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The Right to a Home: Housing Strategies and Social Inclusion of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors and Youth Foreigners

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Abstract. In the current social landscape, the housing dimension constitutes one of the most decisive variables in defining social hierarchies and stratification processes. Access to stable housing is not merely the satisfaction of a primary need; it represents a crucial node in welfare policies and urban planning. When this dimension intersects with the trajectories of human mobility, it becomes a priority indicator for measuring the effectiveness of integration pathways, revealing the structural barriers that migrant subjects are forced to confront. Although a progressive trend toward settlement can be observed among the foreign population, capable of triggering transformation processes in urban spaces, the housing market remains a domain characterized by profound asymmetries and conflict. Indeed, the availability of accommodation acts directly upon an individual's social status and the quality of interactions with the host community, influencing the dynamics of acceptance and reciprocity. Drawing on the results of an exploratory study conducted in the metropolitan area of Palermo, this contribution aims to offer a reflection on the situation of unaccompanied foreign minors leaving the reception system upon reaching the age of majority, and on the possible housing strategies undertaken (such as transitional apartments, co-housing, and Housing First).

Keywords: unaccompanied foreign minors, young adults, housing, social inclusion.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current social landscape, the housing dimension constitutes one of the most decisive variables in defining social hierarchies and stratification processes. Access to stable housing is not merely the satisfaction of a primary need; it represents a crucial node in welfare policies and urban planning. When this dimension intersects with the trajectories of human mobility, it becomes a priority indicator for measuring the effectiveness of integration pathways, revealing the structural barriers that migrant subjects are forced to confront.

Although a progressive trend toward settlement can be observed among the foreign population, capable of triggering transformation processes in urban spaces, the housing market remains a domain characterized by pro-

found asymmetries and conflict. Indeed, the availability of accommodation acts directly upon an individual's social status and the quality of interactions with the host community, influencing the dynamics of acceptance and reciprocity.

The framework of vulnerability assumes particularly severe traits when the analysis focuses on the demographic segment of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (UAMs) aging out of the Reception and Integration System (SAI)¹ upon reaching eighteen years of age.

Over the last ten years, Italy has recorded a significant increase in unaccompanied foreign minors arriving via the Mediterranean or Balkan routes. Lacking parental figures, they carry a baggage of traumatic experiences: from early separation in the pre-migratory context, to violence and exploitation suffered during transit, through to linguistic, cultural, and social difficulties in the country of arrival.

The most critical issues emerge in correspondence with turning eighteen. In this phase, defined in the literature as a "triple transition" (UNICEF, Médecins du Monde 2018): biological, migratory, and the reworking of trauma, these young adults risk slipping into a condition of social undesirability. The expiration of juvenile legal protections exposes these "migrant adolescents and near-adults" to the concrete risk of irregularity and marginalization, transforming them into subjects perceived as a source of public insecurity.

It is within this context of structural fragility that the necessity to rethink strategies for accompanying these youths toward autonomy, overcoming emergency-driven logics, is situated.

Drawing on the results of an exploratory study conducted in the metropolitan area of Palermo, this contribution aims to offer a reflection on the situation of unaccompanied foreign minors leaving the reception system upon reaching the age of majority, and on the possible housing strategies undertaken (such as transitional apartments, co-housing, and Housing First). The research involved interviews with both young adults and operators from the multidisciplinary teams working within the involved facilities.

2. PROFILE

The surge in migration flows into Italy over the past ten years, along both the Mediterranean and Balkan routes, has led to a substantial increase in unaccompanied foreign minors deprived of parental care. This

demographic shift has triggered the emergence of novel challenges for receiving societies throughout the process from arrival to settlement, with wide-ranging implications for institutional, legislative, and organizational frameworks.

As of June 30, 2025, Ministry of the Interior records indicated 16,497 unaccompanied foreign minors in Italy, 87.5% of whom were male. The age breakdown highlighted a clear majority of seventeen-year-olds (54.6%), individuals nearing adulthood and thus poised to transition out of the care system. They were followed by sixteen-year-olds (21.7%), with the 7-14 age group comprising 15.1%. The age profile for female minors, however, diverged significantly from the general trend. Over half of the female cohort was under 15 (51%), whereas the older bracket (16-17 years) represented just over 37%, a markedly lower proportion compared to the 77% seen in the aggregate data. Regarding countries of origin, Egypt ranked first (24.6%), followed by Ukraine (19.5%), Gambia (9.5%), Tunisia (7.9%), and Guinea (6.2%). Reception was concentrated primarily in Sicilia (22%), Lombardia (14%), Campania (9.4%), and Emilia-Romagna (8.2%).

