

## Challenges for the protection of unaccompanied foreign minors in the streets of Ceuta

García-España, Elisa; Carvalho da Silva, Jacqueline.

<sup>a</sup> Universidad de Málaga, e-mail: [elisa@uma.es](mailto:elisa@uma.es); <sup>b</sup> Universidad de Málaga, e-mail: [dasilva@uma.es](mailto:dasilva@uma.es)

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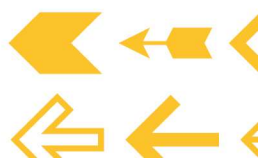
### Introduction

Ceuta, as a Spanish enclave in Africa face specific challenges in terms of immigration. Due the proximity of Ceuta and Morocco, the residents of Moroccan provinces adjoining are exempted from visa requirements and can be authorized to enter and exit the Spanish city, on a daily basis, but not the rest of the national territory. A number of the people that cross this border are minors, many of them come from adjoining provinces and enter legally, with their passports, accompanied by their parents or a relative who abandon them in Spanish territory, with the aim that they could get a better life and help their family economically. Others come from other provinces and undertake this trip alone, often with the same responsibility, of helping their family, and stay on the land border between Morocco and Spain for days or even months trying to sneak across the border illegally.

Once on Spanish soil, the International Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges the Spanish State to protect the unaccompanied minor, via the child protection system. The legal commitment to protect these minors, regardless of their status as foreigners, has put in check the Spanish protection systems, guarantors of the well-being of every child in a situation of helplessness. Although there are about 300 minors in the center for minors in Ceuta, under the tutelage of the protection system, there are around 50 minors in street situation. This number fluctuates quite a lot due to the minors' high mobility. A number of them enter and leave the center for minors, cross the strait of Gibraltar or return to Morocco and new ones enter through the border. Frequently, the police work becomes cyclical: the police officers transfer the minors to the center and they escape repeatedly, always getting back to the port zone of the city.

These minors scape from the system, they are unprotected, exposed to criminal and use of public insecurity and social alarm, although the crime rate of this group is low, negative labels are applied to them. In this context, Ceuta, specifically the Department of Health, Social Affairs, Minors and Equality, has signed an agreement with the University of Málaga, implemented by the Observatory of the Crime control system towards Immigration (OCSPI), to develop a pilot project of research and social intervention to prevent juvenile delinquency and protect these minors. A first agreement was signed from 01 December 2017 to 01 December 2018 and a second one reaffirm de continuity of the program from 01 December 2018 until 01 December 2019.

The PREMECE program (Prevention of crime of foreign minors alone in the streets of Ceuta) is based on criminological approach on the prevention of juvenile delinquency.



Specifically three programs that work in the reduction of juvenile delinquency inspired the objectives and methodology of the PREMECE program:

- a) Programs on positive parenting, an adequate parental / maternal education style (Patterson, 1982);
- b) The prosocial thinking program by Ross, Garrido and Fabiano (1991), for the improvement of social skills;
- c) Multi-component interventions such as the Communities That Care (CTC) Program (Brown et al, 2007, Hawkins et al, 2008).

## Objectives

The objective of this short text is to discuss the implementation level and intervention results of the PREMECE program (during 2018), pointing the main challenges and positive aspects of this pioneering initiative. First, we will present the objectives and methodology of the PREMECE program.

The general objective of the PREMECE program is to reduce the criminal and victimological risks of foreign unaccompanied minors in the streets of Ceuta. To achieve that, specific objectives were settled:

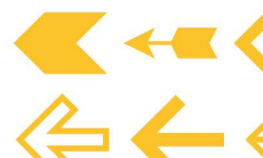
- Make a diagnosis of the situation of minors that do not adhere to the protection system.
- Meet some basic needs, namely hygiene, health care, and legal protection.
- Develop strategies to prevent criminal behavior and foster a pro-social lifestyle.
- Intervene with these children individually to provide individual responses, through the protection system, focusing on the child's best interests (repatriation, reunification, entry into the center for minors, entry in specialized centers, etc.).
- Coordinate the key agents of the city, such as the police, NGOs, Child Prosecutor, etc. for the protection of these minors and increase social peace.

