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Nicoletta Policek ■

Foreign minors and forced labour in contemporary Italy

Małoletni cudzoziemcy i praca przymusowa we współczesnych Włoszech

Abstract: The labour of foreign minors living in Italy fits into a double scenario: on the one hand, it evokes aspects or lifestyles typical of their original culture and therefore represents an experience of continuity with it; on the other hand, it is placed in the context of the host country, where young migrants are often employed in low-skilled jobs or are forced to enter the job market as a means to support themselves and their family. This is an entirely transversal problem in the country, concerning both the more industrialised areas of the North and the more agricultural areas of the South. The sectors where the labour of minors is more widespread are commerce, catering, agriculture, and services. Case studies relating to the experiences of young Chinese migrants and children of Moroccan descent living in Italy are presented in this article. The concluding section suggests that there is no single causal factor responsible for child labour. Indeed, subsistence poverty, inequalities in accessing the labour market and parental choices or constraints may influence the decision to coerce a minor to work.

Keywords: child labour, Italy, trafficking, vulnerability of minors, case study methodology

Abstrakt: Praca małoletnich cudzoziemców mieszkających we Włoszech może mieć dwa scenariusze. Pierwszy z nich odnosi się do stylu życia typowego dla kultury, z której się wywodzą migranci (i stanowi jej powielenie oraz przedłużenie), gdzie praca dzieci jest czymś powszechnym. Drugi zaś związany jest z sytuacją na rynku pracy we Włoszech, czyli w kraju przyjmującym, w którym młodzi migranci często są zatrudniani na stanowiskach wymagających niskich kwalifikacji lub są zmuszani do podjęcia pracy w celu utrzymania siebie i swojej rodziny. Problem ten widoczny jest w całym kraju – dotyczy zarówno bardziej uprzemysłowionych obszarów na północy, jak i bardziej rolniczych na południu. Sektory, w których praca dzieci jest najbardziej rozpowszechniona, to handel,

gastronomia, rolnictwo i usługi. W artykule przedstawiono studium przypadków opierające się na doświadczeniach młodych migrantów z Chin oraz dzieci pochodzenia marokańskiego, mieszkających we Włoszech. W zakończeniu artykułu podkreślono, że nie ma jednej przyczyny odpowiadającej za pracę dzieci. Czynniki takie jak: głębokie ubóstwo, nierówności w dostępie do rynku pracy, a także wybory rodziców i przymus z ich strony, mogą wpływać na podjęcie decyzji o zmuszeniu dziecka do podjęcia pracy.

Słowa kluczowe: praca dzieci, Włochy, handel ludźmi, bezbronność dzieci, metodologia studium przypadku

1. Introduction

Young minors working on construction sites, in markets, in bars and restaurants, in kiosks and in car washes or agriculture: this is the current landscape of child labour in Italy. According to Law no. 39 of 8 March 1975, a minor is a person under the age of 18. Although banned in Italy since 1967 (Buffa, Caracuta, Anelli 2005), child labour is currently on the rise. The numbers only reveal the tip of the iceberg, as the Italian Labour Inspectorate highlighted, claiming that from 2013 until the first half of 2018 there were 1,437 cases of confirmed criminal violations of the current child labour legislation, which forbids children under the age of 16 from being employed (INAIL 2020). According to the most recent data extrapolated by the International Labour Organization (ILO; 2018), the number of children forced to work in Italy exceeds 300,000. Amongst them, there is an increasingly alarming level of early school-leavers, a generation too often becoming a potential reservoir for criminal activities. Again, the data are staggering, as indicated by the Department of Penal Affairs (2019), showing that 66% of the minors currently serving a criminal conviction carried out work before the age of 16.

This is an army of invisible labour experiencing victimisation and exploitation, sucked in by the black market's eddy for starvation wages, with no contracts or protections. This is often the case for migrant and stateless children who live in a limbo of hybrid legal protection (Policek 2016). Although this contribution highlights the experience of labour amongst young migrants residing in Italy, it is worth pointing out here that Roma minors are not included in the category 'foreign minors', since they present unique elements that would require separate analysis, in addition to the fact that they often have Italian citizenship (Policek 2016). The labour of foreign minors living in Italy fits into a double scenario: on the one hand, it evokes aspects or lifestyles typical of their original culture and therefore represents an experience of continuity with it; on the other hand, it is placed in the context of the host country, where young migrants are often employed in low-skilled jobs or are forced to enter the job market as a means to support themselves and their family (Fors 2012). For this article, young foreigners are defined as those who are not native to Italy and those born in Italy but with a family background of

migration to Italy. The terms minors and children can be used indiscriminately to represent those under the age of 18. The data reported herein refer to those who are residents of Italy. Their ages range between 15 and 18 years.

The focus of this paper is on the experiences of minors, who must constantly negotiate new the implications of childhood and struggle with power relations and dynamics. They face a combination of fundamental rights violations, including labour rights violations, which is based on the abuse of their particular position of vulnerability. Their vulnerability 'forces' them to make an 'impossible' choice leaving them with no viable alternative but to submit to the exploitation. From this perspective, the experiences of exploitation of these minors can be regarded as cases of forced labour on the basis of the indicators provided by the ILO, and as cases of trafficking according to Directive 2011/36/EU on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protecting its Victims, which adopted the definition of trafficking from the United Nations (UN) Trafficking Protocol. The latter is a broad definition which, far from being limited to sexual exploitation, entails a wide range of forms of abuse. Although they are strongly related, trafficking and forced labour are not identical phenomena. Indeed, not all forced labour involves trafficking and not all trafficking for labour exploitation amounts to forced labour (Bovarnick 2010). However, delineating a clear distinction between forced labour and trafficking is highly problematic because they often overlap. Italian legislation does not regard forced labour as a specific offence. Nevertheless, the ILO indicators can be useful for interpreting the level of exploitation involved: abuse of vulnerability, deception, restriction of movement, isolation, physical and sexual violence, intimidation and threats, retention of identity documents, withholding of wages, debt bondage, abusive working and living conditions, and excessive overtime. The indicators are derived from theoretical and practical experience of the ILO's Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour (SAP-FL). They are based on the definition of forced labour specified in the ILO Forced Labour Convention of 1930 (No. 29): 'all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily'.

