migration of children because the parents think that this is an opportunity for their children, that it is a bright future. So they don't want anyone to interfere with it.

Q: It is similar to sending them away to college?

Not college, heaven! If you try, as a state, to stop it they will object because in their minds you are preventing them from having opportunities in life. It will be seen as an infringement on their freedom, like you are trying to deprive them from opportunities in life. There is a conspiracy in the society that stops everyone from reporting incidences of smuggling. You will only know when a disaster happens, like a boat capsizing - then you will hear of it. Even the Mayor, when he went to attend the funeral services of the people that died at sea in one of the boats that sank, the man introduced his second son as 'the one that will follow his brother in the next journey!' There is persistence on their part. All of this makes the reporting very weak. Even the Italians at the other end, when they capture the children, most of the time they are not given the correct names or places that they come from, and they escape. So the data is very weak when it comes to actual contact. The only thing that can be done is work in advocacy, work on development, because there is an economic element in it. That is why our intervention is coming in two forms: the first thing, we made the media campaign, then the second thing is that we are building a school. That was my idea. First, the Italians were after collecting data about the minors so that they can send the children back to their families. I told them "you will get nowhere." Simply, there is no data and there will be no reporting. Children will not give them their address and already they didn't give them their addresses and they came to us thinking that they can collect information, and we refused to do that. So we told them we make alternative venues. We can make development plans, and we'll build the school. It took us quite some time for them to agree on the idea but they agreed and we are working on it.

Q: The Italians said that they are spending 100 Euros a day per child. Why aren't we asking them to put 20 Euros here instead and develop the opportunities in Egypt?

They did put money. We negotiated a lot with them and they put nearly two million Euros, for us. It was a victory that they came and put this amount. We have to begin work and we have to do something. It can't just be between them and us, but with other ministries such as that for higher education and local governments as well as those of the district, along with the people themselves. We have to offer quality education. If the reputation of this school is in high standing then everybody will want to attend. We are using it as an incentive, as a carrot, for potential migrants. "Come and train here then the Italians will head hunt you", because I am providing Italian language classes, in addition to the training with Italian instructors.¹²²

¹²² Interview with H.E. Moushira Khatab, Minister of State for Family and Population. January 14th, 2010.

Already, the ‘carrot’ seems to be working. According to Mesalam, there was a noted reduction in the drop-out rate for middle school attendance in the area where the program was established.

We discovered something very strange the drop out rate from the middle schools in this region was around 40%, when they found out that they will be given an opportunity to join the training program which will teach them skills and Italian language speaking classes based on the condition that they are successful in school. The drop out rate was reduced to only 3%!

This all happened in three months only. Because we gained their trust, the Minister came out and spoke and things were happening on the ground and there was a lot of activity and many visits. They were experiencing first hand the actual implementation of the program and they see us there all the time; there is consistency. [The minor that is interested in migrating] knows that if he doesn’t do well in school, he will not be allowed to attend the training program that will help him accomplish his dreams.

There are no promises, the one who comes to me I help provide him with skills and based on his achievement and success there will be a demand for him in both the Egyptian labor market and in the quota system that makes job opportunities available to Egyptians legally.

Q: But don’t you need to complete the circle by making it known that there is this pool of skilled labor from which domestic companies in the construction and tourism sectors draw upon?

That is going to happen in the next phase of the project. One of the upcoming plans has to do with a center for building and construction which is under the auspices of the Ministry of Construction and Infrastructure in Gesr El Suez. This center trains people over 18 years of age based on European standards it provides Italian, English, French and German language classes as well as vocational skills. So we are trying to target all facets of society.¹²³

In order to maintain continuity, Mesalam was coordinating monthly seminars at the University in Fayoum training 200 young people, mostly from Tatoun and its’ surrounding area, on how to conduct a feasibility study and how to manage a project. This program was in cooperation with experts from the Social Development Fund and the

¹²³ Azzazy and Mesalam interview at the Ministry of Family and Population January 14th, 2010.

Local Development Fund both of which provide loans for small and medium scale enterprises. The idea was for people to invest in income generating projects rather than in irregular migration and rather than spending the LE25,000 to LE50,000 on the ‘journey of death’ they would use the money in addition to taking out a loan in order to start viable projects. I was invited to attend the two-day seminar where I managed to conduct interviews and focus group discussions with participants on their feedback on the matter.

Push Factors for Migration: Money, Marriage and Military

Participants in Fayoum identified the unemployment problem as the major factor pushing them to migrate. The lack of opportunities that would provide them with an acceptable way of life, salaries that would allow them to get married and start their own families were unattainable in Egypt. Most of the young men interviewed in Fayoum were in their early 20s. They were extremely frustrated and skeptical about the prospects of their future. They kept reiterating that they had “fallen between the cracks” of opportunities. On the one hand, they did not migrate early enough to be included among the success stories of the earlier period of irregular migration, which was more common before 2009. While, on the other hand they were no longer old enough to attend the schools that were planning on offering the professional skills which would enhance their chances of finding job opportunities that they were searching for either in the domestic or international market. Many asked where their fault was in this dilemma. How was it that after all the school and/or professional training they completed, they were still unable to afford any of the things young men dream of at that age?

Mahmoud was a 26 year old graduate of Cairo University, School of Tourism. He had two brothers in Italy, one had been there for nine years while the other for five years. He himself wished to migrate, but not through the sea route. One of his brothers owned his own company in Italy and he also had cousins and an uncle who could help him get a job. Those who have legitimate papers return twice a year to their families in Fayoum, whereas those without cannot.

Mahmoud worked in five different jobs in Egypt, he explained that his salaries ranged from LE400 to LE800. Being from Fayoum meant that accommodation in Cairo and transportation costs back and forth to Fayoum took up his entire salary. He stated that he was originally a tour guide but he needed a lot more contacts to establish himself in this field, "I have to start small in order to grow I need to have contacts with the big tour companies, which means I have to wait at least five years. Five years here and five years there I might as well find another career."¹²⁴ Willing to work anywhere so long as it was a well paying job, he stated, "Money is everything, it translates to a house, marriage, a car, a life basically. A good standard of living and decent medical service, money is everything now."¹²⁵ Mahmoud was a decent looking young man, clean cut, spoke English and had knowledge of French. He was planning on studying Italian as well. It was clear by the laptop on which he was taking notes during the seminar that he had computer skills as well.

I want to ask something, not for myself but for youth in general, what was required from us that we did not do? We studied very hard, we are willing

¹²⁴ Interview with Mahmoud at the University of Fayoum information seminar February 17th, 2010.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

to work in any career regardless of it's position, all we want is a good salary. There's nothing wrong with that.¹²⁶

Mousa was a 19 year old with a vocational diploma. He had three older brothers in Italy who left six years earlier and have permits now. He was not convinced that there was an opportunity to make money in Egypt. "There is no project that can be made in Egypt that can provide a decent living or allow anyone to get married."¹²⁷ He was preoccupied by the idea of taking out a loan and its' repayment terms, somehow the risk of owing money to a fund or a bank was unacceptable to most of the young men attending the seminar while owing money to a smuggler or 'a guy' who gets them across the boarder was a better investment! When calculating the risks involved most of the young men asserted that the risks in the journey and the potential income in Italy, far outweighed any potential project in their village. Mousa put it simply, "I have the money, but there isn't a project that will make as much money as I would if I go abroad."¹²⁸

Ahmed a 20 year old with two brothers in Italy and a vocational diploma intended to join them after graduation but was unable to.

Some people spent LE70,000 and LE80,000 and they were repatriated. They had arranged with a smuggler to take them to Italy and he did but they got caught and were sent back but there's nothing they can do. He won't return the money.

Q: If that money was spent in a project wouldn't it be more worthwhile? If each one of you invests the LE70,000 together can't you make a successful project?

Yes but the project can be successful and it can fail.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Interview with Mousa at the University of Fayoum information seminar February 17th, 2010.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

Q: And you can also arrive safely to Italy and you might drown at sea on the way?

Our destiny is in God's hands.

Q: Yes but it's a 50/50 chance in anything. Why is it destiny in the journey but not in an investment?

All these dreams of projects only happen after people migrate and make money. Then they consider making projects and investing only after they decide to settle back home. But no one thinks of investing before they make money abroad.¹²⁹

The reason for Italy as a destination was the existence of the network. "The owner of the company is my brother or uncle someone from my family or village, it's always someone who went before," explained Ahmed. "That's what makes everyone go to Italy because everyone has someone," agreed Mousa.

Participants in the focus group discussion all agreed that the *Khalif* system in Saudi Arabia was no longer acceptable, they cited several unfair incidences where the migrants rights' were infringed upon and there was no recourse to justice. Yet they felt that due to the support system in Italy provided by the existing networks such incidences did not occur. They also had the impression that in Europe in general people were more professional and the pay was much better.

During the focus group discussion nepotism was highlighted as one of the main hindrances to development in the district, while absolute pessimism was another obstacle.

Ahmed: I applied for a job in a company then I went after a month and a half to ask about the results, they told me there were 35 jobs and 1500 applicants. Of the 35 positions, 15 were taken by relatives of the head of the district and the other 10 were for the people around him. There were only 10 positions left for people like me who were not connected. These people were already chosen from before the competition began!

Q: Do you feel that this program is going to be the same way? I got the impression from your faces that you didn't believe any of it.

¹²⁹ Focus group discussion at the University of Fayoum on February 17th, 2010.

Mousa: The schools are all going to need connections. Maybe they just did this to help the youth they know travel.

Ayman: Nobody is going to travel.

Ahmed: God only knows someone else will come and take over and it will all be connections and nepotism again.

Ayman: It's just going to stop, they'll stick around for a while then it will all stop and they'll say it's over no one will be trained or anything anymore. They're just trying to give people a break for five years. God only knows.

Q: They're using you as a pilot project if it succeeds then they can replicate it in other villages? Why are you so pessimistic? If you succeed the projects will increase but if you fail it will close down.

Ayman: What projects will succeed?

Mousa: If I learn the language and graduate then what?

Q: Why is it that you are all so pessimistic when you talk of any project in Egypt including the schools and when you speak of Italy you are willing to be optimistic and give it the benefit of the doubt? You believe that abroad there are many more opportunities than here?

Even though it costs you LE20000 by sea and LE70000 by plane with no papers and a fifty percent chance of survival!

Ahmed: There I can work in any job, all I need is a place to sleep. Here I can't do that.

Mousa: It's enough that I am here, I am among my family, I can't be humiliated. There I'm going to work there's no humiliation in it.

Ahmed: Here certain work can be degrading.

Mousa: No job is demeaning there, you can work in anything.

Q: There you can work in any job?

Mousa: Not any job, they can work in construction here and there but the difference is in the exchange rate. It makes the money.

Q: But you work there like a dog for six or seven years you have no life.

Mousa: Yes but I just go for a year or two then I come back to my family.

Mousa: Yes, you don't even eat a decent meal you have to cook for yourself.

Ahmed: He needs to if he wants to build a house and get married.

Mostafa: I have a small grocery store. I got married eight months ago. I wanted to do like those who came back from Italy. I wanted the apartment and the big wedding with the dowry, and my project is going bankrupt now. I tried to imitate them not out of jealousy but so that I don't feel like I'm missing out on anything. My bride is like any other girl she wants to be happy and have those things. And I'm like any other guy.

Ayman: His business is going bust after the wedding!

Q: Yes, but that's the problem, they can afford it because they make that kind of money out there but here in Egypt the situation is different. Prices are high but salaries are low.

Hassan: He wants to live like anyone of us.

Ahmed: I had a friend who immigrated through the sea route, he told me I am dead here and I am dead there.¹³⁰

The focus group discussion continued that day revealing the hurdles the young men were either faced with previously or predicted as happening in the future, we continued the discussions the following day with the same young men.

Q: Where is the answer? For example, circular migration is one option to solve some of these problems if there's a temporary two year contract would you take it? Would you choose to come back in any case? Does any of you have the intention to migrate permanently? I've listened to all of you say that you are going to save money in order to get married no one mentioned that they want to go and stay for good. Like those who go to the United States they tend to migrate permanently, how about you?

Ayman: Everyone who goes regardless of how long even if it is twenty years, they still come back home.

Mostafa: One guy left for a long time, eleven years, he left when he was 18 years old and he wants to come back but he is worried about military draft so he's waiting till he's 30 years old then he's planning to come back, that's the long stay.

Q: What the Europeans' are worried about is being over run by foreigners from different religions and traditions. They worry that this will change their way of life.

Ayman: The businesses that we're in over there is mainly apartments, butcher stores, telephone shops and warehouses. Few people took their wives and settled there, most people go around and around then come back.

Ahmed: Egyptians aren't the kind of people who migrate permanently, every Egyptians' goal in traveling is to raise his standard of living back home. If he can raise his standard of living here at home he won't travel... Egyptians are not a threat to any society because we are not trying to stay there permanently... we don't get involved with the things that are against the law.

Q: Do you feel those who come back are changed?

Ahmed: On the contrary, he comes back to the advantage of the community, he goes out and cleans the street.

Ayman: He's more professional in his appointments.

Again we discussed the standard of living and cumulative causation theory, they all referred to friends that had migrated and were able to build houses and get married

¹³⁰ Ibid.

while they couldn't find decent jobs to support themselves. Even though all of them would migrate immediately if they had the opportunity they all agreed that if they could make a decent living in their hometowns they would rather stay. When I asked how much that would be in their opinion, they stated that they would need LE2,000 if they were married and LE5,000 per month if they were not. Ironically, they assumed it took more money as a single person than as head of a household, due to the expenses that were incurred prior to actually getting married. Military conscription was a common hurdle that they all faced due to the delay it caused their professional lives resulting in a negative influence on their earning capacity, which caused them to delay marriage even further. It seemed that the preoccupation with marriage was all encompassing and when asked why it was so, Ayman jokingly replied: "We want to get married to get the subject over and done with, one more thing off our to do list."¹³¹

On the third day of the field study in Fayoum I conducted 11 one on one interviews in the village of Tatoun. Two interviews were with irregular migrants who had gone to Italy for several years and returned while eight of the interviews were with villagers that had attempted several times to make the journey but failed and one interviewee wanted to migrate but had not attempted to go. Similarly to the focus group discussions conducted above and other interviews, all of those interviewed cited unemployment and lack of consistent secure job opportunities as their main reason for attempting or wanting to migrate. They went into specific details of how impossible it was for anyone to save any money in order to build or plane a future without migrating.

¹³¹ Focus group discussion at the University of Fayoum on February 18th, 2010.

Mahmoud, a 27 year old owner of a grocery store now, went to Italy in 2003 and worked there for six years. He returned in 2009 in order to get married and start his life. “I wanted to save enough money to buy an apartment or build a house so I can get married. When I managed to save enough I wanted to come back.”¹³² He did not intend to migrate again stating that it was a struggle to survive, “I worked sporadically one month and stayed home a couple of months nothing constant until I stayed for three years then I worked more regularly.”¹³³ He understood that in order to succeed in Italy a person needed three things, language, papers and a skill. He explained how things changed over the years in terms of job opportunities and attitudes towards migrants.

