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The city's care of unaccompanied child, adolescent and youth migrants

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This paper explains the current situation of the unaccompanied minors, adolescents and youth migrants living in Barcelona city, and it describes the main actions and programmes that Barcelona City Council has developed and is still promoting to respond to their basic educational, residential and employment needs. The paper evidences the lack of municipal power in this matter and the serious organisational and multi-level governance problems (state, region, city) that affect the social protection network.

Introduction

Child, adolescent and youth migrants travelling alone are unaccompanied migrant minors.³ Therefore, it refers to the emigration of minors to another country without an adult guide in the receiving country. Children, adolescents and youth migrants are usually a very heterogeneous group with very different realities, situations, personal experiences and migratory processes. However, they have some elements in common: the life stage they are currently at (adolescence), and the dreams and expectations of improved socio-economic conditions for themselves and their families. The improvement in their rights compared with their country of origin is true, given that here they have the right to education, health care and so on.

They are emigrants in their country of origin and immigrants in the receiving country. They and their families have certain expectations with respect to migration and the betterment it will mean for them. Regarding their emigration, they carry with them a cultural load, knowledge and an attachment to their homeland, and they are 'parentalised' by their families; in other words, the child or young person takes on the family responsibilities encountered in adult life (Bargach, 2009). A further defining characteristic of these youths is that most of them are very mobile residentially, and are therefore not rooted socially, hence they suffer from what is known as the 'Ulysses Syndrome', the chronic, multi-faceted stress suffered by immigrant persons (Achoategui, 2009). The most important thing to remember, however, is that these young people and adolescents are in a life stage when their personal identities are under construction. They must, therefore, find positive adult referents to mirror themselves on. We must consider these children and youths' potential, since they are the most well-educated members of their households and the ones who have the most energy and ability to undergo the challenge of emigration.

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3. The definition of *child, adolescent and youth migrants* is the nomenclature defined and used by the Directorate General of Child and Adolescent Services (DGAIA) of the Government of Catalonia.

This type of migration started in Europe in the 1980s. In Catalonia, it started at the end of the 1990s with young people mostly from Morocco. In 2000, migrants started to arrive from the African sub-continent (mainly Senegal and Gambia). There is currently a diversity of up to sixteen countries of origin, although the majority come from the area of the Maghreb.

In Spain, the care of children, adolescents and youth migrants usually falls under the social protection system. The protection system in Spain makes intervention and care for these children an obligation, and their status as a minor is the priority criteria over other aspects such as the fact that they are immigrants and the current Immigration Law. As minors, they are guaranteed reception and tutoring since they are minors without parents and, therefore, it is the public body responsible for the protection of minors in each territory (autonomous region) who must provide them with tutoring and is responsible for their care. This delegation of responsibility in the regional protection system and the lack of a centralised body makes the coordination and monitoring of this highly mobile group within Spain difficult. As mentioned previously, this group are very mobile within the territory, moving from one autonomous region to another, among which there is no coordination. A state level observatory is needed and the processes of mobility and the reasons for it need to be established.

In Catalonia, the Directorate General of Child and Adolescent Services (DGAIA) is the body responsible for the protection of minors. The first upsurge in the phenomenon of child, adolescent and youth migrants travelling on their own was at the end of the 1990s, and this is when the DGAIA first created welcome centres specifically for this group which offered a large number of places and were received extremely negatively by the neighbouring community. With the decline in the number of new arrivals of the following years, migrant minors have been received using municipal protection system resources.

1. The situation in Barcelona city

In Barcelona, the City Council created the Municipal Detection and Intervention service in 1999 to attend to unaccompanied migrant minors living at serious social risk on the streets and in public spaces in Barcelona city. It includes the set of services provided by different institutions under the Coordination and Compromise Agreement to improve the inter-institutional response to the serious social problem of undocumented children and youth in situations of serious social risk, of 9 March 1999,⁴ and under later agreements made between the Government of Catalonia and Barcelona City Council. Due to the exponential growth in the number of unaccompanied minors arriving in Catalonia, the DGAIA has had to open new centres and tutored flats as required without any pre-planning or groundwork carried out with the territory or the neighbouring community, because of the situation of emergency and collapse of the system. This precipitated response has generated reactions of stigmatisation and rejection from neighbours and the community, and has even provoked some violent reactions.

