Switzerland supports Italy and UNHCR to strengthen the reception and protection of unaccompanied minors

In the first half of 2025, 6,205 unaccompanied foreign minors arrived in Italy, representing 18% of the total number of people arriving via the Mediterranean during the year. This share is growing, according to the Minor Information System (SIM) of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies. They are only a fraction of the 16,497 unaccompanied minors present in Italy as of 30 June 2026. To ensure they receive the reception and protection to which they are entitled, the project "Enhancing Reception and Protection Services for Unaccompanied Children in Italy" was launched, promoted by the Italian Ministry of the Interior, the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) and UNHCR. The project, part of a broader bilateral agreement between Switzerland and Italy on migration, will strengthen Italy's efforts to date in managing complex migration flows.

The Italian reception system is structured around first and second reception centres, designed to assess needs through interviews with minors, provide legal guidance, and facilitate longer-term integration. Although the government is working to strengthen this system, in practice it appears essential, from a child's best interests perspective, to strengthen individualised support interventions as part of the long-term projects minors require. Since there are no restrictions on personal freedom, many of them voluntarily leave reception facilities shortly after arrival, leaving them unprotected and exposed to serious risks.

Traffickers and criminal networks actively exploit this situation, luring unaccompanied minors into conditions of abuse and exploitation. In the first 6 months of the year, 2,572 minors left the centres on their own, disappearing without a trace.

The UNHCR project, funded by Switzerland's second contribution to several EU Member States and developed in close coordination with the Italian Ministry of the Interior, was created to strengthen the institutional response to the phenomenon of unaccompanied foreign minors, supporting Italian authorities in identifying needs and developing individual inclusion and protection pathways.

The activities are structured around four main pillars:

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- **Strengthening institutional coordination:** Improve joint work between the national and local levels, consistent with the Italian Government's priorities and other ongoing support activities.
- **Direct interventions in reception centers:** Operating in strategic regions such as Lombardy, Puglia, Basilicata, and Campania, where specialized interventions by international agencies and NGOs were lacking, ensuring concrete support for minors.
  Through the partnership with Save the Children, we offer psychosocial support; information on rights and future prospects; and recreational activities to foster emotional well-being and promote inclusion and a sense of normalcy. The daily presence of staff also allows us to collect data on the children's profiles and needs, identifying areas for system improvement.
- **Training and support for center staff:** Develop the skills of reception center staff to improve the quality of care provided to minors.
- **Identifying the needs of minors:** Refocusing on the needs of minors, identified through information gathering on their profiles within the centers, with the aim of supporting Italian authorities in identifying areas requiring improvement.

Source(s)

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (24 September, 2025), Minori stranieri non accompagnati: la Svizzera al fianco dell'Italia e di UNHCR, nasce il progetto rafforzare i servizi di accoglienza e protezione per i minori non accompagnati in Italia [Unaccompanied foreign minors: Switzerland joins Italy and UNHCR in launching a project to strengthen reception and protection services for unaccompanied minors in Italy], https://www.unhcr.org/it/notizie/comunicati-stampa/minori-stranieri-non-accompagnati-la-svizzera-al-fianco-dell-italia-e-di

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