Given these figures, undoubtedly, administrations, territorial services, the third sector, and educational bodies have been compelled to face the increasing social complexity associated with this demographic.

In this context, the awareness that the best interests of the child cannot be pursued solely by meeting material needs, but rather through the promotion of rights and the construction of pathways leading from reception to the acquisition of autonomy and self-determination, has been fundamental. Furthermore, minor age constitutes an additional factor of substantial fragility, both regarding self-protection and the delicate developmental phase the minor is traversing, one heavily conditioned by cultural determinants. The migratory journey itself, the duration of which varies considerably, can be interpreted as a passage into a new phase of existence where minors are called upon to redefine their identity and their relationship with the "other". This transition involves, on one hand, a forced anticipation of certain developmental stages and, on the other, precocious exposure to experiences of adulthood. Minors undertaking the journey without reference adults are frequently exposed to violence, traumatic events, and re-traumatization during the migration phases. Feelings of failure, existential instability, profound vulnerability, uncertainty about the future, and risks of labour and sexual exploitation amplify their condition of fragility, placing them in a suspended space: between childhood and adulthood, between the country of origin and the country of arrival, and between uncertain legal statuses, poised between

¹ Rete SAI, Sistema Accoglienza e Integrazione <https://www.retesai.it/>.

social inclusion and exclusion. Trauma acts as an element that exacerbates this intermediate condition, hindering the transition toward new identity configurations, complicating integration processes within the reception context, and increasing the risks of marginalization and violation of fundamental rights. Among young migrants, stress, depression, anxiety, unresolved grief, and fear of death negatively impact social integration processes. Added to this is the necessity of navigating complex processes of resocialization within a new national context. The internalization of new normative, cultural, and symbolic codes can generate feelings of disorientation, loneliness, abandonment, and communicative difficulties, making integration pathways particularly arduous and fragile.

Even the lack of institutional recognition of educational qualifications and prior skills acquired in countries of origin contributes to reinforcing a form of symbolic devaluation, which is deeply intertwined with experiences of violence and marginalization. These conditions become more acute for those who are no longer minors. In such situations, the activation of interventions falls within the framework of collective responsibility, inscribed in an articulated process of social inclusion aimed at ensuring the full and effective enforceability of fundamental rights. Access to legal guardianship and protection systems, attention to personal development and autonomy, trauma recovery, and mediation must be central to programmed and implemented interventions.

Alongside this, it is equally relevant to institutionally recognize their condition of social vulnerability, accentuated by the diverse motivations driving mobility choices. These decisions, situated within the broader framework of global economic inequalities, climate change, the fragility of family structures, and limited access to education, characterize migratory processes as “unsafe, irregular, exploitative” (IOM 2020: 231).

3. THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD AND THE ROLE OF HOUSING

Reflection on the protection of minors in adolescence is situated within a structural intersection involving the rights, guarantees, and protection measures provided until the age of majority, as well as the system of resources and opportunities that institutions and welfare mechanisms can activate during a particularly sensitive transition phase. In parallel, entry into adulthood must be understood as a complex, non-linear process involving psychological, biological, and neurocognitive dimensions connected to the progressive acquisition of

reasoning skills, emotional regulation, and the assumption of responsibilities typical of adulthood. The transition to adult life (Bichi and Bonini 2021) cannot be reduced to traditional “rites of passage” (Van Gennepe 1981) such as completing schooling, entering the labour market, or forming a family unit. Instead, it must necessarily include numerous factors affecting social inclusion opportunities and biographical trajectories, such as socioeconomic status, gender, migratory and ethnic background, and religious affiliation. These youths experience a “triple transition” (UNICEF, Médecins du Monde 2018): the universal transition from adolescence to adulthood; the migratory transition linked to separation from the context of origin and adaptation to a new environment; and the transition connected to processing traumatic experiences and painful life events. The intersection of these three dimensions gives rise to growth trajectories that are often discontinuous, non-linear, and significantly divergent from those of their native-born peers.