The support procedure for child and youth migrants starts with detecting and identifying who these minors are. The security forces and, in the case of Barcelona, social work teams are the ones who intervene in the public space in the city and can find these children, adolescent and youth migrants. Once found, they must be accompanied to the Public Prosecutor for minors in the Care of Minors Office (OAM) of the Catalan police force (Mossos d'Esquadra) to be identified. The Immigration Law states that all unaccompanied foreign minors must be identified. In the case that they are carrying documentation that identifies them, this must be validated by the OAM. They are then placed in the hands of the DGAIA for their protection, which is when they enter the protection system. If they are undocumented, or the authenticity of the documents they are carrying is in doubt, they must take some medical tests to determine their age. Those classified

4. This was an agreement signed by the Justice Department and the Home Affairs Department of the Government of Catalonia, the State Delegation, Barcelona City Council, Sant Coloma de Gramenet City Council, and the Public Prosecution.

as minors are referred to the protection system, while those identified as adults are put back on the streets where they remain in a situation of administrative and legal irregularity.

Both the administrative procedure they must follow and the medical identification procedure they must undergo have been seriously questioned by social entities such as Bayt al-Thaqafa, the Noves Vies Association and Save The Children, among others, as well as law professionals who denounce the system to determine age by means of an x-ray since it has a two-year margin of error, and so are advocating a change of procedure. And, until this happens, they ask for a guaranteed interpretation of the results of the medical test.

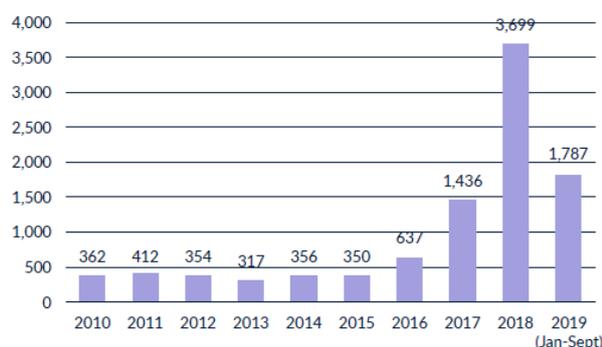
The protection system supports these minors until they are 18 years old, which is when they come of age and are no longer considered as abandoned minors that must be tutored. In Catalonia, the DGAIA includes the Support Area for Tutored and Ex-tutored Youth (ASJTET), a unit that provides young people aged 16 to 21 years old that have been tutored by the DGAIA technical and educational support in the areas of housing and job placement, in addition to psychological, economic and legal support, with the aim of fully integrating them into an autonomous and emancipated social and employment situation. Some young people do not use this service, either because they choose not to follow an action plan, because they arrived in Barcelona at 17 years old and were not able to follow the tutoring process, or because they have not reached a situation where they are autonomous enough to be eligible for access. With the increase in the number of arrivals, the ASJTET cannot provide support for the amount of young people that reach the age of adulthood.

The arrival and settling of child, adolescent and youth migrants in our society is difficult. The environment, the culture and the education system are all very different from the experiences they have had in their own countries. To this can be added their age, the trauma of the migration process, the involvement and expectations of the family, and the stigma or negative view that unfortunately part of our society has of this group.

The document and bureaucratic part, in other words the processes and procedures they must follow to obtain resident and work permits are not easy, and this is even more difficult when they arrive here as adults. As tutored minors, the DGAIA takes charge of the process to be granted a resident's permit and, in some exceptional cases, the process to be able to work as a minor. When they reach adulthood, it is the Immigration Law that regulates the conditions and requirements to renew their resident's permit and find work, which include having to have a full time 40-hour per week employment contract of at least 1 year's duration. The Immigration Law requirements are obviously out of sync with young people's real possibilities nowadays. When the largest proportion of arrivals are youths aged between 16 and 17 years, documentation for this group becomes essential, even if system saturation lengthens the processing period. The problem, then, arises when at 18 years old these young people stop being protected and treated as abandoned minors, which is when their status changes and they become adult immigrants in an irregular administrative situation.

