The child right to a family: foster care under the lens

Foster care in Italy

Rebecca Zanuso, Synergia

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The research in brief

- Countries: Italy (Veneto Region and the city of Bari in Puglia), Romania (cities of Bucharest and Iasi), Bulgaria (Sofia), Polonia (cities of Warsaw and Wroclaw)
- Objective: promotion of foster and responsabilisation of civil society organisations.
- Main action: about 30 interviews per country to policy makers, social workers, biological families, foster families, youngsters who were in foster care.

Italian legislation

- The first law dealing with out of family care dates back to 1983. It states that the child has the right to be educated in his/her own family or, if not possible, in another family or as a last resort in residential care.

- This law is updated in 2001, with law 149, which establishes the closure of institutes and stresses the right for the child to be educated within a family environment. It also establishes that foster care can last no more than 2 years.

Sources of data for Italy

- The Centro Nazionale di Documentazione ed Analisi per l'infanzia e l'Adolescenza (national centre of documentation for childhood and adolescence) collects data from the ISTAT (national statistics institute) and from Regions and Autonomous Provinces. The data about out of family and foster children are currently updated at the 31 December 2008.

National statistics

At the end of 2008 we have 15.200 children in foster care, vis à vis 15.500 in residential community type of care. Compared to 2007, the number of children in foster care decreased by 9,5%, whereas the number of children in residential care stayed stable. It is not yet possible to infer a trend. An update of the statistics is needed.

Italy	Foster	Residential care
31.12.2007	**16.800**	**15.600**
31.12.2008	**15.200**	**15.500**

Regional differences

- Tha national law gives Regions power over this issue. This means that each Region has its own policy and organisation of services.

- There is no national homogeneity: foster care is more developed in the North of the country.

Trends of foster care in Italy

- There is a high quota of adolescents;
- Males and females are balanced;
- Children of foreign origin are on the increase;
- Intra and hetero family foster are balanced;
- Judiciary, as opposed to consensual, foster prevails;
- Often the two years period is not respected and foster lasts longer.

Main issues from the interviews

- Long duration of foster/difficulties in evaluating parental skills
- Lack of laws for non residential forms of foster
- Long time for decisions by the Tribunal
- Lack of involvment and partecipation to planning of children and biological families
- Lack of homogeneity in the evaluation of the support and services received (by all)
- Insufficient information to foster families about children
- Importance of foster family associations

Examples of guidelines

Develop foster families networks

Support strategy for children and foster families, that uses existing resources and creates solidarity:

a) Mutual help groups;

b) Organised permanent structures, expression of the third sector.

Examples of guidelines

WHAT DO I DO?	HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Third sector's level of involvement
Develop foster families networks	o Select and involve expert foster families in sensitisation and training o Put families of the same area in contact o Provide locations for meetings o Involve existing foster associations and support them	o Promotion and organization of sensitisation and training activities o Capacity building for associations o Tutoring of families and facilitation of the family-to-family tutoring o Good practices exchange

Examples of guidelines

Support social inclusion of biological parents and youngsters

- Therapeutic services are not enough to tackle families problems. Support for dealing with housing, employment and other practical issues, although not directly related to foster, could accelerate the recovery of parental skills.
- Youngsters exiting foster often are more fragile than their peers, in some cases they do not reunite with tier family and need help in becoming independent.

Examples of guidelines

WHAT DO I DO?	HOW DO I DO IT? Traces of innovation	Third sector's level of involvement
Support social inclusion of biological parents and youngsters exiting foster (house, work, etc.)	o Select and involve social intermediaries o Network with services for (social) housing and job hunting o Create guarantee institutions for rent o Support paperwork for benefits o Create ad hoc funds and housing for young adults o involve foster families in tutoring young adults	o Tutoring young adults o Modelling of social mediation services o Implementation of services o Exchange of good practices

Thank you!

Rebecca Zanuso

rzanuso@synergia-net.it

www.synergia-net.it