## Methodology

The PREMECE Program consists in an intervention and in a research project. During 2018, the intervention period was between May and November (7 months). The intervention is developed through a team of street educators and psychologists (Drari team<sup>1</sup>), who works directly with unaccompanied minors in street situation, using strategies of positive parenting, balancing affection and control, to help them in their maturation process. The Drari team also promote educational activities based on a prosocial thinking program, adapted to the target population (minors in street situation).

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<sup>1</sup> "Drari" means "kid", a meaningful word in dariya, their native language.



The goal is to help them to make appropriate decisions for their protection and crime prevention.

Other function of Drari team is to meet some basic needs as providing hygiene material, as well as accompany the minors in legal matters and health care and also healing wounds (many children are bruised, especially by attempts to cross the concertinas in the restricted area of the port, or attempts to sneak underneath the trucks). Through the social intervention, during the process of trust building and using participant observation method, the Drari Team collect data to investigate this reality.

The research tools are the field diary and individual diagnostic reports of the minors, filled by the Drari team and analyzed by the OCSPÍ's research team. These registers are very useful to share information and planning common intervention strategies. Moreover, the content analysis of the minor's individual diagnostic reports is very useful to get to know the minors different profiles, their transgressive behaviors, victimization, goals and migration project, as well as their perception of the police and the center for minors, etc.

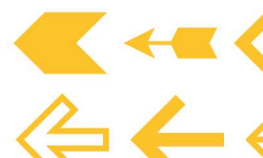
Another aspect of the intervention is focused on the key agents of the city of Ceuta. The project were designed as a community intervention, which entails the need for the coordination of key agents of the city, as the police, the public prosecutor, NGOs, etc. to achieve greater protection of these minors. The direction and coordination of the program serve as a thread to connect these key actors suggesting collaborations, exchange of experiences and providing training.

As the Project is still underway, data are still being collected and analyzed. Here we will focus on the implementation level and intervention results of the first year of the program (December 2017 to December 2018). For that, we use indicators related to the objectives settled in the initial project.

## Results

The PREMECE is a pilot program and therefore one of its objectives is to make a diagnosis of the situation on the street. It is an exploratory research and pioneer intervention program and because of that the results are difficult to assess, once there is no previous data or previous experiences of intervention and research with this group in street situation. The main goal here is to indicate the level of implementation of the objectives settled in the initial plan and present the quantifiable results of the intervention on the street. On this basis, the challenges and positive aspects of this initiative will be pointed out. Due to space limitations, the qualitative results of the intervention, which are much more extensive and difficult to measure, will not be discussed here, but they were documented in the field diary and will be analyzed and published in the future.

- Indicators of implementation - Collection of data for diagnosis:
  - Number of minors attended
  - Volume and quality of information of the individual diagnostic reports
  - Volume and quality of information of the field diary

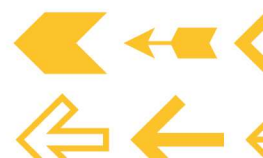


With regard to the data collection for the research, 145 individual diagnostic reports were registered (one for each minor attended in this period) and four field diary (one per educator or psychologist, filled on a daily basis). The main limitation for a great volume and quality of the data collected is the high mobility of the minors. As a program of social intervention based on positive parenting and trust building, research tools such as questionnaires or structured interviews were not considered appropriate, the information that completes the reports is the result of the relationship that were built with the minor over the time. That means that some files lack information, or have superficial information about the minor, it occurred when the intervention time with him was not sufficient to get all the desired information. The information in the field diary, however, gives us a daily account of the dynamics of the street, through the perception of the Drari team: the relationships between groups of minors, the relation with the DRARI team and other street agents such as neighbors, police, etc. However, the dynamics of the street are sometimes too agitated and can distract the Drari team from its researcher role, which sometimes causes that the team focus just on the intervention. The constant contact with the coordination and direction of the program, as well as with the team of support researchers of the OCSPI allowed a constant reflection and better register in the field diary of the street experiences.