Special reference must be made to the invisibility of the girls, who often remain outside the protection system. The role of gender and the cultural and family situations they have experienced in their countries of origin mean that their arrival process takes place through intermediaries, for example through a job in domestic service, getting married and so on. This makes their detection and access to the protection circuit difficult. Data provided by the Department of Employment, Social Affairs and Families for this year shows that 96.1% of the unaccompanied children, adolescents and youth this year are boys and 3.2% are girls. The following graph shows the evolution of arrivals of this group in Catalonia in the last ten years.

Graph 1. Unaccompanied children, adolescent and young migrant annually attended by DGAIA, Catalonia, 2010-2019



Source: Catalan Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Families. Government of Catalonia.

Children, adolescents, young people who migrated alone	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019 (Jan-Sept)
Nº given shelter by the Barcelona DGAIA territorial services	231	317	492	538	353
Nº given shelter by the Metropolitan Area DGAIA territorial services	6	16	67	417	226
Nº given shelter by the other territorial services of the DGAIA (Barcelona counties, Girona, Lleida, Tarragona, Terres de l'Ebre)	113	304	877	2,744	1,208
Nº given shelter by all the DGAIA territorial services	350	637	1,436	3,699	1,787
% increase in the number given shelter compared to the previous year in Catalonia	-2	82	124	159	-33

Source: Catalan Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Families. Government of Catalonia.

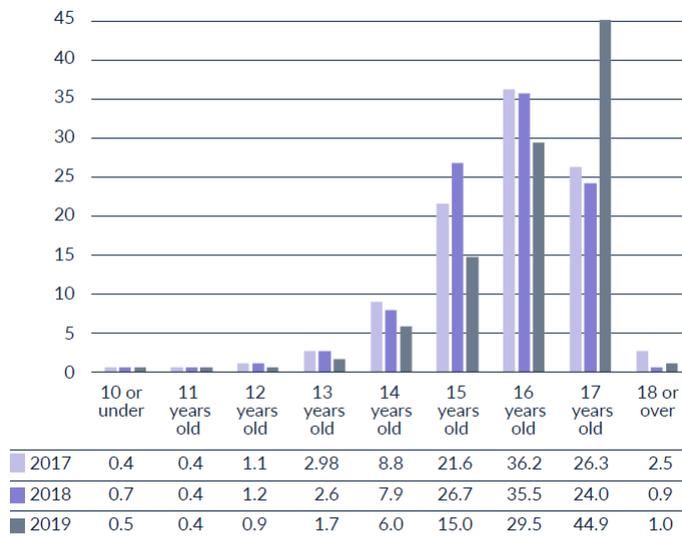
The exponential increase in the number of arrivals of unaccompanied children, adolescents and youth in Catalonia has collapsed all the systems. The detection and identification circuit has collapsed the Public Prosecution and the health system that carries out the diagnostic tests to determine their age. This means that when the security forces detect these minors they must stay in the police stations since they cannot be attended to immediately by the Public Prosecution. The protection system has also collapsed since it does not have enough facilities and professionals to be able to cope with the huge number of minors placed in their care.

This situation of collapse in the different care systems has created many anomalies. It has affected the number of minors who escape from police stations and the Public Prosecution. These youngsters do not trust the police and do not want to spend many hours, or even days, in the police station, a phenomenon that makes identification and entering the protection circuit even more difficult. The number of escapees and rejection of the centres provided by the DGAIA has also increased. Available places are assigned, but there is no way of planning whether this is the most suitable place for each of the profiles they are dealing with. These circumstances lead to increased numbers of this group on the streets, and in flats and squats, in addition to more incidents in the public space, increasing the negative perception some citizens already have.

Many new centres and places have been opened to respond to the needs of these young people but, due to the situation of emergency, the necessary groundwork has not been done with the communities, an aspect that has caused some citizens to feel insecure and, consequently, reject this group. This improvisation has also lengthened the period for obtaining resident's permits,

which leaves the minors who arrived at the age of 17 to leave the protection system in a situation of administrative irregularity, as shown in the graph 2.