When I first went, Italians loved Egyptians very much. They didn’t used to be scared of Egyptians. One could sit next to a lady on the bus and she’s not afraid of you at all. Now if you sit next to a woman on the bus she may get up and leave her seat or she holds on to her purse in a way that symbolizes distrust. Because they got sick of what’s going on, they get ripped off on the bus, the city changed a lot. The most obvious crime is theft mostly from North Africans, Moroccans but also from a small percentage of Egyptians. But to them we are all the same, Moroccans, Tunisians and Egyptians are all one, they don’t differentiate between us.¹³⁴

Fathy was 31 years old he went to Italy through Spain, unlike the rest of those interviewed he had a visa to Cuba transiting through Spain where he made his way to Italy. Fathy was the exception in that he had married a Romanian and was intending to stay in Italy permanently however, his mother got sick and he needed to come back and tend to her. He left in 2002 and returned in 2009, “The first 3 or 4 years I was making money then the next couple of years I decided to make a family. I liked living there and I wanted to stay. I did it, I got married and I have the papers to prove it. If my mother hadn’t gotten ill I wouldn’t have returned now. I would have waited till I got my permit.”¹³⁵ When I asked if there was a chance that he would bring his wife to live in Egypt he said it would be very difficult for her to withstand the hardships of the village life.

¹³² Interview in Tatoun with Mahmoud on February 23rd, 2010.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Interview in Tatoun with Fathy on February 23rd, 2010.

She heard about life here. Things are very different between the life style in both countries. Here we have the gas problem as we've been witnessing all across Egypt, she's not going to come to carry a gas container, it's impossible.

...The gap between the standard of living in both countries is huge. They have poor areas as well and villages, like in Naples, I went there and saw the cats and dogs in the street. But natural gas is everywhere, water is for free, there are sewage systems everywhere, there's an infrastructure even in the poor areas.¹³⁶

Hady was 26 years old he attempted to go to Italy through Libya but was caught at sea by Libyan authorities who sent him to jail for 73 days and then deported him back to Egypt. He had a vocational diploma but was at the time of the interview unemployed, if he had a choice he would migrate legally. However that option was not available and therefore the prospect of trying again was not out of the question. "What can we do people have to try."¹³⁷

Gomaa was a 25 year old construction worker who attempted to go to Italy through Libya three times but failed. The last trip he made he was placed in a detention center in Libya for 21 days after which he decided not to make the attempt through that route again. "The boats we road weren't fit for fishing better yet for human transport. We were 140 people on a 16-meter boat!"¹³⁸

Aly was a 23 year old farmer who hadn't attempted to go to Italy yet but was thinking of it since he had a younger brother that was there a year earlier. "Working in the field can't help you make a living, it won't allow me to get married, or build a house or get an apartment, it won't make a living for me."¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Interview in Tatoun with Hady on February 23rd, 2010.

¹³⁸ Interview in Tatoun with Gomaa on February 23rd, 2010.

¹³⁹ Interview in Tatoun with Aly on February 23rd, 2010.

Dyaa was also 23 years old and had already attempted twice to make it to Italy however he was caught once in Alexandria and once in Libya. He had a younger brother and admitted that if they had the chance despite the risks they would try again in order to make a future for themselves. He was by far one of the more outspoken young men that I interviewed and he summed up what everyone had to say eloquently.

I work and I have a degree in communication and I had the opportunity to continue in engineering college but then I left on the journey when I returned I wanted to reapply to the college but they said I wasn't allowed the deadline was within a year. Then he [his brother] was going into the last year of high school and I pulled him out because there's no point. I learned to make ceramic tiles and that's what I work in now. I have both a degree and a vocational skill they told me in Alexandria I can go for a training period of a year and a half. But a year and a half at my age and I pay transportation back and forth, plus at 24 years old time is running out. Then when I graduate from the training center my starting salary would be LE600. I've already been 20 or 21 years in schools then in the end I make LE600 that will be spent on transportation fees if I go to Alexandria. What's the point of working in a good career if it doesn't make a decent living there's no security, I'd have to borrow money to live. Even if I make LE1,000 what will it do for me? What has all this studying and training done for me? Right now I work in tiles. But even LE2,000 or LE3,000 is no longer enough it won't do anything for me.

I fell in love with someone from our village, which is my right. If I get married I need a three-bedroom apartment and at least 100 gm of gold as a dowry. With all due respect, the 100 gm. of gold is LE25,000 and the apartment is another LE25,000 and I make LE2,000 here, not that anyone reaches that kind of salary. But let's assume I make that much and professionals like you tell us that's good. Show me how that can be considered good. I am the eldest and I have a younger brother and a younger sister. My father is retired, so I have to spend on all of them food clothing everything and my personal expenses as a young man, I want to go out and be well dressed all these expenses are spent right away. And we are saying this is a good salary but what have I accomplished for myself. When can I afford to get married? When can I take care of my father and send him to hag, when can I do all this? How?

You are here to make your research and all of you come to research our situation and then how does this benefit us? I'm sorry I'm fed up and I just need to vent. My sister is a graduate from a scientific college she studied blood analysis, the job she's offered in a lab earns her LE300 a month. I'd rather give her the money myself and she can stay home. When my sister was in her last year of high school, she used to take

private lessons for LE25 per class, I used to pay that much for her then she used to go to Cairo University all the way there and in the end she gets paid this ridiculous salary. I took my brother out of high school because I didn't want him to suffer. I knew he'd get very high grades but my sister is a doctor, what more do you want that's higher than this.

I went to a public communication engineering college, the government placed me in it according to my high school scores. I have a degree from the communication center that is used in traffic control of ships at sea. I finished studying at the age of 23, then you tell me go get training for two more years, by then I'll be 25 years old then I make LE600 after the age of 25, then I have to begin looking for a job. It doesn't cover the amount of money I spent on it after all these years of education. I have to accept LE600 salary, honestly it's ridiculous.

Q: What do you see as the solution?

I don't see a solution but we are a country with a government and a system. There are those who can study and make suggestions better than me, more qualified. But you put me in a problematic situation then you ask me to give you a solution. You are the ones who put me in this state. At least I should have a job, there should be some assistance, if there isn't work in the country then they should find us contracts abroad like they used to in the Gulf. They have to place me, they want me to pay for a contract for LE12, 000, if I had that money I would have gotten myself an apartment. Then if I find myself a job or a contract then I am the one solving the problem again. Why do you come to make research, isn't it so that you can find me a solution? You are obliged to study and find me a solution because if I have to give you the answers then I wouldn't need to come and talk to you in the first place. If I had the solution why waste my time and come.

They tell us we have a natural gas shortage and we are among the largest nations in the export of natural gas. Sorry but we are fed up. I'm not saying I want to own a car like other people or own a beach house in the North Coast, I just want the simplest right to get married. For me to get married I need LE100, 000 where can I make this kind of money in Egypt? You give me the solution. Even just LE50, 000 tell me how can I pay for her dowry only, don't worry about the 3-bedroom apartment or anything. You give me a solution. How do I make a living in Egypt? If I make LE2000 maximum and no one makes that much but even if I did how do I manage to save from it enough to get married?

You will tell me you are better off from others in your position, that doesn't do anything for me; it's not a solution. Maybe someone else's father helps support them, but I am the eldest. I've been working since freshmen year in high school so that I can rebuild our house. I swear to God I used to go to school in the morning and work in the after noon and I got my degrees and I used to pay my sister's private lessons. It's not possible that she gets 94% in her grade and I let her drop out. But all this effort where does it lead? You are not the first one to come and do

research here. From 1998 and we've been hearing of research studies that are done about us but where are the results how has it helped us?¹⁴⁰

Adel was also 26 years old, a plumber by profession. He attempted to go to Italy five times and failed. He lived in Libya for eight years and went back and forth throughout, so he managed to marry a relative and make a small house. Recently, however, he could not find any work. He complained about the social upheaval caused by the migration to Italy and how the entire social structure was upside down now with those making money and sending remittances home regardless of their initial social standing becoming a lot better off than those that remained at home. Although he worked occasionally in Cairo and made anywhere from LE1,000 up to LE2,000 there was no job security and there were months where he didn't work at all.

My monthly expenses are around LE2, 000 and I don't even have children yet. I am required far more than my capacity to withstand. I want to migrate right now! I can go back to Libya at least I managed to get married and build a place of my own from the money I earned there. But Libya now is closed for us, there isn't a signal Arab country that requests Egyptian labor any more. All the doors are closed in our faces. It's closed from all directions, North and South. In order to go to Libya you need a contract which costs LE3,000 to acquire and it is forged as well it's not legitimate. Otherwise you can go illegally through Saloum, [on the Western borders of Egypt] in which case they shoot at you or you are imprisoned or deported. There you are so mistreated you have no value and no rights and that is the case for Egyptians in all the Arab countries now.¹⁴¹

Abdel Awy was 26 years old as well, he tried going to Italy four times but failed. A painter by profession he hadn't worked for four months. "There isn't work, anywhere you go it's the same thing people give work to people they already know, their relatives or townsmen. If there were job opportunities no one would risk death. Like this we are

¹⁴⁰ Interview in Tatoun with Dayaa on February 23rd, 2010.

¹⁴¹ Interview in Tatoun with Adel on February 23rd, 2010.

risking our lives.”¹⁴² His father was a migrant in Iraq for 21 years and he returned three months earlier because he could no longer find work.

We don't want money, we just want opportunities so that we can make a living. That's all we want. Employ me in anything give me a job. I don't want to migrate I just want to work. I need to know there's a future. I am a craftsman if I had any position I would know that at the end of the month I had a salary, some sort of security. I have not worked in four months. Two other researchers came and interviewed me before you.¹⁴³

It was obvious that many researchers had come through this village trying to understand the migration phenomenon whether for policy purposes or for development studies but the expectations of those interviewed were reaching their tethers end. They needed actual solutions for the problems they faced rather than theories. As Abdel Awy said:

If there were job opportunities for young men here at home then no one would migrate. There's a saying: *What lead you to the bitterness my boy, that which is even more bitter old man.* I don't have anything here so I am obliged to take the suicide route, correct. If there was an alternative what would make me take this option. But there is no alternative, this is the only route.¹⁴⁴

Ahmed was 24 years old with a vocational diploma in electrical work. He tried to go to Italy in 2008, but failed. His brother was there for six years and recently returned because he didn't make any money. He was 45 years old and also unemployed. “I farm a bit to just cover my costs, there's nothing extra. If I get another chance to migrate I will. I have no other choice. It doesn't matter if one lives or dies it makes no difference either way.”¹⁴⁵

Ramadan was 26 years old and also a painter by profession he tried five times to go to Italy since 2000 but failed.

I work on occasion sometimes in a coffee shop sometimes elsewhere. I got married three months ago. I am the only son among five girls. We don't

¹⁴²Interview in Tatoun with Abdel Awy on February 23rd, 2010.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Interview in Tatoun with Ahmed A. on February 23rd, 2010.

have a house, I rent. If I get a chance I will migrate no matter what. There's a guy called Yasser who is offering a trip for LE40, 000 from Alexandria. Now it's LE40, 000 he just got out of prison and he's starting up the business again. I spoke to him and he told me if I can get five other people he would take me on the journey for free.

My two brothers in law are not working there in Italy for the past three years. People will leave any way from there. I heard that this training school would provide legal work opportunities in Italy...[but] they are concentrating on the teenagers, so we fell through the cracks again...

Everyone here in the village knows everything that goes on there [in Italy], there isn't a single household that doesn't have at least one person in Italy. Regardless of what they do, there will be people that migrate, legally and illegally.¹⁴⁶

Mostafa was 19 years old he tried migrating twice once at 17 years old he tried going through Libya where he was caught and deported back to Egypt and last year he tried going through Alexandria but he was caught on shore. As the youngest in a family of five boys and three girls all of them college graduates Mostafa M. chose to go to vocational school behind his father's back since he intended to travel.

When he [the father] found out he asked me why I wanted to travel, I told him because we can't all stay here we don't have the means to be able to survive. One of us has to provide for the rest because we are five boys and three girls in my family. All my brothers and sisters are teachers except for one who is a lawyer. My brother is 24 years old he's still not married he is a lawyer and he hasn't done anything yet. They all have degrees but no one has money.¹⁴⁷

Mamdouh had three sons in Italy, one with a permit another without and the third was waiting for his papers to be finalized in order to go. He also had a nephew who was an unaccompanied minor in Italy and he explained that the young boys from the village no longer took their parents permission to leave. Some of them were leaving and calling the parents from abroad informing them that they had migrated and that they must sell

¹⁴⁶ Interview in Tatoun with Ramadan on February 23rd, 2010.

¹⁴⁷ Interview in Tatoun with Mostafa on February 23rd, 2010.

whatever property they had at their disposal in order to pay the debt incurred by the journey. Everyone had something to put as a down payment whether it was selling the land or the car or the cow and eventually everyone hoped that the remittances would make it all worthwhile.

He pulled out 500 Euros from his shirt pocket and told me he had just received money from his son through someone who arrived in the village the day before.

No body uses banks at all. My son calls me up and tells me go to so and so he will give you money. I go, I find this person with a book that has everyone's name and amount due. I just got 500 Euros from my other son today. Why should I go to a bank in Cairo and get harassed on the way, maybe even get stolen like it happened to this guy who was ripped off for 14,000 Euros. Instead I just go to the person who has just arrived and receive the money for a small fee. We are all from the same village and they are all in the same city in Milan.¹⁴⁸

His eldest son got married and had children living in the village. He was traveling back and forth between the two countries living six months of the year in Egypt and six months in Italy. His son preferred it that way because living expenses were very high in Italy to support a family, through circular migration he was able to provide comfortably for his family while at the same time keeping them in their own environment. When I asked if he felt a change in his son's attitude since he had migrated. Mamdouh replied, "No he is stable but he makes us feel guilty for the situation we are in. He comes from Europe; everyone has rights everyone is respected. He managed to build a house get married and have children."¹⁴⁹

Mamdouh explained how haphazard things were; some people migrated and succeeded while others failed, some young men returned and were drafted in the military

¹⁴⁸ Interview in Tatoun with Mamdouh on February 23rd, 2010.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

while others got exempted, some made lots of money while still others became more indebted and got poorer. In the end there was no real pattern everyone had the same hope and chance at accomplishing their dream but luck played a big role and policies changed over night.

Migration to Italy began from here in 1970s. In 1976 they were five people who left, I was in Libya at the time, in 1980 they were 20 people 1986 and 1987 there was a constant increase. It boomed in 1998 then it stopped in 2009. It stopped due to the publicity and the awareness campaigns, the new regulations and the new laws and because of the economic crisis in the world and Libya cracked down on illegal migration. Now there's only legal migration, nobody has left illegally since the second half of 2009, around June it all stopped.¹⁵⁰

Development of the Phenomenon

The constant changes in laws and shifts in policy across the Mediterranean influenced the migration flows; whether by temporarily putting a halt on some routes or establishing new ones and at the same time changing the profile of the migrant. There seemed to be a correlation between the increasing phenomenon of Egyptian unaccompanied minors and the increased restrictions placed on adult regular and irregular migrants. Therefore, I returned to Rome in order to verify the correlation by obtaining insight from the perspective of the minors themselves on the issue of irregular migration. The Rome District Office facilitated the procedure upon a request from the Egyptian Embassy allowing me to conduct 28 one on one interviews with Egyptian unaccompanied minors in four different locations.

In addition, a focus group discussion with eight Italian social workers at the Rome District Office and interviews with six operators of centers in which the minors were

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

housed clarified the system that the minors were placed. These interviews highlighted existing problems faced by both the minors and their caretakers trying to adhere to the requirements of new policies. Strict adherence to school attendance and house regulations imposed on the boys' created a conflict of interest for the boys since their sense of obligation towards their families back home required them to break the rules and work in order to send remittances. Yet such behavior frustrated operators and was interpreted as purposely defiant. Cultural barriers and the lack of communication manifested into a sense of discrimination on behalf of the boys.