From a sociological perspective, moving from one cultural context to another introduces an additional layer of complexity. The categories of “childhood,” “adolescence,” and “youth” assume different meanings depending on the cultural reference systems, impacting social expectations, gender roles, economic responsibilities, and the timing of leaving the family nucleus. For many migrant minors, migration itself marks a profound discontinuity between a “before” and an “after,” entailing the premature assumption of responsibility, exposure to high risks, and the necessity to develop self-care strategies in often adverse conditions. Added to this dimension is the weight of responsibility toward the family and community of origin, which frequently invests these young people with high expectations and moral and economic bonds. This reduces the space for individual self-determination and places many foreign minors far from the models of adolescence typical of Western contexts.

Another critical issue concerns identity construction processes within the reception context, where the young person often experiences a condition of “non-belonging”. This assumes specific relevance for minors engaged in defining their own self. In contexts marked by stigmatizing labelling and discriminatory practices, the possibility of developing an autonomous identity is severely compromised, producing psychological suffering and potentially hindering balanced integration into the host society.

Furthermore, the rigid distinction between “minor” and “adult” does not reflect the procedural nature of becoming an adult, nor does it adequately consider the cultural and social differences characterizing growth paths or the specific vulnerabilities of young migrants.

Many have already experienced roles and responsibilities typically associated with adulthood in their countries of origin or during the migratory journey, yet they encounter difficulties both in recognizing themselves and in being recognized as adults in the host society. Consequently, they must confront new cultural and institutional codes while the host country's regulations and legal devices limit their decision-making autonomy.

The analysis of transition processes highlights several pivotal domains: legal status and the legal recognition of the minor or newly-turned adult; access to education and training; labour market integration opportunities; the construction and maintenance of relational networks, both formal (institutional) and informal (family, community, friends); and the achievement of housing autonomy. These domains constitute the primary devices of social inclusion or exclusion, around which the possibility of developing an autonomous life project and constructing a sense of belonging in new contexts revolves.

A primary obstacle within transition pathways is represented by the complexity and sluggishness of bureaucratic procedures required to obtain residence permits and forms of legal protection. For asylum seekers, prolonged waiting periods for convocation by Territorial Commissions² and for decisions regarding international protection generate conditions of persistent uncertainty, fueling mistrust and increasing the risk of withdrawal from institutional reception pathways. Consequently, the moment of peak vulnerability frequently coincides with the departure from reception centres. This phase is characterized by an increased risk of labour exploitation, social invisibility, structural discrimination, and widespread prejudice, all of which can severely limit access to the real estate market, forcing many young people into precarious, temporary, or informal housing solutions (Brandolini *et al.* 2009).

Access to housing constitutes a central strategic lever for mitigating factors that produce vulnerability (Bergamaschi 2022). Although the right to housing is formally recognized as a fundamental right, its effective exercise remains profoundly unequal and stratified. This condition is also applicable to other target groups and scenarios, such as care leavers, individuals exiting institutional reception systems, and those experiencing housing poverty or residential precarity linked to forms of socio-economic vulnerability. Lack of a dwelling falls

within the spectrum of extreme poverty and correlates with other forms of social inequality, economic disparity, low motivation, negative health impacts, precarious social bonds, lack of civic participation, marginalization, and profound discrimination. These scenarios may lead migrants to homelessness (Consoli and Meo 2020; Meo 2009; Barnao 2004). In such cases, prevention through new housing solutions implies complex choices and critical challenges, such as property identification, cohabitation arrangements to contain costs, domestic space management, and relations with landlords and neighbours. Furthermore, the territorial context acts as a determinant factor: educational, training, employment, and housing opportunities available after reaching the age of majority rely heavily on local realities.

Young migrants confront a multiplicity of normative, bureaucratic, economic, and relational obstacles that limit access to both the private rental market and public or social housing circuits. The demand for economic and employment guarantees, the precariousness of legal status, and the diffusion of discriminatory practices render housing one of the most critical domains in autonomy pathways. Vicious cycles are created where housing precariousness intersects with labour and legal instability, generating an accumulation of exclusion. In this sense, housing cannot be reduced to a mere material good; it must be understood as a constitutive dimension of social inclusion and citizenship. While housing denotes a physical site – whether stable or temporary – intended for habitation and governed by technical, regulatory, and economic parameters, the home serves as an affective institution. It provides more than mere physical protection; it projects the individual's identity onto the external world. Whereas housing addresses survival-related issues, the home constitutes the space where autonomy is exercised and citizenship is constructed. The home is a social product, and dwelling implies processes of symbolic appropriation, relationship building, territorial rooting, and identity reconfiguration.