Graph 2. Percentage of children, adolescents and youth received by the DGAIA by age group. Catalonia, 2017-2019



Source: Catalan Ministry of Employment, Social Affairs and Families. Government of Catalonia.

Even though the number of arrivals has decreased slightly in 2019, the number of unaccompanied children, adolescents and youth reaching 18 years old and leaving the protection system with or without a resident's permit and with no resources to cover their basic needs and building a life project is worrying. These youngsters leave the protection service where they have been treated as abandoned minors, to remain in the immigration system, almost all of them in a situation of residential exclusion and homeless. We must reflect on whether the route out of the protection system could be the homeless persons care system. Also important is the fact that Catalonia, like other autonomous regions, has no strategy for the care of homeless people and, consequently, there is no portfolio of social services for dealing with situations of homelessness.

2. The different services and specialist teams

Barcelona has always been a welcoming city. The City Council has always prioritised humanitarian and solidarity values. To this effect, since the first unaccompanied child, adolescent and young immigrants arrived, social resources that do not exist in the portfolio of municipal social services have always been found and deployed. The municipality does not have specific responsibilities for caring for unaccompanied children, adolescents and youth migrants, because these are state (the Immigration Law) and autonomous region responsibilities (protection of minors). Despite not being responsible for this area, Barcelona City Council, through its social services, has provided a series of resources to support the minors that are detected in the public space and put them in touch with the DGAIA protection service, and to provide adequate support for youths aged 18 years and over, especially when for different reasons they are in a socially vulnerable situation.

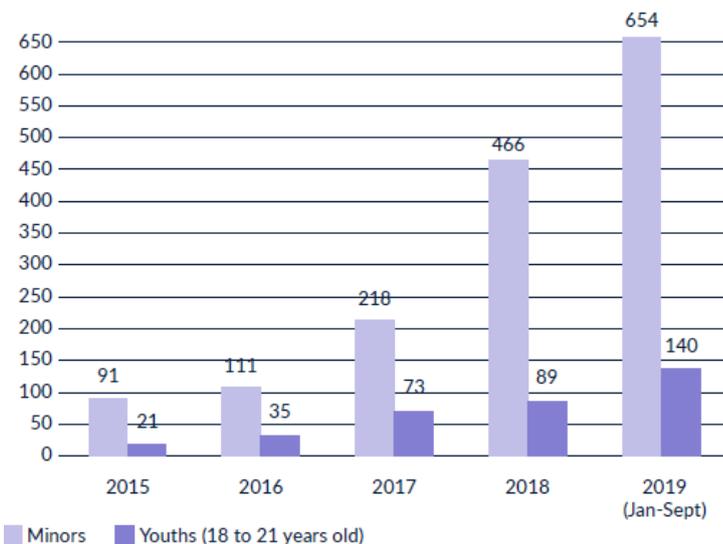
The Detection and Intervention Service (SDI) was created in 1999, and is directed at the unaccompanied children, adolescent and youth migrants who live on the streets and in public spaces in Barcelona and are in a situation of serious social risk, to guarantee them access to the resources of the protection system. This service also intervenes in young people in similar circumstances until they are definitively referred to the basic social and health services and other resources, at least until they reach 21 years old. The SDI intervenes across all of Barcelona, detecting and identifying new unaccompanied minors and youth through picking them up off the

streets, accompanying them to the relevant centres depending how each situation is assessed, monitoring their progress, and directly intervening in behavioural and situational issues. This service also works with entities and services, providing support and advice on caring for this group from their specialist area. This team is currently made up of six social education professionals, who work in split teams of two. They work from Monday to Friday on morning, afternoon and evening shifts, while at the weekend there is an on-duty team to support minors detected by third sector entities and municipal social services.