Trafficking, instead, is defined as an offence under Article 601 of the Italian Penal Code (recently amended in order to adopt the definition of human trafficking contained in Directive 2011/36/EU). At the same time, the Italian legal framework on trafficking, especially through Article 18 of the 'Consolidated Act of Migration' (Legislative Decree no. 286/1998), is particularly innovative regarding the assistance and the protection of victims. There are limits and potentialities of Italian anti-trafficking legislation, and in order to effectively counter these phenomena, labour rights measures and anti-trafficking interventions must be combined in a comprehensive approach, as promoted by Directive 2011/36/EU, which is aimed not only at assisting victims, but also at tackling the structural factors that lead to abuse. This comprehensive approach relies on the assumption that trafficking is a complex phenomenon in which several different issues are at play (including migration policies, labour measures and practice, gender discrimination, and

violence). Therefore, far from being limited only to using instruments of criminal law or to assisting victims, anti-trafficking measures also require the development and implementation of concerted measures to address the root causes of migrant workers' vulnerability.

The paper begins with a brief discussion on the legal framework which defines and regulates child labour in Italy (Miscione 2002). Case studies relating to young Chinese migrants and children of Moroccan descent living in Italy are then presented. The concluding section suggests that there is no single causal factor responsible for child labour. Indeed, subsistence poverty, inequalities in accessing the labour market and parental choices or constraints may all influence the decision to coerce a minor to work (Melossi, Giovannetti 2002). Consequently, no single policy instrument on its own can be expected to eradicate child labour (Invernizzi, Milne 2002) and the vulnerabilities associated with it.

2. Invisible children and child labour

The current existing academic literature (Ali 2019) has failed to establish a systematic association between child labour and household poverty, yet this is often the primary assumption used to explain child labour's root causes (Fors 2012). Although a link between child labour and poverty is plausible and often implicit, such a link has not been systematically identified by empirical analysis. Specifically, most general studies (from Nesi, Noglier, and Pertile [2008] to Nogler and Pertile [2016]) tend to merge and generalise data from agricultural and manufacturing sectors of the economy, neglecting to highlight how other social dimensions such as age, geographic location, class, ethnicity, gender, and other social constrainers intersect to cause disadvantage (Policek, Ravagnani, Romano 2019). Contemporary studies on child labour still rely heavily on Basu and Van's (1998) contribution, which proposed multiple equilibrium-based explanations of child labour, identifying a low-income household as the main cause of child labour. Despite several other explanations – such as the negative externality argument of Baland and Robinson (2000), parental selfishness and external bargaining in Gupta (2000), and credit constraints in both Ranjan (2001) and Jafarey and Lahiri (2002) – the model put forward by Basu and Van (1998) has remained the main influence behind any empirical investigations on the matter.

Their model builds on two assumptions, the luxury axiom and the substitution axiom. The luxury axiom states that a household is willing to send its children into the labour market only if the adult wage falls to the point where the household subsistence requirements cannot be met without the children's income. Instead, the substitution axiom states that adult labour and child labour are seen as substitutes, meaning that child labour can take the place of adult labour if financial constraints

require it. As a result, there are two conceivable equilibriums: one where wages are high and only adults work, and one where wages are low and the children must work. However, if good equilibrium does not exist, then the households will be worse off if child labour is banned. This model rests critically on the assumption that children participate in wage labour in competitive markets, given that the results are based on market equilibriums. To counteract this argument, Bhalotra (2007) subsequently developed a model to test whether household poverty compels families to send their children to work. The idea here leans on previous empirical results showing a negative relationship between household income and child labour, which does not test the hypothesis that poverty compels child labour, but rather tests the less contentious hypothesis that child leisure is a normal psychological need (Ali 2009).

If the poverty hypothesis were correct, then children would only work if total household income was less than sufficient to meet the subsistence consumption level. In this case, children would work toward a target income, i.e. an income that would cover the shortfall between subsistence consumption and non-child household income (Saha 2019). Subsistence poverty alone does not necessarily imply that a child will be forced to work. If there are perfectly functioning credit markets, it should be theoretically possible for parents to borrow against their child's future earnings. A common assumption is that one parent makes decisions regarding household resource allocation (Caocci, Finelli 1999). Therefore, parental preferences play an essential role in the decision to send children to work. It is often assumed that parents act altruistically towards their children; however, if parents are non-altruistic or exhibit low levels of altruism, then child labour will be more prevalent (D'Ovidio 2014). However, as Thomas (2019) demonstrated, even altruistic parents may send their children to work if they face credit constraints. Ghosh (2020), taking a cue from Thomas (2019), showed that when both parents and children are altruistic, a graph of the relationship between parental income and child labour may exhibit an inverted-U shape; because of low parental income levels parents may be dependent on transfers from their adult children.

Contemporary empirical observations (Saha 2019) revealed that some households will settle for low-wage labour and will not supplement their income through child labour and instead they will keep their children in school full-time (Thomas 2019). In some instances, studies have demonstrated that even at high wages, the household will employ their children (Thévenon, Edmonds 2019). This theoretical underpinning on child labour has impacted policies, specifically those which ban child labour (Saha 2019). Indeed, a ban on child labour alone is not likely to be valuable because even a wholly enforced ban may result in consequences if adult earnings do not rise enough to meet subsistence needs after the ban is in place (Zutshi, Creed, Sohal 2009). Furthermore, as Mangiavacchi et al. (2020) observed, during the COVID-19 lockdown declared in Italy in spring 2020, a reallocation of the market and household work took place, which impacted children and young people. Often, children had to be involved in intra-household responsibilities

during the lockdown because the division of household tasks shifted. Sometimes, older children provided childcare to their younger siblings or – mostly due to the labour market restrictions imposed during the lockdown – they undertook tasks while engaging in paid and unpaid work to support their families.

3. The protection of child labour in Italy

According to the International Labour Organization (2018), the number of children forced to work in Italy exceeds 300,000. Many children – the legal definition of which is set in Law no. 39 from 8 March 1975, whereby a minor is a person under 18 years of age – work in dangerous activities and in risky conditions such as construction, mines, quarries, or underwater fishing. Others are sold to pay their parents' debts or are subject to international organ trafficking or sexual exploitation. Others still may be forced to work in cramped conditions and are not given adequate rest periods. Children can lend their labour working in workshops, yards, supermarkets, fields, quarries, factories, or mines, or they can work in isolation, involved in activities such as selling and delivering flowers or working as shepherds or shoe shiners, or in activities that border on illegality, such as beggars, thieves, and prostitutes. A common perception is that child labour takes place in an industrial setting, such as a factory or mine. However, the reality is that in Italy 69 per cent of working children are active in the agricultural sector, 22 per cent are active in the services sector, and only 9 per cent of working children are active in the manufacturing sector (ILO 2018). Their parents instead employ the majority of working children in the family business, despite a clear legislative framework in place to ban underage child labour (Miscione 2002).