It was interesting to note that the institutions that housed unaccompanied minors were referred to by different names according to who was being interviewed. The social workers called them "structures or centers", while the operators referred to them as "homes" or "houses" and Egyptians both adults and unaccompanied minors called them "schools" referring to the entire system not just the academic portion of it. Therefore, these terms were used throughout the study interchangeably to refer to the shelters in which the unaccompanied migrants resided during their stay in Italy.

The Welfare System for Unaccompanied Egyptian Minors in Rome

An elaborate description of the system and its workings was provided during the focus group discussion at the Rome District Office as well as during subsequent interviews with social workers that had attended the session and were assisting me in reaching the unaccompanied minors. Although the shelters served all minors, "The first stage shelters are for everyone Italians and foreigners, but 99.9% are foreign minors that are there. So the norm has become that most of the residence are foreign. Social services are available in the municipalities and Rome is divided into 19 municipalities. In each

municipality there is a municipal service that is responsible for all the residence with problems,”¹⁵¹

Q: What if all the houses are full and you have five boys coming in, what do you do then?

First of all we call the houses in Rome, then we call the houses out of Rome until we find a place. So the place can be in Rome or outside of Rome or even outside of Lazio if we don't have a place. It's our responsibility to find a place anywhere starting with the closer then farther.¹⁵²

When asked how this office's work was different from ANCHI, it was explained that, “The difference between us, the municipality and ANCHI is that we have an obligation by law to get the children in custody. If you have an under age child with no parent in the town it is obligatory to get him in a shelter because of course, he can't be left outside on the streets that are not secure. ANCHI can try and find a place but it's not obligatory. And if they don't find a place they call us, because the law requires us to do that.”¹⁵³

Once an unaccompanied minor was in police custody, whether by turning himself in or by being apprehended, authorities then contacted the SOS call center at the Rome District Office, which proceeded in calling all the centers of initial welcome to find an available space for the night. These centers were referred to as ‘centro di prima accoglienza,’ also known as initial or first transition stage shelters. At the time of this research, there were 120 beds in the Rome district for use in the initial arrival stage.

¹⁵¹ Focus group discussion Margherita Occhiuto, Social Assistant responsible for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors' Services at the Rome District Office, March 10th, 2010.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Focus group discussion Francesco Guglemi, Social Assistant Unaccompanied Foreign Minors' Services at the Rome District Office, March 10th, 2010. He was responsible for two centers of initial arrival one of which was Riserva Nuova visited on March 11, 2010.

This is the opportunity first of all to get him a shelter immediately, then the opportunity to know the child and start the *project* that can help him to get on with his life in Italy. After that stage we have the other shelters which are more particular to the *project*. They get all the information, they start knowing the child, so we can also start thinking of what sort of project we can offer. That's the place where they start all the documents and the affidavits for the municipality. That's where all these types of documents start moving on.¹⁵⁴

The *project* refers to the future plans of the child in Italy. This incorporates his insertion into the school system, the language classes he needs to attend as well as the middle school component of the integration requirement, in addition to any vocational training that may be of use to him later on when he outgrows his minor's permit. The term 'project' was also used interchangeably several times to refer to the child himself. It was a term used by the social workers when approaching the file with all the information pertaining to the particular case.

The individual unaccompanied minor has a file. He is in a shelter. We have a project for him. It means he is studying Italian, learning a job, the plan for his future. The project is for his future. We refer to the project of his life.

Q: It's important to define this term because you use it a lot. What does 'the project' entail?

Everything to do with him: medical controls, check ups, documents, school, work these are the principal things and of course if someone is good in sports but that is something extra, so these are the basic needs and they follow up with that.¹⁵⁵

According to this information the District Office then approached different second stage houses where they placed each boy according to the most suitable

¹⁵⁴ Focus group discussion Mercy Chilling Banchetti, Social Assistant, Unaccompanied Foreign Minors' Services at the Rome District Office, also was the translator during the focus group discussion, March 10th, 2010.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

environment for his particular circumstance. This was clarified in observations noted during the interview processes with the boys in the different locations.

The first stage centers had a different type of contract with the municipality than the second stage houses. The first stage centers were obliged to accept any child sent by the District Office so long as they had space. The municipality paid a flat fee per month in order to keep them open regardless of whether the beds were used or not. Then there was another rate that was paid according to the number of actual residents for that month. “All these houses have an authorization to work. There’s a regional law, which gives the criteria for work, after they have all their paperwork then they can start working with us. If they don’t have their papers they can’t work,”¹⁵⁶ explained Occhiuto.

Both types of houses were private sector, run for profit, but the terms of payment and the services rendered were different in each case. In the semi-autonomous system the residents were being prepared for entering the real world and had to begin to fend for themselves. They were supplied with room and board only; whereas, in the family house set-up, all the needs of the residents were financed by the operator, including amenities such as haircuts, clothing and allowances. The problem in the system according to social workers was the quality control of the running of the houses. Well run houses that spent a lot of the money on the children received the same amount of money as poorly run houses that did not offer half the accommodations. This was done for logistic purposes because it was impossible to have different pricing for levels in accommodations. However, the social workers were the ones allocating the boys throughout the

¹⁵⁶ Focus group discussion Margherita Occhiuto, Social Assistant responsible for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors’ Services at the Rome District Office, March 10th, 2010.

municipality; therefore, if a house was not performing well they could simply abstain from assigning it any residents and it would go out of business or they could send them the most difficult cases.

The centers are for older boys while casa familia [family house] takes fewer boys and it's more of a protected setting. The Commune [District Office] pays for both, but in the Center we pay a flat fee regardless of how many boys are hosted whereas in the Casa we pay per child. There are private entrepreneurs who run these places as businesses but there are criteria that they must meet in order to get permission to be assigned responsibility for the boys. We as social workers for the District Office check on these places regularly. The complete files of the boys are in the District Office but copies of necessary documents go to the structures; this includes medical records, official documents and the like. The casa familia charges 70 Euros per head versus the centre which charges 30 Euros since it is semi-autonomous so it has fewer expenses. Of course, not every casa is like the other, some are better while others are worse. Ideally speaking there should be a difference in cost or payment, however for the sake of the system and the logistics we are obliged to pay all the same amount.¹⁵⁷

Once the initial stage was over, the District Office assigned the unaccompanied minor to the second stage houses, either a semi-autonomous center for older boys or the family house for younger residents. The operator of the structure was then considered the boys' guardian; with assistance and monitoring from the District office, the operator was then responsible for completing permits and managing all the boys' affairs including making sure that he followed all the regulations and laws in Italy. This entailed attending language classes and fulfilling the middle school requirement as well as ensuring that the boy does not work illegally in the black market known as 'lavoro nero'.

In addition to getting a minor's permit, the operator would assist a boy in finding a job with a legal contract when possible, as well as help him switch the minor's permit

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Alessandro Uberti, Professional Educator, Rome District Office. Interview conducted in the car trip to Atina on March 12th, 2010. He is responsible for 80 unaccompanied minors.

to a work permit if the young man was able to receive a legitimate work contract after the age of 18.

Italian Social Workers' Perspective

An operator's disposition towards a boy under his/her authority was of critical importance to the child's future prospects in Italy. Therefore, when a boy did not follow house rules set by the operator or did not fulfill any of the above obligations, the operator's could simply delay the required paperwork. In some cases this resulted in a sense of discrimination from the Egyptian boys' perspective that enhanced the sense of futility towards the system that was not expediting legitimate work possibilities. Thus, it encouraged the boy even further in seeking out his own job opportunities, which more often than not meant working without a contract. This inevitably lead to further rule breaking that was met with even less cooperation on both sides culminating in a cycle of resentment and distrust between some operators and certain resident boys under their care.

Therefore, the most common conflict of interest faced by Egyptian boys in this system had to do with the issue of working with a legitimate contract which entailed fluency in language, working hours which were suitable for their age that allowed them to go to school and proper registration for insurance purposes. However, the work that they were able to find was usually on the black market only, due to existing networks that offered them day-to-day jobs without insurance or contracts at much lower salary rates; such as loading trucks in the vegetable market.

Lots of them work in vegetable shops in the market, some are construction here but it's very little. The general market is outside of Rome. That is where all the vegetables and fruits are distributed in town.

The type of work is very dangerous for a young boy because you have to take things from one lorry to the other. [It entails] moving very heavy boxes. We tell them that they can't do certain types of jobs, it's a matter of safety. Of course the work is late at night also because the fruits have to be there early in the morning ready for distribution to the shops in town. So the reason why it's not allowed is because it is at night and it is very dangerous for them.

That is why you have to have a contract because if you hurt yourself or anything happens in work, if you have a contract you have insurance. If you don't have a contract you don't have insurance and you don't have any legal appeal on what happens.¹⁵⁸

Numerous comments regarding this issue at the District office illustrated its significance:

Occhiuto: They don't want to go to the school they want to go to work out of rules.

Gugelmi: The problem is that all they want to do is to find work.

Luongo: The reason why they don't listen to what we say is that they come here with a big debt due to the cost of the journey. What happens is that they get the pressure from the family to have the money back. So of course, if we ask them to stay in a shelter and go to school for six months without working, they are under pressure because their mandate is to get the money back. That is the point, so it becomes difficult to work with them on other basis of legality and rules.

Banchetti: You are allowed to work from the age of sixteen but of course the first thing you should do to have a legal job with a contract is to know the language. You have to spend some time to learn Italian and then find work. So that is the critical point. The time they have to spend without working in order to go to school and learn Italian. The other critical point is that finding work is not so easy, working with a contract.

So what we do is, all the shelters have people helping them to find work. Of course, they can only find work with contracts that have insurance and that means it takes time. We are continuously asking them to wait; wait to learn Italian, wait because you have to find a job with a contract and that's when they start working outside the rules.

Uberti: They want to work in any way first of all because of the pressure that was mentioned before and because they know that with the new law

¹⁵⁸ Focus group discussion Mercy Chilling Banchetti, Social Assistant, Unaccompanied Foreign Minors' Services at the Rome District Office, also was the translator during the focus group discussion, March 10th, 2010.

[which requires them to have been in Italy for a minimum of 3 years before the age of 18 in order to transfer the minor's permit to a permit with a legitimate work contract] most of them will not have a permission to stay. 'I won't have any document anyway, so I have a shelter now, I've got to find any job. First of all you are not going to help me more than you can now because I'll never have permission to stay. So in any case I'll have to work outside the rules.'

Magini: There's a huge Egyptian community, the boy that just arrived, doesn't want to speak Italian because in any case the market is a big place there's a huge community in Ostia but also in other places in all of Rome. So he goes from the shelters to these vegetable markets that don't need the language and the larger community already protects him. This is a particular situation in which Egyptians find themselves. Also the Bangladeshis have the same case but the Afghanis don't have this situation.

The Egyptian community is big. It allows them to get a job without learning Italian or going to school because anyway they are going to find a job selling vegetables somewhere. That is one of the issues that makes it difficult to work with the children because they know that even if they don't speak Italian they are going to find a job because there's someone here to help them of their community. So of course when we try and tell them something their real reference is the community it is not us.¹⁵⁹

Another problem cited by the social workers at the District Office and reconfirmed by the operators that were interviewed later was that the large presence of Egyptian boys in recent years meant that their numbers were higher in any given shelter. This led to their sense of solidarity, which intimidated both operators and residents from other nationalities as well. It was stated on several occasions that when Egyptian boys were taken on an individual basis they adhered to regulations far more than when they were in a group setting. When asked why they could not all be placed in particular houses together, social workers responded by explaining that the aim of the system was one of integration into society rather than segregation, thus it would be self-defeating to

¹⁵⁹ Focus group discussion Banchetti, Guglelmi, Antonella Luongo, Social Assistant, Unaccompanied Foreign Minors' Services at the Rome District Office, Marta Magini, Social Assistant, Unaccompanied Minors Rome District Office, Occhiutto, Uberti, March 10th, 2010.

do so. When asked why they were not placed individually in each of the houses, Banchetti stated, “We would love to do that but we can’t. The numbers are too high, the huge group of Egyptians and the number of places that we’ve got [don’t match], we are stuck. We can’t distribute them all apart. When we have place that’s what we do. But when the houses are full you might find a house that has five or six Egyptians just because there’s no place to distribute them. We would love to do that but it’s not easy.”¹⁶⁰

Therefore the District office was collaborating with the Egyptian Embassy to try and manage the boys’ behavior in order to maintain a certain level of adherence to the regulations.

The reason why we are working with the Embassy is that with the new Ministry of Family and Population [in Egypt] we are trying to give the situation to the Embassy in certain problem cases. There is no penal level, they don’t do anything dangerous for other people [the boys] they are just badly behaved. It creates problems in the house and it makes it difficult to discipline everybody else. The work with the Embassy is to target the family back home because the children here will not listen to us but they have great respect for their families. So the point is if you don’t behave we have the possibility to get the information to your family and that’s where we asked the Embassy to help us through the Ministry of Family and Population.¹⁶¹

As a result of working outside the rules the Egyptian boys were not fulfilling the school attendance requirement, which was critical to their permit. In addition, a common complaint by operators was that they did not complete assigned house chores nor did they show proper respect towards female employees. “There’s a very big problem with the

¹⁶⁰ Banchetti, focus group Rome District Office, March 10th, 2010.

¹⁶¹ Guglelmi focus group Rome District Office, march 10th, 2010.

women working in the houses because they don't recognize the authority of a woman,"¹⁶² said Banchetti.

Having a great number of Egyptian children in the shelters makes them feel stronger because they have a good group in the houses and that's a difference from the other children in the houses. They are intimidating to the other children and they feel superior to the children from other African countries or Bangladesh because they feel more western than the other children and this makes problems. That's when we started working with the Embassy on this problem trying to collaborate to keep them within the rules and respecting the other children,¹⁶³

My understanding was that unaccompanied minors were the responsibility of the Italian government; so, long as there was no information on where they were from originally, given the best interests of the child, they could not be repatriated.

Q: If you know where the families are in Egypt why don't you send them home? I thought the whole point is that they are unaccompanied minors and you don't know where their families are. Isn't it the case that if you know where their families are you can repatriate them?

Banchetti: They give us the address.

Occhiuto: The law says we can't do that. What we can do is ask for the Committee for Unaccompanied Minors, a national committee, and they have the possibility of getting to the families in the country of origin, talk to them and see what the situation is there. Then they write a report to us, if they say there is a proper situation, the boy can go back. We've got the right to ask the boy if he wants to go back. But if he doesn't want to go back, we can't force him to. So we can have the information on the family but if he says he doesn't want to go back then we can't send him back.

Q: So now that is why you can communicate with the Embassy, they [unaccompanied minors] no longer have the fear that the Embassy can send them back if they know where their parents are, is that correct?

Luongo: Exactly, so we have the address of the family and sometimes we even have telephone numbers in Gharbeyya. They give you the address and then they give you a wrong telephone number but it's always the same number we don't know what that means, if anything.

¹⁶²Banchetti, focus group Rome District Office, March 10th, 2010.

¹⁶³ Uberti, focus group Rome District Office, March 10th, 2010.

The problem was compounded by the increased restrictions since August 2009 in Italy, that were placed on the regularization of minors once they reached the legal age of 18.

Occiuto: We have a problem with the rules, we are not clear on them ourselves yet. That's our problem.

Q: What have they said in August that was new that changed your way of working?

Banchetti: It's not that they've changed things, it's that they are stricter in implementation. This three years requirement in the law was already there but lets say it wasn't implemented. We wrote to the police officers [previously] saying that this child was in a project even for a year, it was ok for them. The law was there but it wasn't so strict. In August, the same rule has become very very strict. So now they say if you don't have the three years, we are not going to give you the permit to stay. They've just enforced it.