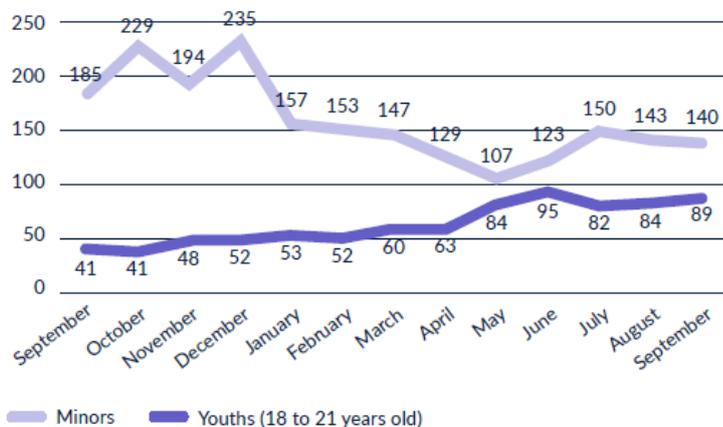
As can be seen in the following two tables, the number of interventions between 2017 and 2019 has increased exponentially, even though it is difficult to cover all existing needs. To this effect, in 2020 the service will be extended, and the number of educators whose task is to intervene in the public space will double. These will also be responsible for monitoring the phenomenon in the city, and they will have a psychological and legal assessment support team at their disposal.

Graph 3. Number of cases dealt with by the Detection and Social Intervention Service (SDI), Barcelona, 2015-2019

Children and youths attended by SDI (2015 - Sept 2019)



Children and youths attended monthly by SDI (Sept 2018 - Sept 2019)



Source: Detection and Social Intervention Service, 2019.

In 2006, the Social Conflict in the Urban Space Management Service was created to address co-existence problems in the public spaces of the city, and the social rejection and alarm that can be

generated by the welcome centres. This service carries out community work and has the task of communicating with and informing the neighbourhoods' social fabric (neighbours, shops and social entities) with the aim of allaying perceptions of insecurity and stopping criminalising speech, and also of supporting this group and the services available to them in the communities that support them in the integration process. They also intervene in conflicts in the public space that arise from other situations that impact negatively on co-existence, such as the exits of night entertainment spots, inappropriate and exclusive uses of recreation places or areas, and interventions linked to social care centres, and so on. This team is made up of three sub-teams with fifteen professionals in total, all specialists in medication and conflict management. In 2018, they intervened in 45 mediation programmes, five of which were related to child, adolescent and youth migrants.

Barcelona has a long experience of caring for the homeless.⁵ Already in the nineteenth century, there were three shelters. The municipal programmes can be said to have started in 1985 with the first Social Services Law. This is when Barcelona City Council's care for the homeless programme was developed, providing those without a home with new resources and services depending on the specific needs and phases of social disconnection (initial, advanced, consolidated) in each case. This marked a shift in the concept of care, going from a provision perspective to encompass new approaches to care that were more person centred and focused on social integration pathways.

The Social integration Service for the homeless was created in 1990 and provides support to socially vulnerable people and groups who use the public space to spend the night or are in situations of chronic precariousness in terms of accommodation, and who have no link with the region's social services. It is made up of SIS Medi Obert and SIS Care and Treatment, their area of action is the entire city of Barcelona including the airport, and their target for care is the homeless adult population. The street team (Servei d'Intervenció Social Medi Obert - SISMO) is currently differentiated from the treatment team (SISTAC). The street team (SISMO) is made up of 29 professionals who cover 100% of the city area from Monday to Friday in morning, afternoon and evening shifts supporting homeless people, ensuring that their basic needs are covered and putting them in touch with the most suitable homeless programme. They are supported by a team of psychiatrists from the homelessness programme of the mental health area of Barcelona Health Consortium. The treatment team (SISTAC) is made up of twenty-four professionals who attend to people without a home and who approach the service independently, provided they have no stable abode and are in a serious situation of vulnerability, and are not being supported by other municipal services. Since 2017, the Social Integration Service has also supported ex-tutored youth.