The first attempt to regulate child labour in Italy dates back to 1866 (Law no. 3657, 11 February), when the age limit of nine years was introduced for children engaged in paid work (Morello 2019). The age limit was raised to 10 for children working in quarries and mines and to 15 years for those involved in more dangerous jobs. For all minors between the ages of nine and 14, permission to work was dependent on eligibility certificates (Spadaro 2019). The ripple effects of the industrial revolution in Italy (Federico, Tena-Junguito 2014) brought the realisation that advances in technology also require a more specialised workforce (Fang, Ceccarelli 2014). Consequently, the need for child labour was temporarily reduced. However, the employment of minors was still widespread in the textile and chemical industries and in the agricultural and mining sectors (DiScala 2018). In 1870, an attempt was made to pass new legislation sanctioning child labour exploitation, leading it back to the crime of 'trafficking in children'. Although this effort failed miserably because of disagreements over the definition of trafficking, in 1876 a proposal was made to raise the minimum age for employing children

(Spadaro 2019). As a result, Law no. 242 of 19 June 1902 raised the age limit to 12 years (13 for children employed in quarries and mines), and confirmed the maximum of eight working hours for children up to 12 years old and 11 hours for those aged 12 to 15. Finally, the law banned night-time work for children under 16 years of age (Moro 2014).

To counteract the widespread phenomenon of child labour, in 1904 compulsory schooling expanded from nine to 12 years. However, the law was disregarded by both entrepreneurs and families too interested in the additional source of income guaranteed by the employment of children. Therefore, in 1907 numerous exceptions were introduced to the prohibition on the use of minors. In the wake of this, the ban on night-time work was also cancelled in 1914. Following Convention no. 33 of 1932 of the ILO, Law no. 653 of 1934 raised the age limit to 15 years (Nesi et al. 2008). The intentions were excellent, but the law still contained copious exceptions. For example, it did not apply to domestic work in employment with relatives or when children were working from home or employed in agricultural settings. Also, the School Inspectorate, with a simple declaration of unfitness to attend school, could exempt working minors from compulsory education and therefore ease their entry into the labour market. In 1948 with the birth of the Italian Republic, the Constituent Assembly stated in Article 37 of the Constitution that the law should protect the work of minors with special rules and should guarantee them the right to equal pay for equal work while establishing a minimum age limit for waged work (Spesso 1953). However, it was only in 1967 that Law no. 977 (Protection of the work of children and adolescents) set the minimum age for employment at 15 years (Moro 2014).

Law 977/67, followed by Legislative Decree 345/99, established the minimum age for access to employment that coincided with the school-leaving age. More specifically, Law 977/67 tolerated the lowest limit of 14 years for agricultural and family work. Article 5 of Legislative Decree no. 345/99 sets the minimum age at 15 years, with exceptions provided for activities of an artistic, sporting, or cultural nature, in which case parental authorisation is required. Therefore, young people aged 15 can decide to complete the compulsory course of study in the vocational training system or an apprenticeship, which is the only work contract stipulated full-time by those under 18 and without a professional qualification. It follows that 15-year-olds with a secondary-school diploma can sign an employment contract. Article 2 of Legislative Decree no. 262/2000 establishes pre-employment and periodic medical examinations for minors under an employer's responsibility; if the minor is unfit for work, this triggers immediate suspension from work. Regarding working hours, children cannot exceed seven hours per day or 35 hours per week, whereas adolescents can work eight hours per day and 40 hours per week (Nunin 2000).

Child labour is also regulated by the Italian Penal Code, in Article 603, which states that 'unless the fact constitutes a more serious offence, anyone who (1) recruits labour to assign it to work for third parties in conditions of exploitation,

taking advantage of the state of need of workers (so-called “illegal intermediation”); (2) uses, hires, or employs labour, including through the intermediation activity referred to in (1), they are subjecting workers to conditions of exploitation and taking advantage of their state of need.’ If the facts are committed through violence or threats, the penalty of imprisonment varies from five to eight years and a fine of 1,000 to 2,000 EUR for each worker recruited is imposed. Article 603 also explains what is meant by ‘exploitation’ regarding working conditions, surveillance methods, degrading housing situations, repeated violation of the legislation relating to working hours, periods of rest, weekly rest, and compulsory and annual leave. The last part of the regulation provides for a series of specific aggravating circumstances that lead to an increase in the sentence from one third to one half. The crime of exploitation of child labour exists exclusively as a specific aggravating circumstance of the crime of exploitation of labour and, as such, is much more severely punished. For the most serious forms of exploitation of child labour, the crime of ‘enslavement’ is dealt with in Art. 600 (Moro 2014). With regard to children’s rights, the Italian government also ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child on 5 September 1991 as well as the optional protocols to the Convention in May 2002. Italy is also a party to other instruments related to human rights, particularly to the International Covenant on Civil and political rights and the Convention against torture and other cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment or punishment. At a regional level, Italy has ratified the European Convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and the European Convention for the prevention of torture and inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.

Despite such regulations, the problem of child labour is often underestimated and underreported (van Daalen, Hanson 2019). The Central Supervisory Directorate of the National Labour Inspectorate revealed that from 2013 through 2019, there were over 1,700 cases of ascertained criminal violations of child labour legislation. Such violations pertain to children younger than 16 who were working without the requisite school education. This is only a tiny fraction since, in the vast majority of cases, the exploitation of minors remains underground, entirely unreceptive to complaints and controls (INAIL 2020).

4. Child labour in Italy

Italy has its own specific characteristics in terms of employment and migration (Policek, Ravagnani, Romano 2019). Migrants are usually employed in highly segregated and low-paid jobs: typically manual work for men (ISTAT 2019) and care work for women, with the care of the elderly witnessing a shift from a ‘family’ model to a (female) ‘migrant in the family’ model (Allievi 2010). Young migrants