Q: Before August you used to be able to give the permit to stay?

Luongo: It was a card that we could play because we were able to be flexible even if the stay was a few months we could get them a permit.

Q: You used to take the child and go to the immigration office to get them their permit?

Banchetti: We still do that but the only thing is that now we are certain that they will not give us that piece of paper because of the restriction. Before the rule was there, but there was lots of flexibility in mind.

Q: That's all that has changed?

Luongo: It means that the 294 [registered unaccompanied Egyptian minors in 2009] we already know that when they become 18 they are not going to be given the permits because they're 16 or so they already know they are never going to have this piece of paper. We will keep them until they are 18.

Q: But you know that they will therefore become clandestine and irregular because there's no way for them to be legally here after 18?

Banchetti: Yes, what we are wishing that the law wouldn't be active immediately that they'd give the boys that have been here for a couple of years a chance. That's a great problem because for now we know that most of them will never have a regular stay.

Q: So we are back to the point of that they don't have any interest in following the rules because the law is not going to help them anyway?

Banchetti: Exactly.

Magini: So we are actually spending all this money and energy to create this clandestine situation. It makes no sense.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴Focus group discussion Banchetti, Luongo, Magini, Occhiutto, March 10th, 2010.

A Debate of the System

The system for taking care of unaccompanied minors was initially set up after WWII for Italian orphans. Large institutions were responsible for the protection and care of Italian children who lost their parents and guardians during the war. “The law changed eight years ago, it stated that the institutions which take care of children must be smaller, large orphanages were no longer accepted because the children adjusted better to smaller houses. But then there was an increase in cost between having five or thirty children it was a matter of economies of scale. There was a need for many more houses.”¹⁶⁵

Also, there was a change in the occupants of the houses, far fewer Italian boys were currently in the system as opposed to foreigners, that required more then assistance from the system. During the road trip to Atina, which took over an hour and a half, I conducted an extensive interview with Uberti, who was among the participants in the focus group discussion at the Rome District Office. He explained various aspects of the system. Among the most interesting points brought forth was the economic benefit of maintaining assistance within the Italian territory rather than channeling it towards funding development projects in Egypt. Although hypothetically it may cost Italy less than half the amount being paid for assistance if it were geared toward development in the sending country, the full amount of assistance in the receiving country was more beneficial to the economy. In other words, 70 Euros per child in Rome spent on assistance, was income generating for businessmen who own the shelters, operators who run them and social workers that follow up on the children. In addition, to many more

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Alessandro Uberti, Professional Educator, Rome District Office. Interview conducted in the car trip to Atina on March 12th, 2010.

jobs that were also influenced by the services they provided for the system, such as the teachers and trainers that prepared the boys for a successful integration process. Along with the caretakers that assisted in the running of the shelters were the staff, the cooks and housekeepers that worked in three eight-hour shifts per structure throughout the week. But if the assistance was to be cut down and replaced for example by investing 40 Euros towards development of a vocational school in the village where a boy came from then it would be 40 Euros outside the Italian economy altogether.

Uberti had his own suggestions of how to improve the current system. He believed that the Egyptian Embassy could help persuade Egyptian businessmen in Italy who had numerous restaurants, stores and restoration businesses to participate in taking part of the responsibility for some of the boys, in return for financial assistance from the District Office. The suggestion of a foster home type system was also brought forth during the focus group discussion with the Rome District Office personnel. The idea was that Egyptian entrepreneurs in Italy were more likely to understand the unaccompanied minors from their own country and hence would be better suited to be their caretakers rather than the current shelters. In return, the District Office would not only provide financial support but also assistance in any possible manner.

This would serve the best interests of the child in two ways. First, it was already clear that children adjusted better in smaller houses by virtue of the same principal as mentioned above, given the larger orphanages and the smaller houses. Therefore, a foster home set up, according to this perspective, was in the best interest of a child over that of a casa famiglia that served nine or ten children at a time. Second, it would stand to reason that having a guardian of the same national origin would improve communication with

the child, in turn increasing the chances of successful integration. This would resolve some the difficulties faced by social workers when handling certain Egyptian boys. Also it would relieve operators who complained of difficulties in running their shelters due to a large presence of one particular nationality over the others.

Given that network theory was used to explain the presence of boys in certain locations, then the chances of having either a family member, a relative or even a neighbor that would be willing to take on such responsibility may be feasible. However, the success of such a proposition would ultimately depend on the cost/benefit that it would bring to the potential guardian. It is difficult to imagine that anyone would take on such responsibility unless the District Office really makes it worth his while by serving the proposed guardian's own self interest in some way. Otherwise, if the potential guardian had difficulty in attaining his residence, the likelihood of jeopardizing it for a problem minor would be out of the question.

Housing of Egyptian Unaccompanied Minors: the Boys' Perspective

Three of the four centers visited were over an hour away from the center of the city. Each of the centers had their own rules and regulations to be followed with daily household chores distributed among residents. These were similar in all of the structures visited. Professional cooks prepared meals twice a day for residents yet the boys were responsible for setting the tables and cleaning up after themselves. The boys needed to be in the houses by a certain time, usually 7:30 PM for younger residents and a little later for the older ones. No one was allowed to spend the night out without permission from the operators. There was a continuous 24-hour adult presence in all of the structures

divided into three eight-hour shifts. The biggest problem faced between the boys and the operators was the issue of school attendance, which interfered with the smooth running of the centers and placed the boys in constant trouble adding to the stress that they already found themselves under.

A Family House, Campino

I was taken straight from the District Office to the first family house where I interviewed eight Egyptian boys. The director of the house, Antonio Trobia, was an elderly gentleman over 60 years old. He had been in this business for five years and ran three other houses in the area. Two locations had the capacity of hosting up to seven boys and one location where the interviews were conducted had a capacity of up to nine boys in total. However, according to the director they were not at full occupancy at the time of the interview. The director had a fatherly disposition and was empathetic to the situation of the young men under his care, yet he had similar complaints to the ones reported above by the District Office. He seemed to sympathize with the predicament in which the boys found themselves but he was also concerned with keeping his license. He was obliged by law to report any of the young men who did not attend the school or who worked without a contract, in addition to having to call the police every time a young man did not make it home by his curfew. The strictness by which the rules were expected to be enforced was a recent development according to Trobia who had received instructions from the District Office only five days prior to the interview. He was still trying to find solutions that would accommodate both the young men's needs and those of the District Office.

All of the boys interviewed had specific circumstances. However, there was an underlying commonality in their experiences. Their families were in financial need, not

dire poverty but on the way there. The situation back home necessitated drastic measures in order to ensure the survival of the rest of the family within certain economic stature. Inflationary prices and a consistent rise in the cost of living due to remittances from previous migrants to Italy, threatened the status quo to the point of jeopardizing, in their perception, the rest of the families' security. Most of the young men had sisters' dowries to consider and younger brothers' educational expenses to worry about. Many sited their parents age and lack of capacity to generate sufficient income for all their children's needs as a reason for their own decision to embark on the journey.

Almost all the interviewees denied pressure from the family as the reason for their departure. On the contrary, they all said that they had to insist and persuade their parents to allow them to leave. In all the cases, the family had to go into debt in order to pay for the journey with the understanding that the debt would be repaid once the young man found a job and started sending the money back home. Hence, the absolute need to work was reinforced in all the interviews and the frustration with the requirements of the system that delayed the process was evident. Often during the interviews the young men explained that they were not in Italy to go to school. They were there to work. Other than learning to speak Italian, they felt that the educational requirement was a waste of time. They could not fulfill both the requirements placed upon them by the system and the obligations they felt towards their families. Therefore, being placed between a rock and a hard spot, to say the least, they chose to attempt to fulfill the initial obligation of returning the debt rather than following the rules.

It was observed that there was a main difference between how they perceived themselves as 'responsible men' or 'bread-winners' and how they were perceived as

‘children’ by the authorities. The irony was that the only reason they were allowed to remain in Italy was because they were still under age minors. Therefore, there were rules and obligations that they were expected to adhere to by virtue of that fact. Namely, they were expected to go to school, they were not allowed to work unless under particular circumstances as accepted by the law and they had to respect the regulations of the shelter they were staying in. There was a direct conflict of interest between the two sets of obligations in which the boys found themselves and therefore they were evidently frustrated with their lives. Despite the good intentions of both sides, their families and the Italian government, the conflict placed undue pressure on these boys and there was no sense of security for them.

The table below summarizes the profiles of the young men interviewed in the first shelter visited.

Name	Age	Location of origin in Egypt	Route	Date of arrival in Italy	Reason for migration	Significant quote
Ibrahim	18	Kafr Kela El Bab, Gharbeyya	Plane to Libya, boat to Lampedusa	03/ 29/ 2009	Replicating experience of others in village	The days for playing games are in the past.
Ahmed	17.2	Korama, Gharbeyya	Plane to Libya, boat to Lampedusa	11/2008	Replicating experience of others in village, building the family house & helping to save for 2 sisters’ future dowries	When I renew my papers then I will go home.
Mohamed	18.1	Kafr Kela El Bab, Gharbeyya	Plane to Libya, boat to Sicily	One year	Father retired, supports 4 younger siblings.	But I didn’t come here to make papers, I came to make money.
Osama	17	unspecified	Walked to Libya from Marsa Matruh,	Winter 2009	Did not say.	They want money but there’s nothing I can do while I’m in the school, I

			boat to Sicily			can't go out and work.
Ateya	18	Kafr Kela El Bab, Gharbeyya	Plane to Libya, boat to Lampedusa	10/2008	Wanted to build a house of his own.	People go down to Egypt to get married then they come back to stay for 6 or 7 months then they go down again, it's normal. I can go down every couple of months as if I'm working in Sharm El Sheikh.
Gammal	17	Gharbeyya	Plane to Libya, boat to Lampedusa	Year and a half	Father retired, supports 5 younger siblings, 3 of which are girls that need doweries.	There's no time, I can't go to school and work at the same time, I can only do one of them.
Hassan	17	Kafr Kela El Bab, Gharbeyya	Plane to Libya, boat to Sicily	9/2008	In our area one erat is LE100,000! If your neighbor has a member of his family in Italy and the next neighbor and the next, everything is getting more expensive, life is getting more expensive what are you going to do. That's what made me come.	I was a kid but inside myself I was not a child. I have to take responsibility. So thank God I was working and I was spending in the house but I found everything getting expensive and my friends kept leaving and I stayed behind.
Ahmed	17.6	Kafr Kela El Bab, Gharbeyya	Plane to Libya, boat to Lampedusa	2/2009	Five sisters no brothers needed to support family.	The problem is that their laws need time and we don't have time.

At the end of the day, after all the interviews were conducted it was dark outside and all the boys insisted on walking me to the train station where they handed me over in the care of three other young Egyptian boys, who had not been a part of the study. However, those who had been interviewed told those on the train to take responsibility for my safety and ensure my arrival. As the Egyptian saying went, *you can take the person out of the village but you can't take the village out of the person!* These were, after all, Egyptian men and to leave me alone after dark in a strange area was not the right thing to do according to their upbringing.

The Termini Station was the main central station in which trains and metros from all over the vicinity intercepted. The boys mentioned it in almost all of the interviews as the location to which they arrived in Rome after their respective escapes from the initial houses in which they were placed across Italy. Once they were in Termini Station, either they contacted their friends or relatives to pick them up or they turned themselves directly to the authorities at the station based on the information they received from their existing networks. Regardless of when they turn themselves in, the process was the same: they were informed of the benefits of being registered in the system and more often than not Termini was the location identified to commence this process. Termini Station was also known as an unsafe location after dark due to the drug dealing, prostitution and illegal activities that were carried on in the station, hence the youths' hesitation at abandoning me in this location.

The three young men who had been charged with the responsibility of escorting me to Termini Station, disregarded their Friday night plans and insisted on taking me all the way back to the center of Rome, a sacrifice by teenage standards of any culture. After

arriving at the Termini Station the young men escorted me through the maze of the station. One of the boys offered me his 'pass' which at the time I did not understand, while the other boy stopped him warning that if caught this would lead to trouble with the authorities. At the ticket vending machine the boys insisted on paying my ticket, joking that the machine would not take my money and they refused profusely any reimbursement. They explained later that each of the unaccompanied minors' had a free public transportation ticket allowing access to buses, trains and metro rails throughout the month. These were made available to them on a regular basis, however some shelters used this as a form of incentive and control over the unaccompanied minors.

During the train trip, I discovered that two of the young men had been in France, as irregular migrants and had chosen to make their way to Italy in order to try their luck at finding jobs, they were both under 18 years old. One was very optimistic while the other was extremely pessimistic in their views on life in Europe. The third young man was living with his parents who had legally migrated to Italy several years before. No formal interviews were conducted with these young men, although the economic and political situation in Egypt was discussed as well as their experiences both in France and Italy.

Having arrived at the destination almost an hour later, it was evident that neither of the two unaccompanied minors had ever seen the Spanish Steps nor the Fontana Di Trevi, unlike the young man who lived with his parents. I insisted on showing them these two sites as a form of appreciation for their generosity and kindness. It was clear that these boys never had time for sightseeing or leisure. They had their missions of survival and it did not entail such luxuries. They were in one of the most beautiful cities of the

world and yet they had never seen any of the sites. They did not realize how many Egyptian obelisks adorned the streets of Rome in memory of their glorious civilization. Their world was one of irregular migration with debts to pay, paperwork to complete and responsibilities to fulfill and yet they took the time to be generous with a total stranger. This characteristic was a common Egyptian trait in the past, yet in today's world of irregular migration it was hard to imagine its survival. All I had been hearing were the flaws and shortcomings of these boys, their disrespect and lack of obedience to regulations. Their life experiences so far were harsh, back home and in Italy. They faced death in their respective journeys; they had to develop a strong enough shell to survive but to have held on to this trait after all they had been through was the only light in this never ending tunnel.

A First Stage Shelter, Riserva Nuova

The second location where interviews were conducted was in a 'first stage shelter.' This particular structure was extremely new and built for the specific purpose of hosting unaccompanied migrant minors as an emergency shelter for the district of Rome. A high increase in the number of arriving minors in 2008 placed tremendous pressure on the existing shelters available in this region, necessitating the establishment of Riserva Nuova with specific parameters. As a first stage shelter it was mandated to provide accommodations for anyone sent by the District Office. The government paid for the building and the operator was paid by a local government cooperative of the fifth district. "The government in Rome cannot employ in a direct way so they use this local district,"¹⁶⁶ explained Pantani. It was a semi-autonomous structure, providing minimum

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Marina Pantani, Education Coordinator & Counselor, Riserva Nuova, March 11, 2010.

services, and the boys were semi-independent and had fewer restrictions placed upon them. The boys were older and about to leave the system altogether. As of the date of the interview 15 employees were responsible for 37 boys while the center had the capacity for hosting 50 boys altogether.

It was clear by the graffiti on the metro cars and station walls that the Riserva Nuova was in an area in the outskirts of town. Being the last stop on the metro line indicated how far out from the center of Rome it was. I was met at the metro station by two of the social workers from Riserva Nuova because it was explained that it would be very difficult to reach the center by Taxi or other public transportation. During the car trip, which took another half hour, the social worker explained that this was a low-income area and it was why the center was placed in this location.