- Indicators of implementation - coordination of key agents:
  - Number of Spanish associations collaborating
  - Number of Moroccan associations collaborating
  - Training and coordination meetings with key agents

As a community intervention, before initiating the program a meeting were arranged with the key agents of the city, namely, the personnel of the center for minors, the Prosecutor of minors, the Police, NGOS of the city and the Drari team. The main goal were to present the program and coordinate the work. By the end of the seven months of street intervention, we had six Spanish association that collaborated with the Project and one Moroccan association that was in touch with the program direction. The main difficulty here is the dimension of the phenomenon, much bigger then the program possibilities. The ideal situation would be a solid collaboration with NGOS in Morocco, to prevent the street situation and to work with the family in Morocco, that in some cases animate the minors to cross illegally the Strait of Gibraltar, risking their lives.

The first meeting were very productive and the communication during all the program were very fluid and constant between the coordination and direction of the program and the key agents. A noteworthy aspect of this community intervention is the work with the Local Police of Ceuta. Some police officers also share a negative image of this group of minors. The program and the Drari team approaches the minors of the local police, so that they can get to know each other, and change their preconceived images. The result is that the minors can better recognize the police functions, their authority and can contact them if they need. An international seminar were organized by the program to experience exchange between the police of Stockholm and the police of Ceuta, since some minors keep crossing borders once in Spanish peninsula, and get until Sweden. The collaborations between social services and police in Stockholm inspired collaboration between the police of Ceuta and Drari team.



The quantitative results of the street intervention are presented in the table below. These results also indicate the level of implementation of the initial intervention objectives.

**Table 1.** Quantitative results of street intervention

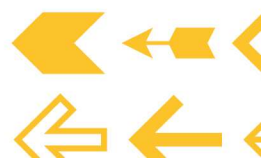
- Number of assistance in hygiene and healing wounds	+2.000
- Number of health assistance	40
- Number of accompaniment for legal protection	25
- Number of educational activities	28
- Number of leisure activities	21
- Number of minors who returned to Morocco	15
- Number of minors accompanied to the center for minors	40
- Number of minors who stayed in the center for minors	21
- Number of minors referred to specialized centers	0
- Number of minors who disappear after contact	18
- Total of minors who leave the street	36

The most striking number in the table above is that of assistance in hygiene and healing wounds. This is an estimate number, based on field experiences. This kind of attention and others accompaniment became a mean of reaching the minors, since the healing became a daily claim of the minors towards the Drari team. The accompaniments are related to positive parenting strategies. In the case of legal accompaniment, minors were accompanied so much that they were victimizers or victims of crimes. The trust built with the Drari team allowed above all to lodge complaints when they were victims, mostly, of physical aggressions, which otherwise would not reach the knowledge of the police. On the other hand, when they were accused of perpetrating crimes, the presence of an adult referent, that reminds them of the need to be responsible for their actions, is also fundamental in their maturation process.

The activities of leisure also served to strengthen the relationship between the minors and the Drari team. Also the educational activities, inspired by cognitive behavioral programs, were well received by the minors. Positive parenting strategies and educational activities got that some minors decided to return with their family or to enter the center for minors. In total 36 children left the street during the first seven months of intervention. One of the limitations for the permanence of minors in the center is the lack of means. Almost half of the children accompanied by the Drari team to the center escaped again. The center is overflowing and does not have the capacity to accommodate the number of minors it receives.

Another major limitation faced was the impossibility of referrals to specialized centers. This objective was designed foreseeing serious cases of drug addiction. During the months of intervention it has not been possible to refer any minor to specialized centers. The limitation in these cases was the need for a psychiatric report to proceed with the referral. The absence of mental illness in cases of serious drug addiction make legally impossible to carry out involuntary hospitalization. So we find minors in situations of extreme vulnerability that cannot be treated on the street, but they refuse to adhere the protection system and cannot be involuntary referred.

## Conclusions



The challenges of this program were, and still are, many: the high mobility of the minors, the methodological challenges to collect data while intervening in such a difficult environment, the lack of means, etc. Despite the challenges, we consider that the program has been adequately and satisfactorily implemented throughout 2018. The results achieved have exceeded the expectations of both the PREMECE team and the Department of Health, Social Affairs, Minors and Equality of Ceuta. As an intervention program, the Drari team once consolidated as a group of referent adults on the streets of Ceuta allows protecting and better understanding the local reality of these minors, as an arm of the administration so that the protection system can be more effective, with the collaboration of the key agents of the city. Regarding the research, this kind of project is essential to have a real and updated diagnosis of the situation of minors in street situations, away from the biases and frequent rumors in public opinion and the media.

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