5. Tracing the trajectory of the Municipal Care for the Homeless Programme, Barcelona (April 2006).

Graph 4. Number of youths contacted by the street team (SISMO) of the Social Integration Service. Barcelona, 2016-2019



Percentage of youths contacted by SISMO in relation to total of people contacted

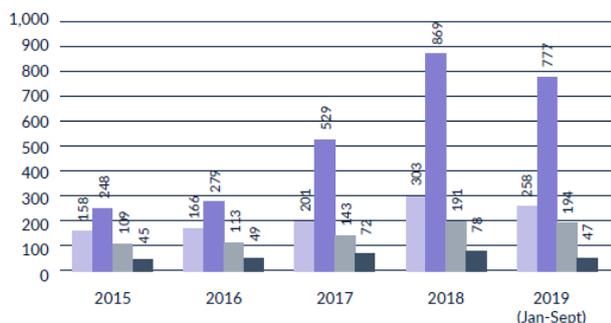


Source: The Social Integration Service's street team (SISMO).

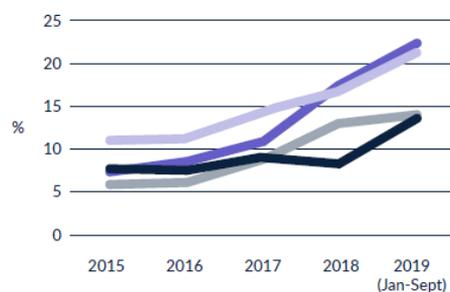
The network of municipal services and resources for homeless people has always provided support for the homeless people who, due to the itinerant nature of this group, are not linked with the city. Every day, the municipality provides 1,349 municipal accommodation places, 285 day centre places, 145 hygiene services places and 1,637 social meals service places. These services are currently under collapse due to the migratory flow and the fact that there are no state or regional level service portfolios, as the following graph shows:

Graph 5. Evolution of the number of youths aged 18-25 provided with care using municipal homeless person care resources and services. Barcelona, 2015-2018

Number of youths provided with care using municipal homeless person care resources and services



Percentage of youths provided with care using municipal homeless person care resources and services



Source:

- CPA, CD. Departament de Social Care Services in the public space IMSS.
- Social Meals: Cognos (Different users from 18 to 30 years old).
- Pension: SIS-AT, SISMO (includes SDI).

70% of the people accommodated in homeless shelters in the city are of foreign origin, and 20% of these are youths, many of which come from other autonomous regions. When they turn 18 years old these come to Barcelona, attracted by the DGAIA's social service (to which they do not

have a right if they have not been tutored by this body) and the city's accommodation resources. The increase in the number of youths in the homeless programmes' facilities and premises, and the consequent difficulties in meeting the needs of this group, prompted the municipal authorities to consider providing these with a specific residential solution. In 2017, the Maria Feixa Accommodation Centre was set up, located between the neighbourhoods of El Born and La Barceloneta. The following table shows the evolution in the number of youths attended to by the different municipal centres and resources.

Table 1. Evolution in the number of youths attended to by the different municipal centres and resources. Barcelona, 2015-2018

Resource/service	2015			2016			2017			2018		
	18-25	Total	%	18-25	Total	%	18-25	Total	%	18-25	Total	%
Night time accommodation (CPA, CRAB, CRI)	226	3,28	6.9	219	3,279	6.7	234	2,806	8.3	nd	nd	nd
First welcome centre	158	2,165	7.3	166	1,935	8.6	201	1,814	11.1	303	1,739	17.4
Day centre	248	4,229	5.9	279	4,591	6.1	529	6,093	8.7	869	6,682	13.0
Social meals (people who are alone)	31	997	3.1	49	1,004	4.9	72	994	7.2	94	1,013	9.3
Accommodation in guest houses (SISTAC, SISMO, SDI)	45	591	7.6	49	652	7.5	72	808	8.9	78	951	8.2
Maria Feixa (since 29/12/2017). 21 places		----			----			----		37	37	100.0

nd (no data)

Table 2. The main actions implemented in the training and employment of these young people. Barcelona, 2017-2019

Training initiatives	Youth Guarantee	Projects in which 22 young people with a resident's permit but no work permit take part (unaccompanied migrant youth, family reunification, asylum seekers and so on), among which there are 13 unaccompanied young migrants
	Other training initiatives	16 unaccompanied young migrants placed on three training initiatives (logistics, gas installer, customer services, etc.)
Employment to regulate their administrative situation	Employments plans	Seven young people with contracts starting from the end of 2018
	Treball als barris' [Work in the neighbourhoods'] programme, supported by the Catalan Employment Service	Two youths from the Ciutat Vella district, with contracts starting in March 2019

Barcelona wholesale market also started a training programme for fishmongers beginning in September 2019 in which eleven youngsters take part, leading to the option of a contract that will enable them to regularise their administrative situation.