I recalled the over-crowded streets of the village of Tatoun and could only presume that the remoteness alone of this location would have an effect on the boys living here. Already I had heard several complaints from boys regarding the difference in climate. They referred to the harshness of the long winters that made working even more difficult to endure. They pointed to the mountain tops and recalled how the snow covered everything earlier in the year. One boy said that he had to drag himself to work while he was sick despite very cold weather because he was afraid of loosing his job, a risk he could not afford. In another shelter, Mohamed, a boy from Gharbeyya recalled how busy the streets of his village were at all hours of the day and night. He reminisced about the coffee shop that was always open and busy with familiar people, his face lit up as he spoke. Then his tone changed as he recalled his current location where everything

was closed by early evening, I could tell he was homesick. He was able to put to words what most of them felt but were trying to subdue.

The center was composed of several buildings, which were plain modern structures no higher than three stories each. The first impression was how clean the place was kept, there was a central reception area that had a television set with a gaming device and a sofa where some young Egyptian boys were sitting along with boys from Bangladesh. The administration had prepared a room in which the interviews were conducted. Six boys in total were interviewed individually in this particular center.

The table below summarizes the profiles of the young men interviewed in the second shelter visited.

Name	Age	Location of Origin in Egypt	Route	Date of Arrival in Italy	Reasons for Migration	Significant Quote
Dawood	17.6	Kafr Kela El Bab, Gharbeyya	Walked to Libya, boat to Lampedusa	01/2009	7 siblings, 5 girls & 2 boys younger, father had a malignant tumor needed expensive treatment.	There are no guarantees your breath comes in and you are never sure you'll live to take the next one.
Naguib	17.3	Zeifta, Shoubra Melis, Gharbeyya	Plane to Sudan also to Turkey then boat to Greece finally plane to Italy. (took 6 mnths.)	Two months earlier	Father unemployed with 2 brothers & 2 sisters all younger.	I am not comfortable I am not happy here, I want to be with people that are like me, my age who want to go to the school.
Abdel Fatah	18	Shoubra Melis, Gharbeyya	Boat from Alexandria to Sicily	Six months earlier	Father deceased, 2 brothers & 2 sisters, supports all of them.	Depending on how things work out I will return

						when I make enough money to cover myself.
Salem	18.2	Did not say.	Boat Libya to Lampedusa	One year & 2 mnths	I came because my friends used to call me and tell me it's a nice country and there's work.	When I secure my siblings I can think about myself at the end.
Essam	18.3	Korama, Gharbeyya	Plane to Libya boat to Lampedusa	1/2009	I had seen the people in our village who came back from Italy with money so I thought there were better chances here.	I give myself time I don't calculate it with a certain amount of money.
Saiid	17.9	Alexandria	Boat from Libya to Lampedusa	11/2008	They [parents] worry about money all the time so I want to help.	After being here I think it's hard to be satisfied with any amount of money one can make in Egypt.

Pantani emphasized that Egyptian boys opted to work in the vegetable market since they made more money there faster than working with a contract and they did not need to speak Italian, which would have limited their options even further.

When I arrived here in December there were always fights between Egyptians and people coming from Bangladesh and Afghanistan. I don't believe very much in the word 'integration' so we decided to divide them, we put people from Bangladesh with other people from Bangladesh and Afghanis with Afghanis and Egyptians with Egyptians, now we don't have anymore trouble. This idea of integrating cannot be done. When they saw that we respect and recognize the culture then they stopped fighting and now we promote the 'good neighbor' idea. And it works.

Q: I asked this question at the District office why don't you keep each nationality together rather than force them on each other? They said that the aim of the policy is integration not segregation.

PANTANI: It's not politically correct. But this is an idea that comes from people who are not in contact with reality. Anyway if they want to be integrated they have to be with Italian culture not with Bengali culture. They came to Italy, right.

We cannot put them together they are very different. This was a very good idea now we don't have any more trouble. They respect one another and they don't fight anymore.

The apartments are now the same nationality but the buildings are mixed. Before they used to put inside the apartments different nationalities, Egyptians, Afghanis, Bengali and Africans in the rooms all together, so they fight, they steal, they don't get along at all. Now from the 14th of December we separated them and they don't fight or steal.

People who work in social projects don't like this kind of thing because they believe in integration. So if you don't reflect upon these things or stop and think then when you have someone coming from Egypt you never put them with another person from Egypt, instead they put them with someone from Ghana. So he will become angry, now they relax. It was like a war here. When we decided to do this they were happy. We decide that the message was different, 'we don't want you to live and stay together but you have to respect each other.' And this worked. Before in the T.V. room they never watched television together now they started.¹⁶⁷

The rooms were one-bedroom apartments or suites with their own bathroom. At the entrance of the apartment was a spacious living room area with an open kitchen and a small T.V. There was no furniture in the room just one wooden closet. When asked why there wasn't any seating in front of the T.V. unit, the boys replied that they used the sofa bed inside the room where three of them slept. They used loose portable chairs to sit in front of the T.V. The place was well lit with two balconies, one on each side of the apartment. There was one to the left of the entrance and one outside the bedroom in which the boys had their washed clothes hanging. There was one bathroom per unit and the boys informed me that they used the downstairs living area to watch T.V. and play games, (Play Station) when they wanted. There was also a common kitchen and dining

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

area that was available for their use. However, in this center residents were not obliged to eat at particular times, as they were in Campino, since it was semi-autonomous.

One strange observation noted the lack of doorknobs on all the common bathroom doors in the central area! When asked the reason for this, the boys replied that they were removed for security purposes. The only bathroom that had a doorknob was the one in the administration room, which guests were allowed to use but not the boys. It was noted that this was also the case in the other shelters that were visited, illustrating the security issues that needed to be dealt with on a daily basis.

Although the administration was trying to cope with strenuous circumstances as best they could, the difficulty in communication and the difference in priorities lead to misperceptions that caused further alienation. Among the complaints of the boys were that when anyone misbehaved everyone was reprimanded regardless of who was to blame. As I told Pantani on our way to the Riserva Nuova, the situation was similar to our car trip. We were all in the same car heading towards the same destination but were each looking out our own window and so we saw different things on the same journey. At the end of the day she referred back to this comment.

The people watching different windows and that's the truth. For me it could be about the people coming from Egypt. They pay to come here, they have to support their families and then they have to go back. So it will be much easier to have them in this way than to propose schools and things like this that they don't want. We spend more money on this we should do different things. We should help them go straight to their dream and then go home.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Pantani, Riserva Nuova, March 11, 2010.

Insight from Atina

The third location visited was the farthest of the four. The Rome District Office had organized interviews with boys from two different locations in Atina, along with three operators that manage them. Uberti explained that there were 8 or 9 operators in this area with 30 places for unaccompanied minors in total. However, not all were occupied at the time of the interview. The boys' complete files were at the Rome District Office. Each file contained a provisional check up with individual health information including an x-ray of the wrist that determined each boy's age. It also contained all the information on the child following his transfer from one location to the next. Each location had its' own medical doctor that provided medical care for any of the boys as required.

I was met by six Egyptian boys and three operators at Casa di Tom, a family house in Atina. Interviews were conducted on an individual basis in a closed room with each of the young men while the operators were interviewed together in the presence of the social worker at the end of the day. The remoteness of the location and the harshness of the environment added to the sense of isolation of this particular location. Surrounded by mountains on all sides, the house was nestled above a small town out of reach from anything familiar. The tension between administration and residents was the highest I had encountered. Each side enumerated shortcomings in the others' behavior, the lack of transparency and communication leading to resentment on both sides.

Among the indiscretions cited by the operators were: consistent rudeness of Egyptian boys to the administrators especially the younger females, bullying of other boys from different nationalities, refusal to adhere to house rules, vulgar and indecent

gestures, use of bad language in both Italian and Arabic, trashing of articles that were purchased by administrators for the boys' use such as clothes and shoes that were not to their liking. Also, theft was mentioned as was a yelling and kicking of furniture as a sign of objection. As was mentioned previously complaints were filed to the District Office regarding several residents. The boys mentioned were reported as having stated that females were there for serving them only, which offended the female administrators tremendously. They repeatedly pointed to the fact that they were in Italy only to 'make money' and often cursed at the host country, which again offended administrators.

However, the operators acknowledged that when the boys were taken on an individual basis they were a lot more cooperative than when they were in a group setting, which was when the problems arose. They wanted to understand why the boys acted the way they did and asked me many questions since I had gotten to interview each one of the boys extensively and was of the same cultural background. They wanted to identify behavior that was based on culture versus that of up-bringing. There was an obvious lack of communication between residents and operators. It was observed at the end of the discussion that a pensive attitude replaced the initial defensive one on both sides. It would have been interesting to interview residents from other nationalities in order to compare the influence of location on behavior.

On the other hand, the boys referred to preferential treatment towards other nationalities and discrimination towards Egyptians in particular, pointing to the delay in their paperwork for permits and lack of assistance in finding employment. They complained about the food and that they were not allowed to eat pork, yet it was sometimes offered to them as another example of how their needs were not taken into

consideration. However, this was denied by operators who admitted to not offering *halal* food because it was not available in such a remote area. They pointed to the fact that Moslems from other nationalities were “not so picky”. It must be noted however, that despite all the complaints on both sides, in most of the interviews the boys cited that they were treated with more respect in Italy than they were in Egypt and that the behavior of Italians was for the most part more Islamic than some Moslems, insinuating honorability and charitably.

The table below summarizes the profiles of the young men interviewed in the third shelter visited.

Name	Age	Location of Origin in Egypt	Route	Date of Arrival in Italy	Reasons for Migration	Significant Quote
Mohamed	17.8	Kafr Kela El Bab	Plane to Libya boat to Lampedusa	12/2008	Life in Egypt was no good... I came from the hardship I saw back home.	I didn't explain to them anything when I left to greet my brother. I didn't know how to speak Italian and I didn't know what I could or couldn't say, so I got in trouble.
Salama	17.6	Beny Helal, Sharkkeya	Libya boat to Sicily	8/2008	Supports family, father deceased, needs to build house & assist in financing marriage of 2 older siblings.	My eldest brother went to work when he was 13.6 he left school to become a farmer in order to support the rest of us, so it's time that I do my bit and help him. He is 21 years old now. I came because I'm a minor and I can make papers but he wouldn't be able to because he is over the age.
Mahmoud	16.5	Kafr El El Bab, Gharbeya	Walked to Libya boat to	01/2009	Money, my parents said whoever wants to get	They [parents] keep shifting, one time they say don't work and another time they ask

			Sicily		married has to have money and a house in order to make it in the village	me for money, they aren't of one mind. I don't know what they want. It's not like I can find work and I'm choosing not to work.
Naguib	17.6	Kafr El El Bab, Gharbeya	Plane to Libya boat to Italy.	01/2009	A lot of my friends are in school and when they finish there's no work for them. I saw everyone who came from my town return with enough money to make a decent life.	A lot of people are asking my father for the money he borrowed. In Egypt we started better off than everyone else, we were always the ones that loaned others money we never borrowed before. Now we are the ones borrowing, so I had to think instead of my father looking bad in front of people I have to work hard and return our debts...Life needs hard work.
Ahmed	17.2	Shoubra Melis, Gharbeya	Sudan to Turkey to Greece then to Italy	9/2009	We found all the other people building houses and improving their lot and we don't have any money at all. My older sister got married and we had to borrow money from a lot of people and we still have to marry the other sister off as well, she is engaged but we can't afford it right	These people won't let me work, not even on a daily bases for 20 Euros. They say I have to go to school and I can't work until I finish the school. But I left my school in Egypt so I can work and make money not so I can go to school here.

					now.	
Nagah	17.6	Kafr Kela El Bab	Came through Libya.	12/2008	Everyone is abroad so everything is very expensive there.	All we want is to pay back our debt and make some money for a project and then we don't want anything from this migration.

Finally, it was observed that these boys worked the longest hours and in the most difficult of circumstances. There was a vast difference between the boys' attitudes towards the reasons for their migration ranging from cumulative causation to an intense sense of responsibility towards their families. In addition, the manner in which they spoke of their work and future plans reflected a complete difference in their level of ambition. Hence, it would be a great injustice to group these individuals together simply because they happen to be the same nationality. Among them were truly hard working dedicated young men, while others left the opposite impression all together. Several of them spent the week in the location where they worked returning on the weekends only. They seemed exhausted and depressed yet they were among the highest earners interviewed and their responsibilities were far more than should be required of their age group. As Uberti said, "These are sons of Egypt, why isn't Egypt taking better care of them?" - a question that haunted me throughout the study.

An Ideal Shelter, Citta dei Ragazzi

The last location that I visited was the most impressive one of all. It was the closest to town and was located on a large estate. The gardens were extremely well kept. There was a 300 seat theater and a very large ceramic/sculpture studio where the boys learned to work with clay among other things, in addition to an art center where the boys

learned the art of stain glass making. There was a pizza/bakery unit costing 200,000 Euros, where children learned to bake with state of the art equipment. The grounds had a football field, a swimming pool that was being renovated and a farm that produced dairy products as well as honey and vegetables. This structure was impressive by any private boarding school standards, let alone a shelter. The housing was spilt into various zones where each unit had its own rooms and living area, separating the younger boys from the older teenagers. The dining room was common ground, consisting of a large hall with a serving counter. Each table was set up and there was one boy in charge of serving the table from the main counter. Everything was organized to the smallest detail.

It seemed like the boys that were lucky enough to be in this location had the potential of learning far more than their counterparts in the other houses that were visited. They tended to be younger in age and more flexible in nature, less stubborn about the purpose for their journey. I was not sure whether they were chosen to come to this particular center for those reasons or they developed this flexibility because they were in this setting. In either case the difference in their disposition was evident. There was far less resistance to schooling than most of the other boys demonstrated. These children seemed settled and more obedient. Either the intricate governing system of the institute managed to control them or there was less urgency in their circumstances to require the need to break the rules in order to work and send money home. The reason was not clear, however something was definitely different. The system was explained in detail during an interview with the elementary director.

Here we are lucky because we have a system that gives the boys a responsibility of managing themselves in everything. For example this morning at 9:00 am there was an assembly of the boys they hold the meetings themselves. The boys elect a boy that is in charge of everything

like a president. The vote is by secret ballot just like a real election. The person that is elected to lead is called *El Syndico*, his tenure is for two months. During the assembly they speak of all the problems and situations that occur in the institute during this meeting. The leader chooses his assistants, like a cabinet of ministers, we call them the *accessory*, they help him run the organization There are four assistants. Each assistant is responsible for a certain function, for example the one that takes care of the cleanliness of the structure divides the work for the boys and he is responsible for keeping all areas clean. The same thing happens in the dining room, there is an assistant that divides all the work among the boys, he needs to make sure that all the tables are set on time for the meals, that everything is served properly that dishes are removed and washed promptly. This assistant is called the *capo restaurantore*, he is chosen by the leader to run the dining area. This assistant assigns the jobs to the other boys and has to make sure that everyone does their allocated job. Today because we have a football match the sports assistant has certain responsibilities. He has to have all the uniforms ready for the boys, he needs to make sure all the footballs are available, he must make sure everything is ready and afterwards everything is put away properly.

The boys receive a small amount of our own currency for doing the odd jobs around the institute. It is given once a week, like an allowance, for doing the chores properly by the financial assistant who manages this transaction. This pay is given for cleaning up the rooms and performing all their responsibilities up to a certain standard. Then they can purchase things from the school store. It is a store on campus that sells things to the boys. The leader also chooses a boy to manage the store as he does with the assistants. The boys can only buy things with our money, they can buy things like, sweets, batteries, mp3s, telephones, recharge for their telephone cards on a weekly basis, everything that they might want to buy on a regular basis.