Therefore, housing support must be configured as a central challenge for public policies and the multidisciplinary teams of the Reception and Integration System. These actors are called upon to promote strategies capable of combining protection, empowerment, and active participation, with the awareness that investing in housing autonomy means strengthening social capital, fostering proximity ties, and contributing to contrasting the structural inequalities that traverse the trajectories of young migrants. The fragility of legal status frequently intertwines with socioeconomic vulnerability, amplifying the risk of housing exclusion.

² The Territorial Commission for the Recognition of International Protection, established within the Prefecture - Territorial Office of the Government, is the competent authority for examining applications for international protection, which have been previously formalized at the Border Police Offices or at the Police Headquarters (Questure). <https://prefettura.interno.gov.it/it/prefettura/torino/commissione-territoriale-riconoscimento-protezione-internazionale>.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

The research was conducted using a purely qualitative methodological approach, based on in-depth interviews with unaccompanied foreign minors and young adults residing in second-level reception facilities, followed by an interpretive analysis of the emerging content. The inquiry addressed three fundamental dimensions: the ontological question (reflection on the nature of the studied object); the epistemological question (reflection on scientific knowledge); and the methodological question (reflection on social research methods) (Corbetta 1999: 21-23).

From a methodological standpoint, a non-standard approach and an inductive criterion were adopted to gain deeper insight into the subject of study through specific experiences, utilizing an “analysis by subjects” (ibid.: 23). This chosen approach facilitated the exploration of the social and symbolic meanings that actors attribute to their own practices, prioritizing the understanding of processes over the numerical measurement of phenomena.

Interviews served as the central instrument, allowing for the establishment of a direct, situated relationship with interlocutors. This fostered a climate of trust that enabled the emergence of personal narratives, memories, sensitivities, and subjective interpretations of lived experiences. The conduct of the research adhered strictly to ethical principles, with particular regard to participant protection. This entailed ensuring all participants were fully informed of the study’s objectives and data usage modalities, alongside the strict application of the principle of anonymization.

The qualitative analysis of collected data, conducted through thematic coding and the comparison of diverse viewpoints, ultimately allowed for the identification of shared interpretive models. The study was implemented first through a literature review and subsequently through the analysis of interviews. Data collection took place between May 2025 and December 2025. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 migrants from various countries (all male, aged 17-19) and 15 operators working in structures of the Reception and Integration System within the Palermo metropolitan area. The interviews with migrants were conducted in Italian and, in only a few instances, in English. The decision to focus the interviews on male subjects is informed, as previously noted, by their significantly higher representation, 87.5% according to Ministry of Interior data, compared to their female counterparts. Each interview lasted approximately one hour on average. The interviews were conducted within the facilities

or at the participants’ homes. The operators are specifically tasked with initiating pathways toward housing and employment autonomy.

A semi-structured interview guide was utilized, constructed based on dimensions, or thematic areas (Cardano 2011), associated with stimulus questions deemed relevant to the research aims. Finally, the interviews were analysed using ATLAS/ti to support textual processing. Through this software, texts were managed, categories created, and conceptual frameworks constructed.

4.1 What does it mean to dwell?

The concept of “dwelling” extends far beyond the mere possession of a physical space; it encompasses a set of practices, relationships, and meanings through which locations are lived and acquire symbolic value. For care leavers transitioning out of reception systems, housing autonomy represents a crucial milestone in the transition to adulthood. This process does not exclusively concern access to housing, but involves the development of economic management skills, the construction and maintenance of relational networks, engagement with social norms and expectations, and the capacity to envision future projects. In this perspective, dwelling becomes a space of mediation between past, present, and future, between the abandoned space of origin, often marked by traumatic experiences, and the space of settlement, which remains unstable and fraught with uncertainty (Kabachnik *et al.* 2010). To dwell means to take root, to construct an identity, and to transform a “space” into a “place.”