often follow a migratory trajectory similar to their adult compatriots who habitually travel with them or have preceded them (Atrigna 2011). Frequently, young migrants travel alone as unaccompanied minors (Policek 2016). They leave their countries of origin as adults, since Albanians, Pakistanis, or Moroccans aged 15 or even younger are deemed in their country of origin to be legally responsible as adults when it comes to being financially independent. Upon arrival in Italy they are again considered minors because this is how the law defines them (Atrigna 2011). This is not simply a legal shift, but one that relates to the processes of the construction of a child's sense of identity and belonging, sanctioning the inclusion in or exclusion from peer groups (Policek, Ravagnani, Romano 2019). Data presented by Policek et al. (2019), summarising the experience of victimisation amongst a group of young migrants to Italy, offer the opportunity to contend that belonging to a group does not necessarily affect the level of victimisation, although having one or two foreign parents can often be translated into a highly significant experience of victimisation. Therefore, to counteract victimisation, young foreigners utilise financial independence through employment as a tool to assert themselves within and outside of the group of reference. It is worth highlighting here that foreign child labour in Italy no longer comes only from low-income families, but also involves minors from families in more advantageous economic conditions, who identify in the child's work a multiplier of the family's standard of living (Baraghini 2017). Indeed, child labour for Chinese, Filipino, or Peruvian minors residing in Italy, for example, is a priority as a means to contributing to the success of the family's migration (Calcaterra 2016). Nonetheless, it should not be discarded that there are also situations of constraint, linked to clandestine arrival routes to Italy or associated with illegal circuits or networks. Such networks often ensure that minors are employed with no pay but as a repayment option for debts contracted by them and/or other family members so that migration to the host country can be guaranteed. Population migrations often involve large numbers of unaccompanied minors. Unaccompanied children are at significant risk for forced labour and sex trafficking, given their young age, lack of adult supervision, lack of knowledge of the host language and culture, and precarious legal status. These children are particularly vulnerable if they lack the necessary authorisation or documents required under immigration regulations and have been smuggled across an international border. Traffickers may subsequently lure them into situations of severe exploitation and maintain control over them through violence, threats, or economic or psychological manipulation. Unaccompanied children are likely to be reluctant to report abuses to authorities because of fear of arrest and/or deportation. Finally, gender-based violence and discrimination, a cultural assumption that boys cannot be victims, cultural beliefs that children must support the family in crisis, the sexualisation and objectification of girls, and the weak recognition of children's rights are societal factors that contribute to vulnerability. Benevene, Lagioia, and Callea (2010a) pointed out that there seems to be no unanimous agreement on what can be considered exploitation, what can be defined as work

with a positive value, and what cannot even be defined as work unless the employment of a foreign minor is considered embedded in a culture-specific context. Consequently, it is pivotal to trace the activity that is work back to the migration project and family ties, acknowledging that in some rare instances exploitation is not conscious. This is the case for most foreign minors employed in their family business. The number of hours, the existence of remuneration or recognition, the protection and the link with the other spheres of the minor's life (i.e. recreational, school, familial, relational) are variables which should be kept under observation (Buffa, Caracuta, Anelli 2005). Furthermore, this is not to say that there are other forms of child exploitation which should not be addressed, such as child prostitution or trafficking (Abebe, Bessell 2011). It is also not clear what can be included in a single 'work' category, when the activities differ and the classifications created at the theoretical level vary. For this reason, it may be useful to adopt a broad and flexible definition of work, in order to leave room for the multiple activities that foreign minors carry out and the meanings that these can assume. Such flexibility will allow us to differentiate between employment which violates the fundamental rights of the person and activities which are more compatible with other life experiences (Abebe, Bessell 2011). Notwithstanding the subtle differentiations, it should be reiterated that minors are all in a vulnerable position.

5. Methodology

Typically, case studies draw on multiple sources of evidence (Feagin, Orum, Sjoberg 1991). The two case studies presented herein include archival and statistical records, interviews, direct observation, and participant observation. They are based on 100 interviews with each group, that is, Chinese minors and Moroccan minors living in Italy, aged 16–18 years. As required by the ethics clearance obtained for this research project,¹ the participants and their parents/legal guardians were briefed about the study's justification, aims, and objectives and ethics.

Atlas.ti software was used in assisting with the handling of data, which were analysed inductively using a grounded theory approach. This was characterised by a process of coding and sub-coding, with the final interpretative phase characterised by the emergence of a story with the aim of developing an evolving theory (Cresswell 1998). A scope of enquiry was used to develop the interviews. Using semi-structured interviews kept the interviews flexible and allowed for the areas of interest to be probed. The interviews focussed on an exploration of the experience of child labour. The data gathered guided the case studies presented herein. Three areas of enquiry supported the interviews: 1) the minors' understanding/interpretation of what

¹ The study received ethical clearance from the Centre for Conflict and Migration Research Ethics Committee (CCM/24/08/HREC2019).

constitutes labour; 2) a description of the activities which constitute labour; and 3) legal child labour versus illegal labour.

Each participant was interviewed in Italian because all participants were fluent in Italian. All minors who decided to participate in the study were allowed to ask as many questions as they felt necessary at any stage of the study. Particular attention was given to the interview format to minimise stereotypical child–adult communication patterns that reduce data credibility. The researcher adopted different strategies to minimise the minor’s inclination to give responses perceived to be socially desirable rather than socially unacceptable. In some instances, the participants were offered two alternatives, either of which could be considered acceptable in the context of the interview. Thus, the researcher could avoid placing the minors in a position where the participants had to deny perceived undesirable behaviour. During interviews, the researcher found it best to start with questions calling for more concrete responses and then shift to more abstract questions to accommodate the sample’s range of cognitive abilities. Although the participants were given as much time as they needed, the researcher was always alert for nonverbal cues indicative of fatigue and decreased attention, ending the interview as quickly as possible if necessary. The unfamiliarity of the interview situation was always considered and therefore opening questions set the interview tone and allowed the participants to find out what was expected of them. To allow time to build rapport and trust, the funnel sequence – starting with more general questions and proceeding to more specific ones – was deemed very useful because it allowed the participants to state their frame of reference and respond in meaningful categories.

The participants signed a consent form before commencing the interview, and they were offered the opportunity to receive a copy of any academic publications relating to the study. The participants were able to withdraw from the study at any stage of the interview.

Measures were put in place to ensure that the research was culturally safe for the participants through a network of trusted stakeholders. Emotional support was also in place for the study’s duration so that the participants could deal with any issues affecting them. Trauma child counselling was also made available to participants, who were also referred to many other available avenues of support, at both the local at national levels. The safety of the researcher was also paramount, and measures were in place to assure the researcher’s physical and emotional safety; the researcher followed rigorous lone worker’s policies and procedures as agreed at the time ethical clearance was granted. All interviews took place in daylight, either at community centres or the minor’s place of residence such as refugees centres, but never their homes. The participants were given a great deal of control over the specific location of the interview to enhance data collection. It was felt that less formal, more familiar settings may help the minor view the researcher as an interested adult rather than an authority figure.

5.1. The challenges of researching the experiences of young minors

One of the greatest challenges has been establishing trust with the participants: some migrant minors were in the process of legalising their status and, therefore, they were not willing to talk. As a result, the nature of the study sample is one of opportunity, and therefore it cannot be considered representative of the entire population of Chinese and Moroccan minors living in Italy. Given the topic in question, a few minors who initially agreed to be interviewed about their experience of working in Italy later refused to talk. The minors who agreed to talk always talked to the researcher in the presence of an adult – a legal guardian, parent, family member, or in some instances a social worker.