The election is only for the leader every two months everyone else is assigned by him. Since it is a lot of responsibility and hard work for two straight months, no one wants to become the leader right after their tenure, so it has never been an issue that the same person keeps being reelected.

If the leader does not perform his work well the boys who have elected him can give him a vote of no confidence so they can have him removed. If an assistant does not perform his duties then the leader alone has the right to remove him from those responsibilities and he can assign someone else for the job.

We have a written constitution here. A boy who does not perform his job can be punished. If a boy misbehaves to a large scale like bullying a younger resident or stealing from someone else or if an assistant misuses his power there's a denouncement and they hold court. There is another boy who takes the role of a judge and there's a tribunal where they hear the case. They can be fined up to 150 notes of our currency or they can be

given extra chores for no money or they might be forbidden from watching T.V. for 10 days, different forms of punishment depending on the incident. If for example the incident involved stealing then the boy in question might not be allowed to run for elections as a leader or be appointed as an assistant for a certain amount of time. If a boy is consistently misbehaving then the leader can ask the president of the institute to have him removed from the structure completely.¹⁶⁹

Since the system was elaborate and took some time to adjust to, younger boys were more likely to be sent to this institute. It was not feasible for boys who only had a few months till they were out of the system to adapt to all the regulations nor was it imaginable for those that had work as their priority to manage in this system either. “The phenomenon of Egyptian unaccompanied minors arriving in the Citta dei Ragazzi only started four years ago, there weren’t any before that... Our institute is for boys who want to study,”¹⁷⁰ explained Tonino. At the time of the interview there were 60 boys in total at the institute 10 of which were Egyptian. The institute had the capacity to host 80 boys in total.

Usually boys come here for at least two years. Sometimes they come for longer three or four years it depends at what age they arrive. Definitely they have to leave at 18 years old.

Before a boy is registered here we have him visit the place in order to see it and understand the expectations and responsibilities he will have. We make a personalized project for each boy that has the plan for his education, depending on his age and experience. If he is 16 and worked before in a particular profession we try and see if we can help him develop in that area, if he is younger 14 for example and we have more time than we try and give him more options for his education. It is clear that in this system we can’t receive boys that are 17.6 who will leave in six months time.

Q: So no one can come here and find work like in the other centers?

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Tonino Moschetta, Director Elementary Section, Citta dei Ragazzi in Rome March 13th, 2010.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

Here before they are 18 years old we give the boys a chance to work part time outside, but they need to use their time wisely in order to be able to learn Italian properly and finish their middle school as well as train for work. The boys who get the training for making pizza obviously find work more easily when they leave here because they are already trained. A boy who has taken the computer training courses can use it for employment later on. We have boys that have gone for training as hair dressers, they take two years of vocational training then they go out in the world and find work in this profession. They also train with hairdressers outside the institute. We also have a mechanical training school then they go get their degree in that if they are good, then they get employed easily. There are kids in the summer who work in restaurants or hotels in order to make some money during their summer vacation when school is out. The problem we face with the Egyptian boys is that they don't want to go to school but they want to work. If they don't have the language to speak and they don't have any documents nor any professional vocation then who will want to employ them. Some boys have tried to go work with an Egyptian employee who wants them to work in the black market without a contract. We never allow this to happen because in order for us to allow them to work outside the school we have to have approval from the social worker in the District Office and they will never allow them to work in *nero*, working for 15 hours a day for 20 Euros.

Q: So the assistance that you provide in terms of employment is to help them find a job with a proper contract.

Yes otherwise we don't do it.

Q: Does the District Office give you boys that are younger on purpose?

No, the District Office has an obligation to house all unaccompanied minors that are on their territory, they don't give us younger boys in particular. We are the ones that prefer not to take older boys because we can't help them as much. If a boy is almost 18 the Citta dei Ragazzi is difficult for him because the organization here is so complicated. Of course, he needs a shelter like everyone else but perhaps this is not the ideal place for him. This is better for a 14, 15 or 16 years old since it will take them at least six months to understand our system.

It's not easy being here because there are a lot of rules and regulations but there are also a lot of things to do. A boy in this institution does not only go to school, he has many activities that he is expected to participate in such as the governing process, all the chores, and the sports activities. Life here is very busy.¹⁷¹

Since it was a Saturday all the boys had better things to do then talk to me. We had lunch together on a table in the big dining hall and I got to witness first hand the system that

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Tonino was telling me about. There were boys serving each table and others clearing them out - everything was very organized and proper. A young Afghani boy came to greet us, he was around 16 years old and spoke in perfect Italian. He told me he was training to be a hairdresser and if I wanted a cut he would be glad to oblige. There were boys from so many different nationalities on the tables around us it was like being in a United Nations convention. I was certain that these Egyptian boys were getting a lot more out of their migration experience than all the other young men I interviewed.

The table below summarizes the profiles of the young men interviewed in the fourth shelter visited.

Name	Age	Location of Origin in Egypt	Route	Date of Arrival in Italy	Reasons for Migration	Significant Quote
Aboud	16.6	Gharbeya	Walking to Libya boat to Lampedusa	10/2008	We are 13 children in our family that's without our parents... I only came for the school I wanted to get an education then work.	Here I understand a lot better and Italian is an easy language, in Egypt we used to skip school all the time because teachers beat us up.
Sayed	16.10	Gharbeya	Came through Libya	12/2008	I came to help my parents I have one brother and two sisters they are all younger than me. My father is a farmer.	They both didn't want me to leave but when they found out that my cousin will be going with me they agreed. We mortgaged the land.
Adel	17	Belbes, Sharkeya	Walked to Libya then boat to Lampedusa	About a year.	I came to Rome to the school in order to get my papers done. A friend of mine	What is there to be afraid of, I came with my brother on the same boat.

					told me about it.	
Hosni	16.6		Plane to Libya boat to Lampedusa then sent to Sicily.	One year and a half.	The people in the village changed they were becoming too materialistic. Those who traveled and came back with loads of money made those who stayed feel even less able to survive. We felt even poorer.	The system is very good but for us Egyptians it is not so great. Because we came to work and return our debt it takes too much time here.
Mohamed	14.6	Santa, Gharbeyya	Libya to Lampedusa by boat.	One year ago.	I had to do something. My father tried two or three times to come to Italy and each time they returned him from Lampedusa. One time he reached Sicily and got caught in the train.	I had a friend that was coming with me on another boat but it capsized and they drowned. They were 200 people and they all died.
Aly	15	Mansoura, Dakahlya	Plane to Libya boat to Lampedusa	8/2008	My cousin came to France before I came to Italy. So I wanted to go abroad I was sick of Egypt.	They are very fair, they treat us all alike.
Ibrahim	13.6	Kafr Kela El Bab, Gharbeyya	Plane to Italy then boat to Lampedusa	One year and three months	Our neighbor had sent his son so he told my parents and my father refused in the beginning. But I told them I wanted to go. I didn't want to go to school anymore and I was working	I regret that I came but when I tell my father he says that they told me so and that they had wanted to send my brother instead. After I work and get my papers straight then I can go back.

					with my father in the land. I used to get tired from farming.	
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Conclusion

All of the boys interviewed paid a high price to be in Italy. Each of them recounted their story, the circumstances which lead them to opt for migration as a viable solution to the problems faced by their families. Sons of farmers told me their parents sold or mortgaged the land. Sons of taxi drivers said the car or mini bus that their father owned was sold to pay for the journey while the father worked as a driver for someone else instead. Others sold all the cattle and live stock that belonged to the family in order to put a down payment for the journey, while some signed blank checks that would be paid in installments each time the child sent money home. The boys did not come from completely destitute backgrounds. Each had some means to enable them to choose this form of migration as an option. Yet, they were desperate enough to give up all that was providing their families with income at the mere chance of making it in Italy. The responsibilities they had towards their families were not imaginary, nor exaggerated. The very survival of the rest of the family depended on them. There was no choice. They needed to work and there was no time to waste. They could not afford to sit around in schools to learn grammar and history. They did not want to break the law, but they could not afford to follow all the rules and regulations placed upon them by the system.

The whole purpose behind their migration was to improve the family circumstances, to help fund siblings' education or in many cases to fulfill dowry requirements. They wanted to emulate the success stories that were reiterated throughout

the villages of sons having gone to Italy and sent enough money to alleviate the entire family to a better standard of living. But that was a different time when the laws were not so stringent and the prices were not so high. Everything had now changed. Each one of the boys carried a sense of guilt and responsibility having allowed their families to sell their main means of income in order to get the price of the journey. Therefore, they felt an obligation that could not be translated to their Italian caretakers. They were frustrated, tired and far away from home. Some of them were angry and some were very sad but they were all ready to do whatever it takes to accomplish their initial goals. And that is what worried me. If the laws kept changing against their favor would they give up on staying within the system? Returning home empty handed was not a viable alternative from what I was hearing, yet Egypt was their final destination.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of Egyptian unaccompanied migrant minors in Italy was a recent development of the past couple of years. An information gap was identified in the literature on Egyptian irregular migration of unaccompanied minors therefore; the purpose of this study was to bring to the forefront the issues involved in this particular type of migration. Presenting all the different perspectives was critical to better understanding of the phenomenon. In addition, the study advocated the increase of circular migration schemes for Egyptian adults as a viable alternative to irregular migration of unaccompanied minors.

The scope of the study included identifying the circumstances of everyday life of these Egyptian youth in Italy, the reasons and consequences for developments in migration policy as well as identifying the push factors that led young migrants to opt for this journey. Italian government officials and social workers identified the problems faced by the current system leading to both a financial and social burden on Italy in particular and the EU in general. Egyptian government officials emphasized the potential negative consequences of such migration to Egypt, highlighting the risks and costs, and shame, of this phenomenon. Meanwhile, interviews with migrants explained the need for such migration and the coping mechanisms used to side step hurdles. Finally, interviews with the unaccompanied minors in Rome provided insight into their personal experiences of the journey and the system in which they were placed.

Egyptian Perspective

Officials at the Egyptian Embassy in Rome identified the unaccompanied minors phenomenon as the most prominent issue of concern currently at the forefront of the irregular migration issue. Due to the clandestine nature of the migration and the risks involved in the journey coupled with the fact that younger children were now arriving in Italy in this manner emphasized the urgency of studying this phenomenon. Although the numbers of unaccompanied minors relative to migration flows from Egypt in general are not significant, the alarming rate of increase over the past two years was reason enough for concern. This being said, the phenomenon has more impact on policy in both countries, Egypt and Italy, rather than its relevance on migration flows in a larger scope. The fear of recruitment by criminal organizations of undocumented young men for illicit purposes and/or the trafficking of these children was a major concern. In addition, the fact that they continued to be stuck in their irregularity without the possibility of legitimizing their residence caused further frustrations for both Embassy staff and the migrants themselves. Despite the unanimous agreement of all the migrants interviewed that the migration was temporary, all Embassy staff interviewed were of the opinion that the migration was permanent, emphasizing that once in Italy no-one chooses to return. Yet there was ample evidence that the migration was circulatory, once there was an opportunity to do so. At the same time, there was agreement by both Embassy staff and migrants interviewed that the problem lay in the institutions back home that did not prepare youth with sufficient skills that were required in an increasingly competitive job market, domestically and abroad.

Italian Perspective

On the one hand, Italian government officials were concerned with the rising costs incurred by the system for managing unaccompanied minors, in addition to the security issues involved in having large numbers of unidentifiable foreign elements on their territory. On the other hand, Italian social workers were preoccupied by the consequences of recent policy restrictions. A prominent fear was that current unaccompanied minors that did not have a chance of fulfilling legitimate migration requirements might give up on the system completely and either absconds from assigned housing, or disregard the regulations altogether, since there was no added value in following them. Another potential negative consequence of recent policy restrictions was that the three-year requirement necessary for minors to attain legitimate documents after the age of 18 would lead even younger minors to make the journey of death. Given that policy was actually being set during the research of this study, the implementation and effect of said changes was yet to be experienced. The main concern was that increasing restrictions would simply increase illegality rather than putting a brake on the flow.

Hypothesis

Migration has been the solution to economic strife in Egypt since the early 1970s. The successful migration of at least one member of the immediate nuclear family translated into the financial survival of the rest of the family. High demand for Egyptian employees in the Gulf Arab countries and Libya proved to be a lucrative alternative for job seekers in Egypt. A continuing reduction in Egyptian migration flows to the Gulf since the 1990s has had a noticeable consequence. In the absence of sufficient legitimate

job opportunities, both domestically and abroad, irregular migration routes sought to fill the gap of at least a portion of the unskilled labor market.

It began with the migration of Egyptian male adults from certain villages that established networks in destination areas in Italy, facilitating the migration of others whether through regular or irregular channels. The more restrictions were placed on legitimate routes the more clandestine means were sought, including a reduction in the age of the migrant in order to avoid deportation. Each time a restriction was placed, an alternative was immediately sought to address the new limitation. The migration flow did not cease. While authorities clamped down on routes through Libya, new ones were established from Egypt. When adults were deported, minors replaced them. The longer the requirement was for attaining legitimate migration privileges, the younger the age at which they were sent. Because the need for the migration continued, despite recurring restrictions, it would seem that the solution lies in addressing the issues that lead to the migration itself.

Recommendations

Emphasis on facilitating legitimate circular migration opportunities is of the essence in seeking viable alternatives for the irregular migration of Egyptians. Although there was a quota of job opportunities available to Egyptians legally in Italy, two main problems were identified. The first was the lack of appropriate skills required for fulfilling available jobs, including language and training requirements. The second problem was access to the Italian Embassy in Egypt by potential candidates. Many of those interviewed for the study cited corruption and nepotism as a prominent hurdle

which reduced the number of available legitimate job opportunities. Hence the irregular route was sought as the only viable alternative for their migration requirement.

In order to address the first problem of skills, a recommendation of improving existing vocational schools throughout Egypt to the extent that they actually meet the standards required in an increasingly competitive job market cannot be emphasized enough. Already, as of the writing of this study the Italian government earmarked assistance for technical and vocational training schools in the village of Tatoun. Close monitoring of the progress and effect of such development on the migration trend from this particular village may reveal the impact of suggested policy. If successful, this recommendation could be implemented through the assistance of various EU countries using each destination country as a patron for the villages that have established migrant networks in their territory. For example, just as Italy is assisting with development plans in Tatoun, it could expand its scope of assistance to the other areas from which irregular Egyptian migrants are arriving, namely Kafr Kel El Bab, Borg Meghezal, Kafr El Gazar and El Azzizia. The town of Meet Badr Halawa in Gharbeyya district is known for migration to France. Therefore, seeking technical and financial assistance in development plans for this location from France would be logically beneficial. In the same way, existing networks in Germany and Austria lead townsmen from Sheedymo in Fayoum to migrate to these two destinations, so it would be reasonable to assume that development plans for this region would be served by approaching those two European countries for assistance.

More important than financial assistance is the technical training of youth, providing them with skills in language and crafts that would in turn assist them in finding

viable job opportunities in the future. Development would also alleviate pressure on migration by improving the quality of life in these areas and creating job opportunities at home. In addition, existing Egyptian Diaspora in European countries can participate in providing assistance to targeted regions while in return receiving certain tax exemptions from the countries in which they currently reside.

A recommendation that would address the second problem of access to legitimate migration opportunities is to develop mobile consulates that would visit sending districts in Egypt allowing direct access of potential applicants for said job opportunities in the quota system. Just as the Egyptian Embassy in Rome developed a successful mobile consulate to visit various areas in Italy facilitating its citizens' ability to complete necessary paper work, the potential benefit for the Italian Embassy is worth considering. The system of a mobile consulate would entail visits by embassy personnel to target districts that already have established networks in order to facilitate legal access to the country. There is a two-fold benefit to this recommendation. In the first place this would cut down the smugglers' edge as being the only viable alternative for migration to the destination country and in the second place it would allow proper recruitment for available job vacancies. It would be reasonable to deduce that the more accessible the legal route for circular migration purposes, the less tempting the illegal route would be.