In August 2019, through the social entity Superacció and within the framework of the municipally-funded Ciutat Vella District shock plan, a pilot sports club started which is aimed preferably at minors living on the streets and unconnected to any protection centre (but in which over-18s can also take part), and whose goal is to engage this group through sporting activity to encourage them to voluntarily return to the protection system. A way of implementing a follow-on social project aimed at the over-18s once this pilot action has finished is being discussed. This action took place during all of August and was attended by 100 youth, 10 of them minors and the rest under 25 years old. Of these only two were women, and 88 lived on the street. The success of this activity is attributed to the methodology of education through sport, and also to support directed at harm reduction and low expectations in terms of the commitment to attend.

In the autumn of 2018, the Barcelona Youth Network (Xbcn), promoted by the Social Services Consortium and Barcelona City Council, was launched as a collaboration and coordination space made up of the public administrations (Consortium, Government of Catalonia, through the Support Area for Tutored and Ex-tutored Youth (ASJTET), Barcelona City Council (through the Area of Social Rights), and 43 first-level third sector entities that work with young people in the city from different areas. It was conceived in response to the growing number of youths in Barcelona aged 18-25 in vulnerable situations.

It supports four profiles of young people:

- a) Ex-tutored young people,
- b) Unaccompanied youth of foreign origin who start the migratory process as minors and who, once they have passed through the protection system, find or have no options once they reach 18 years old.
- c) Youth of foreign origin who have not passed through the Catalan protection system because they arrived in Catalonia as adults with no family members or documents that enabled them to apply for residence.
- d) And youth who, irrespective of whether they have passed through the protection system, currently have no personal, social, family or economic resources, and are in slums or other inadequate accommodation.

The main goals of Xbcn are:

- To create a portfolio of services and resources provided by the public administrations and services that form part of the network to be able to design itineraries depending on each young person's needs, and which is not just adapted to the description of the different resources and services, but is focused on these young people and the involvement of this group in the system.
- To create a sumatory system of resources that guarantees sustainability and transparency.
- To increase public and private coordination in the social services system.
- To work on the integral skills of each young person so that they achieve full autonomy.
- To become an observatory of the youth population in situations of vulnerability in Barcelona.

Given the exceptional situation regarding the arrival of unaccompanied youth, the Government of Catalonia and Barcelona City Council have set up various collaboration spaces created especially to address the situation of these minors and to guarantee them protection. Since November 2018, Barcelona City Council has been working with the DGAIA and the Social Services Consortium on an intervention procedure for minors living on the streets who for different reasons refuse to enter the protection system (called *refractory minors*). The aim is to connect with these young people through the work of the SDI to persuade them to enter or re-enter the protection centres. To this effect, Barcelona City Council has implemented various intervention proposals through the DGAIA aimed at this group to connect with them and provide them with their basic needs. Among the actions under way promoted by this joint initiative are:

- Regular meetings to evaluate the actions currently in progress, compare information about the situation and put different possible measures on the table to improve how the problem is addressed.
- DGAIA and the City Council share a list of minors who for different reasons refuse to enter or re-enter the child and adolescent protection system in order to address each case individually and study the best way to link these young people with the system.
- Dar Chabab health team of nurses and psychologists who support the SDI with their work on the streets. They are also working to provide a psychiatry service that can issue legally binding reports to recommend stays in specialist centres where required.

- Protocol with the Barcelona Public Health Agency to process the health code of all the minors and young people, both those under protection centres and those on the streets, and their assignment to health centres to undergo health tests for epidemiological monitoring.

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