One recurring area of concern regarding conversations with minors was the researcher's awareness that memories of events that are experienced repeatedly lose their unique character and become part of a generic event memory system. The challenge was embedded in the concern that participants could or would use a sort of predetermined script. That is, scripts devised by the participants could contain what is supposed to happen in certain situations, not necessarily what did happen.

As already stated, all participants received a complete, clear, and developmentally appropriate explanation, and they all signed an assent form once parental/legal guardian permission had been secured. Interacting with minors, even those aged between 16 and 18, requires careful consideration of any issue relating to confidentiality. Young people are especially concerned with confidentiality, as they are often experimenting with new ideas and ways of presenting themselves. Additionally, because of the research topic, it was felt that some respondents may be reticent on sensitive topics. Assurances that responses will not be shared with others outside the interview settings, namely law enforcement agencies, helped to increase the credibility of the data collected. Privacy during the actual interview also enhanced the data credibility. An assent or consent form guaranteeing confidentiality and describing how it will be maintained was therefore very useful for the initial explanations and reinforcement; additional verbal assurance throughout the interview process was often needed when participants seemed reluctant to respond to questions.

5.2. Data and empathy

Whilst interacting with young minors, at every stage of this study the researcher was concerned whether empathy and compassion (Goetz, Simon-Thomas 2017) towards young people and their experiences of forced labour could somehow pollute the data. Compassion arises when witnessing another's suffering (Gilbert 2017) and it is embedded in the acknowledgment that not all pain can be fixed or solved, yet it is essential to make any research endeavour as mindful as possible of participants' lived experiences. The almost paradoxical aspect of this methodological

questioning led me to realise that whether I wanted it or not, my emotions were phenomenologically present. My emotions alerted me toward specific research foci and interpretations, and I turned to my emotions as the key driver for this study. I saw vulnerabilities in the lived experiences that minors shared with me, as I felt a profound sense of injustice – or rather non-social justice as I would define it – at the knowledge that young people were forced to work. It did not matter to me whether minors were working because of financial constraints or perceived and internalised cultural constituents, for example. For me, it was often trying to listen to stories that I would rather not hear. At first, the challenge was to remain disconnected from the participants' narratives and experiences. I tried not to submerge myself too deeply for the sake of data 'purity', holding to the beliefs about scientific objectivity. More meaningfully, I feared the perceived unsafe role of empathy. After all, this research was about child labour and not about the social scientist. My methodological and ethical struggles toward balancing empathy and detachment demonstrates how qualitative research resists the recognition of the active role of investigators and methodologies in the construction of subject matter and data. I have chosen to make the constructive presence of the researcher visible as an active constructor of reality because I believe that such a personal involvement enriches the rapport with participants and contributes to data constructions and interpretations. In addition, reflections on the researcher's subjectivity and emotional reactions can be used to interpret the research rapport and the possibilities (or limitations) of data analysis as a relational endeavour. For instance, my own awareness of the emotions that the investigation triggered in me sustained and influenced the ability to listen to the participants' stories and to stay engaged in inquiries on what I perceived as sensitive or difficult topics, namely foreign minors' vulnerabilities in the workplace, especially when working was not perceived as a choice but an obligation.

6. Foreign child labour in Italy

Cultural elements and the influence of multiple factors, such as the means of arrival and the conditions of inclusion in the host country, along with the family's expectations and needs and available opportunities, all play a central role in the construction of a young minor's identity and sense of belonging (Policek, Ravagnani, Romano 2019). It follows that, conditional to the context, the same labour activity can assume different meanings. From this assumption, the boundary between lawful and illegal activities often remains blurred (Calcaterra 2016). In order to interpret the meanings of the work experiences of foreign minors, both the cultural elements and the standard of living of the minors and their families in Italy must be kept in mind (Van de Glind 2010). First of all, it is necessary to consider how childhood is viewed in different cultures (Thomas 2019). The concept of the child

as a member of the community, called to take an active role in managing family life and able to assume certain responsibilities (according to the child's age), leads to a different configuration of intergenerational relationships. The experience of a foreign minor who helps their family at home or in the workplace then becomes a contribution that the child makes, according to a cultural model in which all the members of the family are involved, at different levels, in supporting the family economy.

Foreign minors often carry out highly visible activities, such as street vending in cities or cleaning car windows at traffic lights, bringing such activities closer to the daily reality of every citizen. These activities are almost normalised and coexist with less visible activities, such as domestic activities or tasks undertaken in families' workshops. There are no accurate data on forced labour of foreign children in Italy, according to a recent ISTAT survey (2019). However, the most recent studies available indicate the presence of foreign minors in activities supporting the family (Scannavini, Teselli 2014) in regular jobs (Benevene, Lagioia, Callea 2010b), in activities carried out for third parties (Silvano 2017), or in illicit work or illegal activities, where exposure to conditions of exploitation is more widespread (Melossi, Giovannetti 2002). Because these are often jobs carried out in the informal or 'underground' economy, it is particularly difficult to accurately ascertain the scale of the phenomenon. It remains difficult to compare data. Certainly, a common occurrence, with the exception of cases of extreme exploitation, is the coexistence of work and school attendance (Napolitano et al. 2001) and it could be argued that there does not appear to be a causal link between child labour and school dropout, since the majority of foreign minors who work also attend school.

The ISTAT survey (2019) recognised that the tools it utilised underrepresent the foreign population under scrutiny. For this reason, rather than trying to obtain an actual quantification, the purpose of the enquiry is to construct a picture of the 'risk' of child labour, particularly with reference to forced child labour. Some studies (Abebe, Bessell 2011) on Moroccan minors who work in Italy show that, as soon as they arrive in Italy, minors interpret their work as an opportunity to earn and be able to help the family, according to a notion that it is normal to include this experience in life. It is from the clash with a completely different context, in which work is the prerogative of adults, that minors begin to problematise their lived experience. In Italy, the employment of Chinese minors and Moroccan minors is what has, in recent years, attracted the most attention, both for their characterisation and diffusion (Chinese) and for their visibility and perceived problematic nature (Moroccans). Other communities are also involved in child labour activities: for example, Filipinos and Peruvians in the North of Italy, Albanians – especially amongst unaccompanied minors, who are most at risk of being victims of forced labour (Bovarnick 2010) – and Cape Verdeans and Sri Lankans in the South (Abebe, Bessell 2011).