Finally, the removal of two main hurdles to circular migration is vital. First, the problem faced by existing unaccompanied minors with regards to attaining the Egyptian National Identification card can be addressed by removing the age limit of 16 years. This should not be a problem since currently children born as of 2000 receive the national identification number along with their birth certificates. Therefore, it should be possible

for parents to fill out an application for children of any age to receive a National ID without an age limit. It is not clear what possible negative repercussions of this might be, since neither driver license nor voting rights are attainable in Egypt before the age of 18 years. Instead, this would assist in limiting those who are not identifiable currently in Italy and allow them to attain Egyptian passports. This will help determine their situation later when they become adults. Either they will receive work contracts in Italy and remain legally on a contract basis or they will be repatriated to Egypt. Otherwise as the study illustrated they remain stuck in their illegality.

The second main hurdle that needs to be addressed is that of the military draft in Egypt. Although after the age of thirty a male adult is allowed to pay a fine instead of fulfilling his conscription requirement, this option is still not available before that age. Most of the migrants interviewed in Italy identified this as the single most important reason stopping the circularity of their migration. Even those who legalized their stay in Italy are not able or willing to return to Egypt on a regular basis in fear of the requirements posed by the military draft. It would be worth considering allowing payment of fines by these migrants at any age in return for dropping charges against their skipping of the draft. This would facilitate circular migration that in turn would serve both Egypt and Italy, now and in the future.

Limitations of the study

The study was limited in scope by financial and time restrictions since it was self-financed and thus limited the number of interviews that could be conducted and the number of areas visited. It would be beneficial if this study were repeated with a larger scope to include other sending districts in Egypt of irregular migrants in addition to

Tatoun, as well as other recipient destinations in Italy in addition to Rome. The Rome and Tatoun locations were chosen for their accessibility to the researcher, even though migrants from Tatoun tended to target Milan as their destination, whereas migrants found in Rome came mostly from Kafr Kela El Bab. Therefore, if the study were repeated it would be reasonable to suggest that both Milan and Kafr Kela El Bab be targeted for interviews as well.

In addition, reception centers in Sicily where irregular migrants can be found were not within the scope of this study yet they would have been worth visiting if access to them were available. The same was true for the vegetable market in Rome where most of the unaccompanied minors were able to find temporary employment on an irregular basis. Again it was not feasible for the researcher to visit this site alone due to inaccessibility and safety concerns.

Another limitation of the study was due to the timeliness of the topic. Policy issues were developing as the study was being conducted. Thus, it was difficult to assert how they would reflect on the current situation of unaccompanied minors. Although the social workers and policy makers in both countries were extremely cooperative during interviews, they themselves had questions on the outcome of the situation. The migration of unaccompanied Egyptian minors was seen as a very recent development in the field and the phenomenon was increasing at an incredible rate. Bilateral agreements and laws were being drafted during the research of this study. Policies to tackle the many issues that were emerging were still not clear to those who were expected to implement them let alone the children whose future was going to be determined by them. They had no idea what was going to happen next. This was a two-edged sword since it made the topic even

more fascinating to study, highlighting its significance and urgency, yet it also made it so much more difficult for research access and analysis.

This is a highly complex topic with a multitude of levels that needed to be studied from a multidisciplinary perspective. Countless political, economic, cultural, psychological and social issues were coming to the public forefront during the fieldwork for this thesis that could not be dealt with in depth.

Articles on captured or capsized boats off the coast of Malta, Libya and Italy were common in Egyptian newspapers throughout the year. Interviews abound with survivors and with family members of those who were not as lucky. The murder of a 19 year old boy at the hands of a Peruvian migrant during a street fight in Milan in early February, 2010 led to riots by Egyptian and North African migrants in that district, causing a government crack down on migrants in general and Egyptian irregular migrants in particular. Two weeks after the incident the Mayor of Milan Letitsia Mouraty intensified restrictions on owners of properties both for residential and commercial purposes that required them to provide a listing to the district office of all tenants using their property otherwise risking large fines. Owners were required to notify authorities of any irregular migrants whether at work or in their place of residence or else they would bare the consequences themselves.¹⁷²

Bilateral agreements between Egypt and Italy reached an all time high during 2010, with 24 pacts covering a range of agreements on agriculture, transport, health,

¹⁷² Regulations in Milan, Tightening Restrictions on Egyptian Migrants, Al Ahram. Issue no.45009, vol. 134. February 28th, 2010 p.4.

education and vocational training were announced.¹⁷³ Italy provided Egypt with five patrol boats to assist in monitoring the coastline for potential smugglers in an attempt to reduce the irregular migration flow.¹⁷⁴ The press reported an unprecedented increase in the price of property in villages with large numbers of migrants in Italy creating a schism in society.¹⁷⁵

Potential for Further Research

The presence of several nationalities of unaccompanied minors in the shelters that were visited brought to the forefront the intriguing possibility of comparing attitudes and behavior of Egyptian minors with those of other countries. It would have been interesting to investigate whether the problems identified by Egyptian unaccompanied minors were similar to other nationalities, since according to them there was a difference in treatment. A comparison of coping mechanisms according to nationality was appealing. Following up on the progress of the children interviewed would help identify the effect of recent policy changes on their future. Observing the developments in Tatoun and comparing the future of the graduates of the technical school and training program with those of the unaccompanied minors interviewed was enticing. Although there were limitations in scope due to time, funds and location that could not possibly be covered in one thesis alone there is still substantial potential for further research in the field, which is essential for successful policy development.

¹⁷³ *Mubarak-Berlusconi talks focus on Partnership*, The Egyptian Gazette. Issue no. 42,221, May 19, 2010, p.1.

¹⁷⁴ *Five Italian Patrol Boats for Fighting Irregular Migration*, Al Ahram. Issue no.45076, Vol.134, May 6, 2010.

¹⁷⁵ *Here..the karat with L.E.2 million: Money from Italy created a huge gap in the social structure of in Meet El Korama*, Al Ahram. Issue 45071, vol.134, May 1, 2010, p.22.

Personal Journey

At the outset of this study I wanted to understand the reason behind the irregular migration of Egyptians to Italy. Weekly articles in Egyptian newspapers announcing yet another boat that was caught in international waters or off the coast of Libya or off the coast of Italy were common. The pictures of capsized fishing boats with Egyptian corpses floating at sea brought unacceptable images of desperation that was inexplicable to me. There was no question that the system was failing certain segments of the population, but to what extent necessitated further research.

To my absolute shock, I stumbled upon the advent of unaccompanied minors making this deadly journey. The recurring alarm that was set off initially by the Egyptian Consul in Rome and then by everyone else that I interviewed kept sounding off that there was a much bigger problem at hand. Outside the cities, in the villages and towns, the system was failing everyone. Educational institutions were churning out unemployable, unskilled and for the most part uneducated youth. Inflationary prices that were increasing annually were more so in the outskirts, due to remittances from irregular migrants as was the case from their predecessors in the Gulf Arab states and Libya. This made those who couldn't, or wouldn't, migrate even poorer than their law-breaking neighbors who managed to secure better living standards by all measures for the rest of their families.

Just as the best and brightest of Egypt's teachers and doctors had gone to the Gulf in the early 1970s and 1980s, so too were the most able and ambitious youth opting to make the journey of death. Just as the wealthier families were sending their high school graduates abroad for a better education or delivering their newborns in countries where they could attain alternative passports, so too were other segments of the population

seeking irregular options at their disposal to secure a better future for their children. Those who still had some form of financial back-up, such as selling any property at their disposal, sought alternative routes out of impending poverty. Parents of all different means were seeking better alternatives for their children's future than that being offered in their country. Whoever was able began to forsake Egypt through any possible route. This was a very scary prospect and one that needed to be tackled as soon as possible. Just as Egypt's educational and medical institutions suffered in the long run from the migration of its' teachers and doctors, the consequences of fleeing youth may be just as tragic.

During the research for this study I interviewed some of the most insightful young people I have ever met. Both in the focus groups in Tatoun and in the shelters in Rome I was allowed into the mind-set of young Egyptians with a completely different life experience. Every interview was enlightening in more ways than I can enumerate. It was a personal journey of growth.

Suffice it to say that for the country to develop we need to focus on the concerns of youth. I realized that there was no moving forward if our institutions remained archaic. There is no hope for the future if advancement is not based on merit alone. Accountability for nepotism and corruption is the key for successful development in Egypt. Providing the opportunity for attaining basic dreams such as marriage and a decent job is vital for enticing youth to remain in their villages, or at least in the country. According to my interviewees, none of this is feasible unless they or someone in their family successfully migrates for a number of years. By virtue of recent restrictions, the burden now falls upon younger family members who do not need to face deportation.

They have become the unaccompanied minor migrants who are stuck between fulfilling obligations to their families and adhering to the laws of the country they have found themselves in. Attempting to duplicate success stories of adults that had traveled before them, but who no longer have such opportunities, and with policies changing on a daily basis, the debt incurred by the journey was high and the outcome elusive. The fear was that if they could not fit into the system, how far outside it were they willing to go?

Although the irregular migration of unaccompanied minors to Italy was relatively small compared to legitimate migration flows from Egypt, the trend over the last two years of exponential rates of increase were reason enough for alarm. One could argue that from the Italian perspective there was no reason to endure the economic burden of irregular unaccompanied Egyptian minors, a view that was expressed especially from conservative Italian politicians. Initially the routes were established for Sub Saharan Africans fleeing from war and famine, yet “Fortress Europe” was developing policies to keep Africans on their own continent. Bilateral agreements with Egypt and Libya were set to buffer Italy and the Southern Mediterranean countries from a tidal wave of refugees. The advent of irregular Egyptians taking advantage of the existing boat flow of mixed migration (economic migrants as well as refugees and asylum seekers) was a side effect of the sub Saharan flow; thus, repatriation/deportation agreements with Egypt took care of those who attempted to enter in that manner.

The arrival of unaccompanied minors, however, was a completely unexpected outcome. The laws did not allow for their repatriation while the costs for supporting them were high. As mentioned repeatedly throughout the study, it was not the actual numbers that was a problem as much as the rate of increase and the trend that it

illustrated. Tackling issues of development and assisting in creating job opportunities for Egyptians both domestically and on the international market were seen as the only way to safe guard Southern Mediterranean countries from this phenomenon. Enumerable restrictions without readily accessible alternatives have only profited the clandestine elements in this migration.

In order to successfully address this phenomenon there is a need for a gestalt approach whereby the whole is perceived as more than the sum of its parts. Any solution that involves the self-interest of a single element in this formula is bound to fail. In other words, if Italy is to increase restrictions and intensify migration controls without addressing legitimate circular migration issues and development assistance in target regions, the likelihood of increasing irregular flows of migration will continue. Egyptian parents seek material security for some of their children at the cost of others, is a high-risk enterprise with precarious outcomes. As for the Egyptian government, tackling the phenomenon by signing agreements and intensifying border controls is only a small part of the solution. The bigger challenge is to upgrade and develop educational facilities to the extent that they meet international standards in order to prepare youth for a legitimate competitive job market; also ensuring that legitimate job opportunities abroad and domestically are equally available to those in the outskirts of the cities from where irregular migrants abound.

Although the vocational training program in Tatoun is evidence of a good start in this direction, it is far too little too late. All the towns and villages identified as sending regions of irregular migrants should be targeted for immediate development projects. People in these areas need to feel that the government is aware of their struggle and is

working towards providing better alternatives to ‘the journey of death’ for their youth. Providing Egyptians with options for a better future should be the responsibility of the government, not smugglers.

Finally, an advantage for Italy and the EU in reaching out and assisting Egypt in its development plans at this juncture in history would be to dilute extremist influence in the country. Successful circular migration opportunities for adults in the short run and long term development plans were seen as the foundation for tackling the phenomenon of unaccompanied Egyptian minors. This in turn would service both domestic and international security issues that stand to lose if these young men continue to be cornered into irregular migration. Perhaps the success of the Italian training center and the vocational school in Tatoun will be sufficient proof that Europe stands to gain more by reaching out rather than raising barriers. However, waiting for a couple more years for results would not be advisable; the sooner solutions are sought, the better the chances will be of resolving the problems experienced by the Egyptian youth addressed in this study.

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APPENDIX A

The following is the full transcript of one of the unaccompanied minors in Rome.

The administration is a bit discriminating towards Egyptians, every time something goes wrong they blame the Egyptians. If someone is yelling and breaks a doorknob they say it is us, so they forbid us from going out. Even though the ones over 18 years old are allowed to go out. They end up taking our transportation rations because they say since we aren't allowed out they take them instead of us even though they're not allowed. There are a couple of Egyptians who are the ones who make trouble then the administration gets all of us in trouble, it's not fair. We tell them, we are all friends so all we're saying is if someone does something wrong fine, do it but own up to it, so that the rest of us don't end up paying for their decisions. They don't care and even though we say it's not us the administration punishes all of us.

We went to the director, another guy that's 17 and me to complain... We said we want to be transferred from here because they are older and I still have 8 months before I turn 18 years old, I want to go to a family house. She asked if I thought I was young and I said yes I am younger compared to these guys and according to your laws I am young. I don't want to keep getting in trouble for their sake. She said, 'we'll see'. Then I heard they were thinking of sending us to Naples but I don't want to go outside of Rome, I won't leave if they take me outside of Rome. So they know now. My roommate and I have a room to ourselves, there are just two rooms with Egyptians these other guys are four, they start making noise and banging on things when the administration comes they get us all in trouble even if we were sleeping. She said we were trivial, and that we are all Egyptians we can deal with each other amongst ourselves and they won't get involved. We're the ones at a disadvantage because they take our things, they are all already 18 but we still have several months. When I asked to be transferred they said I have to have a reason.

I told them, 'do I have to beat someone up or get in trouble so you listen.' I am not comfortable here, I just want to go in another house not a center. I want to take my classes and have some peace.

When I went to complain in the Rome District Office, the social worker said I was a troublemaker and I don't know the rules. I told him I eat every meal with everybody and when I go out I come back at 7:30pm like I was told and the directors in the place like us.

These pranksters lit one of the Egyptian guys feet while he was sleeping and then the director said all the Egyptians won't be allowed out the following day but we were sleeping and this guy got burned. When we tried to go out the next day they forbid us so I called the lawyer and I told her we were sleeping. She said 'it's not my business, you deal with it. Pretend I am not here.'

The ones that did this went out because they are over 18, so they can leave whenever they want. No one cares what they do, but we are stuck with the rules, we have to obey. We

have to eat at certain times we have to be back inside by 7:30 pm but the 18 year olds can eat whenever they want and they can come in whenever they want. Lunch is at 1:00pm and diner is at 7:00 pm. When I asked the social worker he said go find out who filed the complaint and that's the person you need to talk to.

I found out it was this Iranian guy also a director, who is very racist against Egyptians he doesn't like us, when I asked him why he put our names in the complaint, he said we did it. I told him he wasn't Italian that he has no right to judge us. So he filed another complaint that I threatened him. They kicked us out of the center my friend and I they gave us our stuff and put us out, so we called the police, who said they had been their for two years and never knew there was a center in this area. They told the social worker they have to take us in because we are minors and they can't leave us out on the street.