Consequently, the pathway toward housing autonomy constitutes one of the most complex challenges: it is not merely a matter of finding accommodation, but of acquiring economic management competencies, building social networks, and navigating the discriminations present in both the labour and housing markets. Dwelling, therefore, refers to a social and symbolic process interwoven with the construction of personal autonomy, empowerment, the strengthening of proximity ties, and social cohesion. In this sense, housing autonomy represents a critical stage in the transition to adulthood, in the recomposition of fragmented identities, and in gaining access to broader forms of social participation and independence.

From the analysis of the interviews, three key dimensions emerged: the management of everyday life within secondary reception facilities; the experimentation with innovative models such as transitional apartments or “Housing First” (Molinari and Zenarolla 2018); and the critical impact of structural barriers within the private real estate market.

The experience of living within secondary reception facilities is articulated by interviewees across two distinct yet interconnected temporal and functional levels: dwelling within the facility, understood as a “training ground” for autonomy and the negotiation of rules; and dwelling outside the facility, viewed as the ultimate goal for self-recognition and the initiation of forms of participation in collective life.

The internal space of the facility is not presented as neutral but, following Bourdieu (1993), as a space reflecting power relations and social dynamics. The management of domestic space becomes the primary testing ground for the beneficiaries’ soft skills. Dwelling and cohabiting with other young people of different nationalities is configured as a continuous relational process, shaped by memory, daily practices, and social interactions. These dimensions render the space dynamic and meaningful, enabling the construction of bonds and a sense of belonging. Life within reception facilities follows precise educational logics, often derived from prior experiences with “group apartments”, as highlighted by one of the interviewed practitioners.

Let’s say that we only recently became a community, but our organization used to be an ‘apartment-group’ (shared housing), so we wanted to keep that same setup where the kids start to test themselves out, even with things like meal preparation; they also have to manage the washing machine. They are starting to move towards a certain level of autonomy (02).

The internal organization proposed by the multi-disciplinary teams within the reception facilities aims to replicate familiar or small-community dynamics that foster the acquisition of skills geared toward building autonomy through “daily doing”. These dynamics are designed to foster the acquisition of skills geared toward building autonomy through daily practical activities.

In this context, tasks such as cooking and self-care, for example, facilitated through cleaning, catering, and laundry services, are not merely provided services; rather, they serve as “spaces of agency”. However, forced cohabitation among individuals with diverse backgrounds, originating from various countries such as Gambia, Bangladesh, Somalia, and Maghreb may generate conflict. In such instances, the strategies implemented by practitioners aim to create spaces for collective dialogue and confrontation:

When there is a problem involving everyone, we call a meeting and discuss the issue, attempting to foster accountability. If a problem affects one person today, it could affect everyone tomorrow. We try to make them understand that

this is a home and that it must be lived in with trust and mutual respect (05).

A significant development has been the decision by certain facilities to move beyond the mere provision of reception services toward the development of innovative projects (D’Agostino 2020), such as “transitional apartments”. These initiatives provide a bridge between protected reception environments and full independence, offering critical insights for reimagining “housing welfare” for care leavers.

These interventions are characterized as processes of gradual detachment, specifically designed to empower the individual youth and bridge the gap between their pursuit of rights and autonomy and the host society. In this context, forms of political and community action are initiated, centering on co-design practices and the development of robust public-private partnerships.

For sure, the ‘transitional apartment’ is an apartment that, because it’s small, gives autonomy back to the kids by letting them experience the sense of ‘having’ and ‘being’ home (07).

In the landscape of reception policies, specifically those targeting Unaccompanied Foreign Minors and young adults, the housing question is not merely a logistical necessity, but the pivot around which the entire educational and empowerment project revolves. Housing autonomy thus becomes an evolutionary phase toward independence and responsibility, marking the transition from a state of passivity to one of activism and social networking. This pathway aims to restore the individual’s central role in decision-making, respect their personal timing, re-signify social belonging, and actively counter structural inequalities.

The support pathways toward housing autonomy initiated within the reception facilities are designed to prevent unaccompanied foreign minors from regressing relative to their achieved goals once they leave, due to loneliness or a lack of practical tools for household management.

While the internal pathways within facilities and transitional apartments appear structured and pedagogically oriented, the impact of the external real estate market is described by practitioners and young adults alike with tones of frustration and condemnation. The search for housing represents one of the most critical points of the system.