6.1. Helping the family

The most common activities among foreign minors aged 7–14 years can be summarised as helping parents in their work, helping with housework and small errands, caring for younger siblings, and mediating/interpreting for parents who are not able to speak and understand the Italian language (ISTAT 2019). The influence of educational models originating from the parents' culture is substantial and is also maintained in Italy: minors are not exempt from this form of widespread participation in family responsibilities and, even if they are not remunerated, they carry out an activity that has economic value (to keep down costs of family businesses or to support the parents in the labour market), with an involvement that increases with advancing age – the opposite trend to that of their Italian peers (Melossi, Giovannetti 2002). In addition to contributing to family life, these work experiences allow minors to gradually learn the skills necessary to assume future roles in the host country. These activities are not always considered 'work' and thus are not always included in analyses of the work carried out by foreign minors; they are defined as 'jobs' or simple forms of participating in family life. Household chores carried out by girls, for example, often remain invisible and, if disproportionate to the child's age, cannot be harmoniously integrated into the child's educational path (Castles, Davidson 2000). Although these experiences are not visibly and legally classified as forced labour, by playing on children's vulnerabilities and lack of agency they can be considered labour that children are forced to undertake.

6.2. Working for third parties

Commonly, work outside the family prevails for adolescent migrants (15–18 years) who are employed on a regular basis – very often for little pay. Patchy data provided by local job centres reveal that in Italy, minors who work for third parties have apprenticeship contracts or zero-hour contracts (ISTAT 2019). The quantification of the phenomenon is rather difficult, as it is often the case for minors absorbed in the informal economy. The ISTAT survey (2019) identified forms of parallel economies in which there is a concentration of the work of foreign minors, such as Moroccans in the commercial services sector and Chinese people in the textiles and leather industries. Usually, these activities do not interfere with school attendance.

In both family work and work for third parties, there may be situations of exploitation when legal frameworks and health and safety regulations are not acknowledged or implemented. There are also activities that fall within the sphere of illegality and which, generally, are defined as exploiting child labour, sometimes bordering on delinquent activities or crimes (UNICEF 2019). Here the divide between regulated labour as supported by the legal framework and forced labour become blurred.

6.3. Illicit and illegal activities

What illegal and illicit activities have in common (those which break labour laws, violate human rights, and are punishable by law as offences) is the exploitation to which the minor is exposed. This is within the realm of forced labour. In Italy, some minors work alongside adults selling handkerchiefs, sponges, or small objects. They may have been recruited for these networks by compatriots, in which they find support, but the sales activity can also mask begging – which involves forms of humiliation from which the minor cannot escape. There are minors who work on the street to repay a debt contracted when travelling to Italy or who move from begging activities to criminal behaviour (drug dealing theft), which provides easier earnings. Migrant minors often do not find access to support channels other than those of illegal activities. ISTAT (2019) stated that the participation of minors in illegal activities can be considered a residual phenomenon, as the same minors are often also involved in legal activities. However, attention should be paid to the involvement of minors in drug dealing, prostitution, and theft. It is especially these types of activities for which it seems appropriate not to focus excessively on aspects of cultural differences, but to keep in mind the conditions of social hardship and marginalisation in which these minors often find themselves (Thomas 2019). It is worth highlighting here that the philosophy accompanying the investigation behind this article does not recognise the voluntary choice of prostitution by minors under the age of 18, as in Law no. 269/98 ('Rules against the exploitation of prostitution, pornography, tourism damage to minors, as new forms of slavery'). More specifically, the exploiters or protectors – or any other person in various capacities – who induces individuals under the age of 18 to engage in prostitution are committing a serious crime (as stated in Art. 9, 'Anyone who trades in minors under the age of 18 in order to induce them to prostitution is punished with imprisonment from six to twenty years'). The seriousness of such crimes is evident regardless of the voluntary or involuntary (expressed or unexpressed) participation of the victims or their presumed psychophysical maturity (Art. 1 and 2). These are quite particular crimes that in the most extreme manifestations can be configured as new forms of slavery. The relationships that exist between the actors involved are characterised by violence and abuse of the vulnerable position minors find themselves in. What puts them in this condition is the lack of freedom, ability to negotiate, and to sever the unbalanced relationship. This impossibility is determined by the particular relationship that arises between the parties: one party has coercive power (physical and psychological), whilst the other is vulnerable and weak, and therefore unable to offer resistance either as an individual or family or group.

The two different case studies presented below demonstrate how the link between legal and illegal activities is often blurred. However, none of the participants in this study shared any experience of being coerced into prostitution or being victims of violence and abuse. There is also no evidence from the conversations

with minors reported here that they were trafficked to Italy. Such evidence was supported by access to social workers' reports and other gatekeepers' written reports prior to meeting with participants. It was pivotal for the researcher to assure and explore all ethical considerations in relation to children's victimisation in accordance with the WHO's definition of victimisation (Bovarnick 2010). The WHO defines child victimisation as all forms of physical and emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power. Workplace victimisation can take many forms when children are forced to work, such as physical, psychological, emotional, financial deprivation, damage to health, educational deprivation, etc.; they are also exposed to situations that make them vulnerable to trafficking, abuse, violence, and exploitation.

6.4. Chinese minors working in Italy

For Chinese communities settled in Italy (Castles, Davidson 2000), the employment of minors is part of a family project based on economic integration in the host country (Baraghini 2017). Integration is often pursued through the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises (Silvano 2017). The household unit often coincides with the place where the family's work is carried out and this in turn facilitates the involvement of a minor: these are small tasks, not identifiable as forms of child exploitation (Glick, White 2003). The case study presented here reveals that more than 90% of Chinese children (N=100) aged 16–18 and residing in Northern and Central Italy help their parents in the leather goods sector. In this case, we find continuity with lifestyles of the country of origin, which are maintained even in a different context: work involves all members of the family and children also play an active role. They help in leather goods workshops as well as restaurants, grocery stores, and clothing stores, often receiving a symbolic financial reward. The hourly load and the tasks performed are related to the age of the children, and there does not seem to be any difference according to gender: most minors work from a minimum of five hours a day to a maximum of eight and the work activity covers the entire period of the day that minors would spend outside of school. In all instances, the work is carried out in the afternoon, in the evening, and at weekends and does not hinder school attendance; therefore, there is no correlation between child labour and school-leaving (Nobili, Sebastiani 2001). One of the typical elements of the work of Chinese minors is precocity: they start working during primary school (6–8 years old) (Napolitano et al. 2001). A few young people work even more than eight hours (2%), while there are also those who work less than five hours (19%). It should be emphasised that the minors interviewed declared in 92% of cases that their parents work more than 15 hours a day and their siblings worked more than 9 hours (32%). In 37% of cases siblings worked between 7–8 hours and in 31% of cases siblings worked less than 7 hours.

The experience of Chinese children is not unique (Benevene, Lagioia, Callea 2010b). It is worth highlighting a condition of exploitation due to the reduction in the exercise of other rights (leisure, play, or building friendships). In particular, this is not a question of free choice, but rather a condition of 'self-exploitation' that involves all members of the family with the aim of maintaining the family micro-enterprise or the work done for third parties (Gosh 2020).