The lawyer came and the Iranian, we all sat to talk and I told them fine give me my things and passport and I will leave. I can't stay here because I haven't been allowed out for three days. My friend wanted to take me shopping the other day on Monday because it's his only day off, he was going to give me some money to buy things but they kept me in.

They gave me the passport and said 'go ahead leave' but if you do we will say you broke down the door and took off. So I told them that I was going to call the police right now and tell them you are kicking me out. The social worker said that if I don't get any complaints by the end of the month he would have me transferred. After he left with one hour they made me problems again just because we were sitting around joking we weren't even watching T.V. or anything. Just one hour later! From the start I told them I want to be transferred. They said I was old so I told them that according to them I am a child according to myself in Egypt I am older but here it's different. In Egypt I could be getting married.

I wanted to renew my passport so I can have the new little one, they said I had to have a certificate from the Egyptian Embassy first and when I got the passport they said when we feel like making you the papers we'll do it. They still haven't made me the information sheet that I need to have before I go in front of a judge in order to get my permit. It's been two months now and the people that came with me that went to a family house already got their papers in 10 days and I haven't even gotten my certificate from the Embassy! I want to get out of here and go to a family house that will help me. These people don't want to do anything for me. I can leave and go to France and just find my way there. I don't understand where the problem is in transferring me.

Everybody here are from all nationalities, they are big, no one is my age I can't talk to them I have nothing in common with them not even the Egyptians they are older. There's only my roommate who is like me he wants to be transferred out as well. He was in a house with Italians and he speaks the language now. He was translating for me all the time, we both want to leave here now. I am not comfortable I am not happy here, I want to be with people that are like me, my age, who want to go to the school.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Onsi, unaccompanied minor in Rome, March 11, 2010.

APPENDIX B

The following interview was with a young man who left a very strong impression on me. His interview provided insight on an unaccompanied minor's life; his thoughts and concerns as well as his anxieties and ambitions were a reflection of those of many of the young men I had interviewed. Due to the limitation of space and time I could not include all of the interviews, although I would have liked to, suffice it to say that they were all equally long and intense. He was of average height with short black hair and fair skin. He had the beginnings of a moustache as adolescents often do. He also had the distant attitude that teenagers have around adults, I recognized it from my own sons.

My name is Karim from Kafr Kela El Bab, I am seventeen years old. I came to Italy a year ago through Libya first by plane then I stayed in Libya one month.

Q: Do you know how to swim?

No.

Q: Were you scared?

What can I do this is what needed to be done.

Q: What is your situation in Egypt?

I have two brothers and two sisters. The girls are older and the boys are both younger than me. My father is a truck driver.

Q: Are you the first one in your family to make this trip?

My cousins on both sides traveled.

Q: Did you decide to travel or did you sit down together as a family and decide that you needed to make this journey?

No I wanted to come, my father said I should stay in school and that I was provided for but I wanted to help. A lot of my friends are in school and when they finish there's no work for them. I saw everyone who came from my town return with enough money to make a decent life. They build houses and they have a good life. I thought I can come and stay five or six years here then I can save enough money to make a project and I can have a steady income. Everything will still be there when I return nothing will fly away.

Q: So you intend to work and save all the money till you go back home?

I won't save anything I will marry my two sisters off and build our house and that will be enough. I am still young, I am not going to spend my whole life here in Italy, I have to live as well. I will just provide for my sisters dowries and I'll build our house then I will go down.

Q: So your target is a certain amount of money that once you achieve it you will return home?

Then I will return home God willing.

Q: Does it matter how long that takes or do you have a time limit in your plans?

God only knows, it can take years or months however long it takes I will stay here till I accomplish these goals. If it takes six months it would be great.

Q: What if you accomplish it in very little time do you think you might get tempted to stay longer in order to fulfill other dreams like having a store or something else?

It depends on circumstances. I have one that is engaged right now she is 22 years old she has to get married.

[He speaks about his sisters as if they are his children. Using the first person when referencing the responsibility to himself.]

Q: How come this is your responsibility not your fathers'? These are your older sisters and he is their father why is this your responsibility?

If the father can't provide for them on his own do we leave him to break his back on his own without helping him? That's not acceptable.

The situation in Egypt is difficult, what we can earn in a year in Egypt we can earn in three or four months here in Italy. So if we stay here three or four months we can save our father's back trying to provide for his daughters. I can withstand a few months to get a girl's dowry instead of my father suffering that makes more sense.

Q: Do you think like this or did someone tell you this?

Nobody told me this. I've seen this all my life and this is the way it has always been these are our circumstances and that is what I must do. Just because I'm 17 doesn't mean I have to think of childish things like lollipops and games. Everyone sees what is in front of them. In Milan there are kids that are 14 and 15 years old and they are working, they think of the advantage of their family.

I made a work contract for six months, I wake up at 4:00 am I go to Laguila it's two hours by bus I arrive at 6:00 am and start working till 6:00pm then I come back to the house at 8:00 pm everyday. I get 400 Euros a month because they are training me for the first six months in the beginning. So it's like a vocational type contract till I learn the

skill then they give me another contract. It will depend on the work I can get. I am a welder of rode iron for the bridges and houses, everything for construction.

Tarek is also with me in this work. I learned a lot.

I was indebted to the man who brought me here for the trip. I owed LE30,000, I wrote checks, and he even prepaid my airplane ticket to Libya. So I wanted to return the debt as soon as possible. So everything I earn I send home. That is my first priority to pay back the debt, then I will start on the girls' dowries. Hopefully by the time I finish the debt I will be earning more money. The people I work with are happy with me.

Q: How will you fulfill the requirement for the middle school?

I don't know they said they'll try and work something out for me I don't know how they will manage because now I sleep over at the site I work in from Monday till Friday and I only come back here on weekends. It's a room with a bathroom and we are four people who share it. Tarek and I and two Italian men, they are older, adults. We work better than anyone there, I learned to do everything, welding and rods we learned everything.

Q: Isn't it dangerous work for someone your age?

It's dangerous but when you owe money it doesn't matter. A lot of people are asking my father for the money he borrowed so I thought a lot. In Egypt we started better off than everyone else we were always the ones that loaned others money we never borrowed before now. Now we are the ones borrowing, so I had to think, instead of my father looking bad in front of people, I have to work hard and return our debts.

Q: Why did the circumstances change for your family? What happened to your father's job?

The situation has changed since 2002 ever since those high-rise buildings were struck in the U.S. [World Trade Center] the petroleum industry in Egypt came to a halt. Before all that happened the U.S. companies in Egypt used to pay very well for drivers. The driver used to make LE2,000 or LE3,000 per week then they start making only LE500.00. Of course the household needed much more than that to run, food intake alone was LE500.00, then there were the schools and clothing and so many other expenses to pay how will my father pay for all that. We are five children. I've been here for a year and a half, I was in Rome for five months in a house, I asked to be transferred because I needed a place to work. I learned to speak Italian in Rome first in the school and then here, I also speak at work with the Italians. I know how to ask for everything and I know what everything's name is now. But they kept me from work today just so I can talk to you.

Q: I'm sorry to keep you from work but take it as a day off, rest a bit. Are you tired?

We're very tired.

[He speaks in the plural, I'm not sure why. He doesn't look at me when he's talking he keeps looking to the side. I think it is out of respect because I am a woman and an unveiled one at that, I believe it is not appropriate for the boys to look directly at me from

their point of view. Being Egyptian, I understand and I don't take it personally, but I could see how this could be misunderstood by the Italian female operators as disrespectful.]

The past six months have been exhausting, my arms are all torn up from the welding. Look at my arms and my hands from work. [He shows me his scars.] What are we going to do, it is necessary. Thank God, it is much better now. The first few months it was worse because I didn't know anything and I looked bad in front of the other workers. When they used to call me they used to tell me what to do and where to go. Now I tell them what to do and where to go, I learned everything and my boss is very pleased with me.

When they break for lunch I don't even stop I tell them they get hungry too quickly. They say that it's because I am Egyptian. But we work by the hour so the more you work the more money you'll make. But they rip us off sometimes when we work 12 hours they only put down 9 and they take the three hours in their pockets. You are supposed to have an hour for lunch but we take ten minutes and they get paid the full hour so they keep 50 minutes of the money that is owed us. I am working through a guy who brought me to the factory, if I was directly working for the factory each minute would count. At noon there's a bell you leave whatever is in your hand at 1:00pm another bell rings you start working again till 5:00pm. But with this man we work 'nero' [under the table, black market] we work an extra two hours. There is a contract but what we actually do is different otherwise they'll find someone else. Even the 'nero' work they calculate he pays me extra, for example I work an extra 2 hours which means 40 extra in the month then he pays me 100 or 200 Euros extra, like overtime.

Life needs hard work. I have a cousin in Rome who also works very hard. He wakes up at dawn and goes to the vegetable market, it's a small store and they are three people working, a driver and a cashier and one who cleans the vegetables. It's a safe job there's no danger involved in it. There's no risk of injury, but in our job there are warning signs everywhere.

There the smallest injury can kill you. Tarek took five stitches the other day.

Q: Yes, he showed me.

He came to me because the factory is spilt in two areas. He is in one area which doesn't have machinery at all. In my work there's a lot of machinery. When they finish their work they come to our side to help us finish as well. So he came to help without knowing how to work the machines so they were cutting the iron while he was picking the one up the other guy pushed the next one in his direction so it went into his neck. It just scratched him it didn't go inside. But they are tough the Italians they can smoke while someone is dying in front of them. Even if they are Italians together it's not because we're foreigners they are just like that. If he's important at work then they'll run to his aid but if he is insignificant then they can stand around watching.

Q: What did they do with Tarek?

Tarek doesn't know how to speak Italian so I went to see him in the bathroom, they told me my friend was injured, so I went to find him in the bathroom. He was holding some tissue to his neck full of blood, I told him what happened, he said not to worry about it. But I took a look anyway and I found it open a deep wound. So I called the boss, he listens to me because I am very serious in my work I don't joke around. When he's not there they tend to goof off and smoke and he knows that I work hard so he listens to me. I told him Tarek needs stitches. He resisted first but then he was convinced. He sent us to a hospital where there was a Tunisian lady she spoke to Tarek in Arabic. She asked if he wanted to sue them but he refused because he didn't want to lose his job.

Here in Italy life is very simplified for Italians, those that are unemployed get housing and those that are working like us with contracts they give them receipts if they have a couple of children they give 100 Euros per child and the wife gets 50 Euros so he earns more money over his salary just for having the family.

Q: Because they stopped getting married and having children so the government is trying to encourage family life once again.

Since I came here they've been asking if I like Italy so I tell them of course I like it. I like everything about it including it's girls and I tell them I want to get married here and get an apartment to live here. I have to say this, what am I going to say otherwise. But I don't really want to I just say what they want to hear. But I can't do anything against my religion I don't want to offend them I just want to work for a couple of years God willing and I'll return back to my family. I'm sad that I had to leave them, I can't leave them like this. No one leaves their family anymore.

I left everything back home my family and my friends, I was in school for ten years before I came and I was a good student but I can't help the circumstances.

Q: You will go back and make something out of yourself with all the skills you are learning here between the language you are gaining and the professional work you are trained to do now, you will be a big deal when you go back.

[He was silent and sad looking.]

Everything is wrong in Egypt, even if you have a college degree you can't make a living. I have a cousin in law school out of 10,000 students he was ranked third they said he can't go in because his family is poor, they have to let a rich person in or someone whose father has a high position in the government. It's like this, when they found his father working in the textile company and he knows people in the press they got worried so they let him in. It's the press that changes things now, that's what everyone fears and officials are cowards despite the fact that they are Moslems. But they don't act like true Moslems. They give thousands of acres to officials to plant and people can't find a room to live in.

Sharm El Sheikh is part of our country but you need a National ID and a passport to enter it and a letter that explains why you are there, it's our country we should be allowed to come and go as we please. We're not going to do any harm, even if it's just for tourism, we have a right to go see what it looks like we can go on vacation we don't

have to go to work there. They don't allow anyone in and it is our country we should be able to go anytime we want. We get frisked in front of people, it's humiliating.

I used to go with my father on the road sometimes and I'd see accidents with a bus full of people, Egyptians and I'd see the officers standing around smoking and it would take forever till the ambulance would come by the time they arrive people would be dead. Yet if they were foreigners they would go immediately. The law is bad. It's like the hour is upon us [Armageddon is on its way,] there is no more true Islam, even in Afghanistan or Pakistan its all no good. No one has any honor left amongst the Moslem nations any more.

Q: Do you think it's a government problem or the peoples' problem? Do you believe things can change for the better?

A lot of things can change if the president changes his actions. We have a lot of land that is reclaimed that is left empty, in upper Egypt and in Sinai everywhere. It doesn't belong to anyone just the government. Why don't they give a couple of acres to every citizen so they can plant them or do any project on them so they can bring income to the house hold. They've ruined everything. A person needs to be a thief in order to make a living in Egypt. Then he can bring up 5 or 6 children that are also thieves so they can steal as well. If he can't be a thief than he can't survive.

Suez Canal alone brings in millions, I know I used to pass by it everyday with my father, and there were so many boats and each one paid so much to go through, where did all this money go. Each ship pays per ton where is all that money going? Every five minutes a ship is passing, just two months of this money if it were given to the poor people of Egypt you would see what will happen. I don't know. The situation has been ruined from a long time. Even the Brotherhood [the Moslem Brotherhood] are not correct. No one is acting according to our religion.

If the five pillars of Islam were followed everything would be fine, just those five things will be better.

Q: Do you pray regularly?

We pray, but I pray in bed so they don't criticize me or make fun of my religion. Tarek prays in front of them on top of the bed. The important thing is that I pray I don't like anyone staring at me when I pray. Here in the house I pray in my room because they understand.

They made fun of me last year when I was fasting, so I asked if they liked my work, they said yes so I told him [an Italian co-worker] don't get involved in something that's not your business. My religion is personal I don't interfere in your religion so don't interfere with mine. So they backed off. When we are alone he doesn't say anything but when they are in a group he tries to impress everyone else and make them laugh. But I answer back now. The most important thing is to make something of yourself in work. If you become essential they will think twice about loosing you because if they bring in an Italian to do the work he'll cost them 3,000 Euros instead of 500 or 600 Euros.

*Everything has an end. God willing the most important thing is to marry off the girls. Sometimes when she is 18 years old and someone proposes to her we refuse because he wants to marry in 6 or 7 months. How are we going to get all her furniture in such a short time if we can't afford it? So we invent excuses to reject him. God willing she will marry my cousin in Sinai. I told him whatever she wants I will provide for her. She's 22 or 23 years old now. He's also 27 years old and he works for an electricity company he is very respectable he doesn't smoke or anything.*¹⁷⁷

I thanked him for taking the time off to talk to me and told him I would not have been happy had I not had this opportunity. I wished him well this young man, this old soul and hoped we'd both get a chance to see our nation in a better position. He struck me as a very religious boy that needed some instruction on how to unwind a bit and learn to look at life with a little less intensity. But there was no time for that in his life, right now he had a mission to accomplish and maybe once it was achieved he'd have some time to live out his youth if there was anything left of it. On the one hand his religiousness kept him on a steady track within what was considered proper behavior. On the other hand, there was a risk that under certain circumstances this could be manipulated in the wrong direction leading to extremist behavior in the future whether in Italy or in Egypt the threat of recruitment did not only come from criminal syndicates but also from fundamentalist organizations. Therefore ensuring that this did not occur to Karim and other hard working young men was of vital importance to both national and international security issues.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Karim, unaccompanied minor in Rome, March 12, 2010.