An alarming picture emerges in which the possession of formal requirements, such as employment contracts, valid documentation, and financial stability, is insufficient to secure a lease. Practitioners define this

phase as the “sore point, a very sore point (07)”. What presents itself is a form of explicit and diversified “housing racism” based on nationality, which forces practitioners into an exhausting and often fruitless role of mediation. Often, the guarantee offered by the organization or the practitioner themselves is the only possibility to overcome the suspicion of landlords, though even this does not always prove successful.

It's such a sore point... you call the numbers on the ads and they tell you: no, they're foreigners, we don't want them. We don't want foreigners, we only want students, we don't want people coming from facilities, we don't want Bangladeshis, we don't want Tunisians, we don't want Nigerians (07).

Housing poverty is inextricably linked to social marginality (Tosi 2017) and manifests through processes of spatial exclusion. Material deprivation compromises individual capacities for autonomy and the ability to be recognized as citizens, thereby increasing the risks of social exclusion and lack of participation.

The transition out of the reception system forces young adults to confront a private real estate market characterized by: a shortage of supply often saturated by short-term tourist rentals; unsustainable demands for economic guarantees; and a widespread distrust from landlords fuelled by stereotypes of insolvency and unreliability. Consequently, available solutions are often of substandard quality, located in peripheral or degraded areas, which amplifies the perception of deprivation.

Furthermore, the relationship with the surrounding residential context is often described as hostile or suspicious. Neighbours are frequently ready to demand “good conduct” from foreign youth to legitimize their presence in the building. In this context, dwelling becomes a continuous performance, as the young person must prove themselves to be a “good neighbour” to deconstruct stigma (Goffman 1963), burdening the simple act of residing with elevated political and social responsibility.

Let's just say we experience this lack of acceptance on a daily basis, especially since not everyone in the building accepts the presence of foreigners. That's why it's important to follow the building rules, be polite, and let people get to know us, doing our best to fight the idea of prejudice (05).

Despite these barriers, analysis of the youths' biographies reveals that they do not operate as passive subjects or mere victims; rather, they demonstrate a capacity for agency manifested through motivation for autonomy, expression of needs, and the claiming of rights.

Where innovative models have been proposed, they have opened spaces for mutual aid, assistance, and dia-

logue, serving as homelessness prevention tools. A primary example is the Housing First (HF) approach, originally theorized by Tsemberis (Tsemberis 2010; Tsemberis, Gulcur and Nakae 2004; Tsemberis and Eisenberg 2000) in the 1990s to combat chronic homelessness with psychiatric comorbidities and subsequently adopted into national guidelines for severe marginalization.

The HF approach (Cortese 2017) has been adapted to support the transition to autonomy for migrant youth. In this perspective, housing is understood as a fundamental starting point in an individual's life, not a reward to be obtained at the end of an integration path, but a necessary precondition to activate social and labour inclusion processes. Housing is no longer the final goal, but the primary action of harm reduction and the first step toward the recovery of relationships, roles, and transversal social competencies (recovery approach).

We cook together; we eat together. There are four of us. One guy is Italian, a student, we do everything together (10).

Consequently, this represents an inescapable precondition for the activation of any socio-occupational inclusion pathway and for the restoration of psycho-physical well-being. The model, as developed within the European context, is structured around eight core principles: housing as a fundamental human right; user self-determination in decision-making processes; the decoupling of housing provision from clinical treatment services; a recovery-oriented approach; harm reduction; active engagement without coercion; person-centered planning; and the provision of flexible support for as long as required (Pleace 2016).

Through the Housing First experience, for young migrants, the concept of dwelling has transcended mere spatial availability. It points instead toward a socio-symbolic process interconnected with self-determination, empowerment, and the strengthening of social cohesion, thereby challenging a victim-centered narrative of these individuals (Tumminelli 2024).

I moved from the facility to a house with a friend of mine... it's nicer, even if you have to think about keeping the place clean and doing the cooking (01).

I didn't feel like staying in the community all the time... it felt too closed off that way (03).

The youth have demonstrated a capacity for resilience and aspiration, utilizing the domestic space as a site for identity renegotiation and the exercise of responsibility (budget management, maintenance of the premises, and compliance with building regulations). They

have translated this agency into the assertion of rights and the formulation of autonomous choices.

In the community, that's how it was, whenever you needed something, you'd ask... one time [the tutor] got annoyed and told me, 'Look, the house is yours, when you want something, just take it'. These little things might seem silly, but honestly, if you're used to living that way, it's really hard (05).