6.5. Moroccan minors working in Italy

Moroccan minors generally are inserted in the itinerant sales channels by compatriots, but there are also more serious cases of infiltration in criminal circuits linked to the sale that risk being read as jobs, when in reality they are crimes (Finkelhor 2008). Traveling minors work mainly in the afternoons after school, in the evenings, and on holidays or on Saturdays and Sundays. In the majority of cases, minors work flexible hours and collaborate in supporting the family, also carving out time for leisure and school. However, there are also minors who work in the afternoons and evenings and who must personally cover all the costs of their room and board, maintaining a discontinuous school attendance, and others who work on holidays and away from home to avoid being recognised.

Vagrancy is one of the main activities carried out by Moroccan minors. For some it is a job undertaken to support the family. For others, it is an activity justified by traditional practice and almost an expectation from the country of origin, whereas others see it as evident exploitation. The ISTAT survey (2019) emphasised how the situations of greatest risk are probably when the forms of small itinerant trade (selling handkerchiefs, washing car windows at traffic lights, or illegal custody of cars in car parks) slip into forms of masked begging, which in turn can turn into forced labour when minors are made to do it.

It is not always the parents who decide to have their children (usually boys) emigrate to work; sometimes it is the same young people who wish to come to Italy with high expectations of employment, only to be disappointed once in Italy. This is because minors often do not have the perception of being exploited. The most serious forms of exploitation are found in dealing drugs and other illegal activities which, though they can arguably be defined as work, represent the only possibility for income. Minors involved in these activities are usually not sent by their families to live with a relative, but they set off on an adventure: once they arrive in Italy they are directed by peers or compatriots toward illegal activities, transgressing traditional values and entering the sphere of the *haram* (illicit), with frequent breakdowns in familial relationships (Policek, Ravagnani, Romano 2019). With respect to labour trafficking, potential indicators may include a recent history of immigration, unfamiliarity with the city or town where they live, or apparent control and intimidation by an accompanying adult. Often, the parents of the minor may be victims of labour or sex trafficking, with or without victimisation of the minor.

Because of the sensitivity of the research area, empirical studies are relatively limited and there is a narrow evidence base. In the vast majority of instances, researchers focussed on women and girls who experienced sex trafficking, revealing a paucity of research on male victims and victims of labour trafficking. In many studies on human trafficking, researchers have included aggregate results for adults and children, boys and girls, or individuals from multiple countries of origin. Some researchers also combine victims of different forms of trafficking. Without disaggregated data, it is hard to identify findings that may be specific to minors or to subpopulations of child victims. Nonetheless, much can be learnt from related areas of study, such as work with the homeless or runaway youths, some of whom engage in survival sex and are therefore victims of human trafficking. Studies of adult populations are also helpful inasmuch as adult women involved in sex work were often recruited at very young age and continue to experience some of the same hardships as sex-trafficked youth. The lack of research on male victims of trafficking may indirectly support the cultural belief that boys cannot be victimised and may exacerbate the problem of under-recognition. The paucity of research translates into limited empirical knowledge of the factors that increase boys' vulnerability to trafficking, of the unique experiences that occur during the period of exploitation, of the gender-specific adversities faced by male children, and of their unique needs for recovery and reintegration. A lack of knowledge and awareness likely contributes to the deficiency of services for male trafficking survivors and a tendency to treat them as offenders rather than as children in need of help and protection. With reference to forced labour involving minors, existing studies tend to suffer from the limitations mentioned above, especially with regard to researchers combining minors and adults in the sample population and inadequately distinguishing between victims of labour trafficking and of sex trafficking. Research is also difficult to conduct because of the complexity involved in identifying and distinguishing between child employment, child labour, hazardous child labour, forced child labour, and trafficking. Because labour trafficking has not received the public attention accorded to sex trafficking, there is little awareness of the possibility that minors or their parents may be victims of labour trafficking.

Another limitation in the research is related to potential generalisability. Researchers suggest that the victims identified represent only a small fraction of the total number of persons subjected to human trafficking. It is possible that these victims are fundamentally different in important respects from the whole population of trafficked persons, which would significantly limit the generalisability of study results. This possibility may be more relevant for studies conducted on trafficking survivors who are actively seeking services than for studies involving street outreach and interviews of homeless people or runaway youths engaging in survival sex. Research on trafficking victims, especially child victims, is particularly difficult because it involves a vulnerable study population. Service providers offering care to survivors are often appropriately cautious about the possibility

of exposing survivors to stressful situations and may be reluctant to approach their clients about participating in a study, which may limit access to survivors and discourage attempts to conduct research. Finally, adults and adolescents who do participate may experience recall bias, especially if recounting events that occurred years earlier. Alternatively, they may provide inaccurate information in an effort to protect others or themselves from stigma, shame, reprisals, or other consequences. Studies on minors involved in drug use often reveal that they experience victimisation and trauma caused by forced labour and sex trafficking.

Although it does not only concern Moroccan minors (Lagomarsino 2002), the sale of drugs has progressively been organised in a stratified way, coordinated by older adolescents, attracting children with the promise of easy money. The presence of debts contracted by the family and as yet unpaid, or the subtle persuasion exercised by the strong influence of the community and the familial bond, can represent a further constraint that conditions the experiences of minors.

Another situation of exploitation concerns young Moroccan girls, aged 10–13, who are sent to Italy by their compatriots with the promise of receiving a school education and being regularised in exchange for help with domestic activities (ISTAT 2019). These conditions are often misleading, and girls remain confined to the role of domestic workers with no access to education. In this case, there is a link with the traditional practices embedded in the culture of origin (i.e. the traditional practice, still in force in rural contexts, of educating girls in the future role of wives by sending them to work with wealthy families in urban areas), which are nonetheless disrupted, fuelling illegal practices. Especially for the illegal activities considered, the influence of the paths and methods of inclusion in Italy cannot be overlooked (Hopkins 2010). It is important to highlight that for Moroccan minors, there are heterogeneous working conditions: in situations of family unity in Italy, children predominantly offer help to their families in household management; in cases where minors join their fathers to work, there is an acceptance (at least initially) of being involved in external activities, such as begging and having to demonstrate autonomy and independence. In the case of irregular or unaccompanied minors, involvement in illegal activities is more widespread, so the risk of exploitation is greater.

7. Eradicating child labour and forced labour of children

The two case studies presented herein draw attention to the complexities embedded in the experience of child labour. Although there are clear similarities between the two groups, such as strong family ties, there are also instantly recognisable differences, specifically with reference to work undertaken outside the family, an experience shared by most of the Moroccan minors but not by the Chinese minors.

Widespread bans, boycotts, and trade policies cannot certainly reduce child labour and, in some instances, may even exacerbate the problem (Huijsmans, Baker 2012). This is not to say that child labour should not be outlawed. Certain forms of child labour can never be acceptable, such as illegal activities and hazardous labour. However, merely banning such activities will not be sufficient to ensure the children's welfare if the household is unable to meet its subsistence needs without the income generated by the children (Petti 2004).

The elimination of child labour requires policy instruments that target its causes. Households facing subsistence poverty will require higher incomes in order to be able to withdraw their children from underage labour. Higher incomes will allow families to send them to school. Income redistribution is one potential means of achieving such an objective, but it will only be effective if the mean income level in the household is sufficiently high. Often, this is not the case; therefore, direct financial aid may be necessary in the short term. Financial constraints caused by the current COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the need for financial support. Conditional cash transfers are one such policy instrument. In return, households can be expected to fulfil a programme requirement, such as sending their children to school. Without access to credit, some families may have to send their children to work rather than to school. Even if children are not sent to work, they may be kept out of school if credit is not available to cover the direct costs of schooling. A lack of credit may also prevent some families from buying income-generating assets or pursuing certain income-generating activities. In some cases, informal lenders may be the only option available to a household – an option that tends to carry high costs in the form of interest, in turn subjecting families to further debt. If a family does take a loan from an informal lender at a high interest rate, there is a risk that the child may be bonded into labour in order to repay the debt. As a result, informal credit markets may increase the incidence of child labour in families who are in desperate need of a loan; therefore, policies that aim to provide credit to the poor at reasonable interest rates may help to reduce child labour. This is a recurrent experience amongst migrant families in Italy (Nobili, Sebastiani 2001) and elsewhere (Saha 2019).

Policies addressing child labour should also consider the connection between fertility and child labour. While high fertility and child labour may be a rational response by the household given the behaviour of other families in the community, the group behaviour in this equilibrium may be considered irrational. Paone and Teselli (2000) show that the costs of raising children are quite high; therefore, whilst child labour can offset some of the costs of raising a child, it is unlikely that it could compensate the total cost, let alone be profitable. As a result, policies aimed at lowering aggregate fertility may help to reduce the incidence of child labour. Sexual and reproductive health policies specifically aimed at migrant populations should also highlight such a link. Mandatory school attendance, coupled with policies aimed at improving access to and the quality of schools, is also another important intervention that would primarily affect children who

are facing subsistence poverty. Empirical evidence (Saha 2019) has shown that educated parents are more likely to send their children to school. Indeed, education appears to have a dynastic effect, where educational attainment leads to a virtuous circle, while the lack of education could lead to a poverty trap. Consequently, policies aimed at improving the quality of schooling will increase the returns to education, making education a relatively more attractive alternative to child labour. The critical role of education in economic growth is demonstrable (Gilbon 2014). The empirical evidence indicates that human capital explains a great deal of the differences in output between households (Tagliaventi 2002). Therefore, increasing school attendance should have positive long-term effects on reducing child labour.

When addressing more specifically forced labour of children, in order to tackle vulnerability and, accordingly, to challenge a system of black markets, labour exploitation, and sexual abuse, the adoption of a comprehensive perspective built on human rights standards, including labour rights, is indispensable. A comprehensive approach inevitably implies long- and medium-term aims. Certainly, the first systemic factors that should be tackled in the long run are the deep economic disparities among countries which lead populations to migrate. In a context of global injustice, individuals choose to migrate to work abroad because economic pressures all but coerce them to. The wide gap between rich and poor countries is itself a form of coercion. On the other hand, medium- and short-term objectives should include actions aimed at strengthening and monitoring the respect of labour rights standards by promoting, for example, economic and legal incentives for non-exploitative business to help them in upholding labour rights standards and bearing costs of production. In this regard, the provisions offered by the 2014 ILO Forced Labour Protocol, which makes clear the need to adopt effective strategies of prevention and protection, can be extremely useful. Furthermore, changes should also embrace the creation of more legal and viable migratory channels.

In Italy, the work started by some local institutions, associations, and experts to address all forms of abuse experienced by young migrants seems to be moving towards addressing some of these points. There are now various forms of intervention to tackle the structural factors that render migrant minors vulnerable. M – specifically, centres to provide social and legal support to migrant workers, mainly those with children.

8. Concluding remarks

In addressing child labour and forced labour of children in Italy, it is pivotal to further investigate forms of work that can be reconciled with school attendance in opposition to situations that represent the exploitation of minors, where minors are harmed and deprived of their fundamental rights. Consideration of cultural

differences seems to emerge as a significant fact in the effort to integrate migrant children from disadvantaged social backgrounds into the tapestry of Italian society (Melossi, Giovannetti 2002). In working conditions that respect health and safety regulations, it should be emphasised that for some minors being in Italy confronts them with a different reality and model of childhood. For some minors, work could represent a simple adaptive tool often perceived as a personal social inclusion channel. In this regard, it is possible to argue that there is a conceivable positive value of work in the process of building the identity of a minor and their sense of belonging to society (when work is carried out respecting legal rules).

Different representations of childhood could shed some light on some meanings of the work experience of foreign minors living in Italy and could lead to implications of work concerning the migration process. For foreign minors, it is important to explore the meaning that work assumes in their experiences and to try to understand how to reconcile the original cultural variables with the real possibilities of inclusion in a different cultural setting, one often perceived as hostile. Obviously, the dimension of work cannot be isolated from other variables. Still, it can certainly be central in the projects of inclusion for those willing to reside in Italy, as well as for those wishing to repatriate.

The greatest challenge posed by any intervention aimed at banning or regulating child labour likely concerns the ability to protect individuals, guaranteeing respect for the rights of children and adolescents together whilst responding to their expectations – not by dissociating them, but by building shared paths together, around the dimensions of training and work as well (Thévenon, Edmonds 2019).

Subsistence poverty, inequalities in accessing the labour market and parental preferences may all contribute to sending a child to work. Therefore, no one policy instrument on its own can be expected to eradicate child labour. This is especially true in the case of a ban on child labour or a boycott of products produced by child labour, which are aimed at the symptoms rather than the root causes of child labour. Such policies on their own are not likely to significantly reduce child labour. Indeed, they can have the opposite effect, making children and their families worse off. Bans and boycotts will not produce the desired results if the children and their families do not have alternatives. Preventing children from working without providing alternative options can have devastating consequences for children because they become vulnerable to further exploitation. To successfully eliminate child labour, policies must address the causes of child labour and provide viable alternatives. This is by no means an easy task, but it can be achieved by ensuring access to quality schooling, addressing inequalities in accessing the labour market and providing economic support to those who face subsistence poverty, as well as by pursuing long-run economic growth strategies.

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