What I've always liked is that sometimes we wait for each other... to wait for the other person, to chat, we buy some things... and we have a good laugh (02).

Furthermore, autonomous living, clearly distinguished from the communal life of reception facilities, has fostered an unprecedented sense of freedom, while simultaneously presenting new managerial challenges and deconstructing prejudices through the routine of neighbourhood interactions.

Around here we say hello when we see each other on the stairs... it's little things like that (09).

Investing in structural housing solutions has proven fundamental for ensuring dignity and substantive citizenship, while also being more economically advantageous compared to the costs of emergency management for marginality.

5. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The persistent shortage of housing and structural discrimination within the private market continue to constrain the effective exercise of rights. Addressing the issue of dwelling, therefore, assumes both individual and collective significance. Constructing one's life in a new country entails the development of autonomy and the strengthening of empowerment. Having access to a home does not merely imply possessing a physical space; it means accessing concrete opportunities for social inclusion. Residential autonomy thus becomes a fundamental phase in the transition toward independence and responsibility, marking the passage from conditions of passivity to processes of activation and the construction of social networks, while contributing to the redefinition of meanings of belonging and the countering of inequalities.

For young migrants, dwelling presents itself as a relational and processual dimension, arising from the intersection between a space of origin, often abandoned and marked, in the case of refugees, by traumatic experiences, a current settlement space characterized by material and symbolic precariousness, and a future space as

an object of aspirations and strategic planning. A structural tension emerges between the migratory experience and dwelling practices, in which the home loses its meaning of static stability to assume that of a process in constant transformation.

The act of inhabiting becomes synonymous with an inclusive pathway aimed at territorial rooting and the acquisition of agency within the host community. Despite this, the home simultaneously represents both a space for experimenting with responsibility and the primary obstacle to the realization of the integration pathway, due to phenomena of systemic racism and mistrust on the part of property owners.

The young people have demonstrated significant capacities for resilience and aspiration, utilizing the domestic sphere as a site for identity renegotiation and the exercise of responsibility, specifically regarding budget management, premises maintenance, and compliance with building regulations. They have translated this agency into the assertion of rights and the formulation of autonomous choices. Furthermore, autonomous living, clearly distinguished from the communal life of reception facilities, has fostered an unprecedented sense of freedom, while simultaneously presenting new managerial challenges and deconstructing prejudices through the routine of neighbourhood interactions.

From the analysis of interviews with reception operators and the young people involved, the complexity of the housing-autonomy nexus for migrants is reconstructed. The reception system has developed refined methodologies to transform dwelling into an educational process capable of generating skills and responsibility. The concept of the "passage" as a supervised transitional phase represents a best practice that responds to the need for gradualism in the process of exiting tutelage. Consequently, operators find themselves managing not only the education of the youth but also the "education" of the local territory and homeowners, acting as guarantors and mediators in a context of increasing social closure.

The analysis highlights as centrally relevant: working with young migrants to acquire cultural, social, and relational resources; working with the community to ensure it assumes a proactive and inclusive role; and working with the context to imagine spaces of encounter, dialogue, and participation. Furthermore, the impact that new housing models exert on the creation of social relations, the acquisition of social roles, participation in territorial life, the reduction of prejudice, and the emergence of forms of reciprocity should not be underestimated.

Housing support, therefore, represents a central challenge not only for the multidisciplinary teams operating within reception and integration systems but for

the institutions themselves, which are called upon to design strategies capable of sustaining this delicate transition. The activation of support networks, investment in social capital, the construction of alliances between public and private actors, and the promotion of spaces for shared relational confrontation are configured as indispensable trajectories for the reduction of the risks of marginalization (fio.PSD 2006).

Finally, the residential autonomy of young migrants cannot be read exclusively as the outcome of an individual integration path (“finding a job”, “behaving well”), but rather as a structural issue requiring public policy interventions in the real estate market, such as social housing, guarantee funds, and ethical mediation, to prevent the “sore point” of dwelling from undermining the entire educational investment of the reception system.

Therefore, investing in housing policies proves to be not only an ethical imperative but also economically advantageous compared to the costs of emergency management. This confirms that stable housing constitutes the essential foundation for transforming the presence of care leavers from a problematic issue into a community resource.

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