

# YOUNG AFRICAN MIGRANTS REINVENTING THEIR LIVES IN THE CANARY ISLANDS

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## Abstract

The intensification of irregular African immigration in the Canary Islands resulted in the arrival of thousands of unaccompanied foreign minors (MENA in Spanish: *Menores Extranjeros No Acompañados*), reaching a peak of maximum intensity in 2006 during the so-called 'cayuco crisis'. This population of immigrants under the age of 18 is under the tutelage of the government of the Canary Islands and is placed in specific reception centres for foreign minors (CAME in Spanish: *Centro de Acogida para Menores Extranjeros*). This paper presents the methodology and main results of a research project, implemented by the author for the Observatory of Immigration in Tenerife (OBITen), on what these young Africans experienced when turned into Unaccompanied Foreign Minors by an administrative process whose aim is to protect them as vulnerable persons. The project fieldwork included in-depth interviews with immigrant minors and experts. Additionally, we carried out semi-structured interviews with professionals involved in the development and education of the unaccompanied foreign minors. We also organised focus groups with the resident Canary Islands population. The results we obtained reveal shortcomings in several areas: in the personal and emotional experience this process implies for the migrants, in the area of administration and management and, particularly, in the transition from the condition of unaccompanied foreign minor to that of adult immigrant.

## Keywords

Unaccompanied minors, immigrants, young Africans, personal goals, emotional experience, integration, transition to adult life.

## Introduction

The geographic mobility of the population for labour reasons is a known fact for inhabitants of the Canary Islands, in terms of both incoming and outgoing labour flows, with the former providing the framework for the arrival of Africans who enter Spanish territory through areas other than those legally established for this purpose, the borders. In this paper we will focus on the youngest immigrants, that is, Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (hereinafter MENA), the term used by the Spanish administration. This construct has been consolidated and recognised by the scientific community to designate those persons that the European Union (EU), in its Council Resolution 97/C 221/03 of 26 June 1997, defines as:

*below the age of eighteen, who arrive on the territory of the Member States unaccompanied by an adult responsible for them whether by law or custom, and for as long as they are not effectively in the care of such a person.*

MENA is not the only designation applied to them, however. In fact, the Separated Children in Europe Programme (2009), a joint initiative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Save the Children International Alliance, utilises the term *separated*, since it:

*is regarded as better defining the main problem facing these minors, namely, that they are without the care and protection of their parents or legal guardian and, as a consequence, suffer the effects of that separation socially and psychologically.* (ibid)

In Germany and the UK they are referred to as ‘unaccompanied minors requesting asylum’, or as ‘unaccompanied refugee minors’, a term that is also applied in the Scandinavian countries, Austria, Greece and Portugal, and many of the new member States. The European Commission, after reviewing the treatment offered in the various countries (EMN, 2010), requested the drafting of specific measures that culminated in the Action Plan on Unaccompanied Minors 2010-2014 (European Commission, 2010), which proposes a common EU approach based on the best interests of the child and on the establishment of key areas of action that include prevention, shelter and a search for lasting solutions (return to the country of origin, an international protection statute that allows them to integrate into the host State or to resettle).

The so-called ‘cayuco crisis’<sup>1</sup> in the Canaries in 2006 (Godenau and Zapata, 2008), which saw a large increase in the number of Africans arriving in the islands, including MENAs, caught the attention of the media and society alike due, on the one hand, to the vulnerability of these individuals, and on the other, to the scarce resources made available by the government of the Canaries to properly meet their needs.

YEAR	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total	311	273	331	672	565	166	84	928	752	804	245	54
Morocco	261	185	272	509	477	100	67	267	295	199	45	48
Sub-Saharan	50	88	59	163	88	66	17	661	457	605	200	6

Figure 1. MENA arrivals in the Canary Islands through illegal entry points 1999-2010  
(Source: Canary Islands Government Department of Social Welfare, Youth and Housing)

The social emergency declaration (Order 126 of 8 March 2006 of the Office of Labour and Social Affairs) placed the MENAs at the centre of political and academic debates, especially until 2009, when the number of arrivals started to wane. Despite the lower number of arrivals, however, there were concerns regarding the proportion of minors reaching the coasts of the Canaries, a percentage that continued to increase, with minors accounting for 22.8% of all such immigrants in 2010.

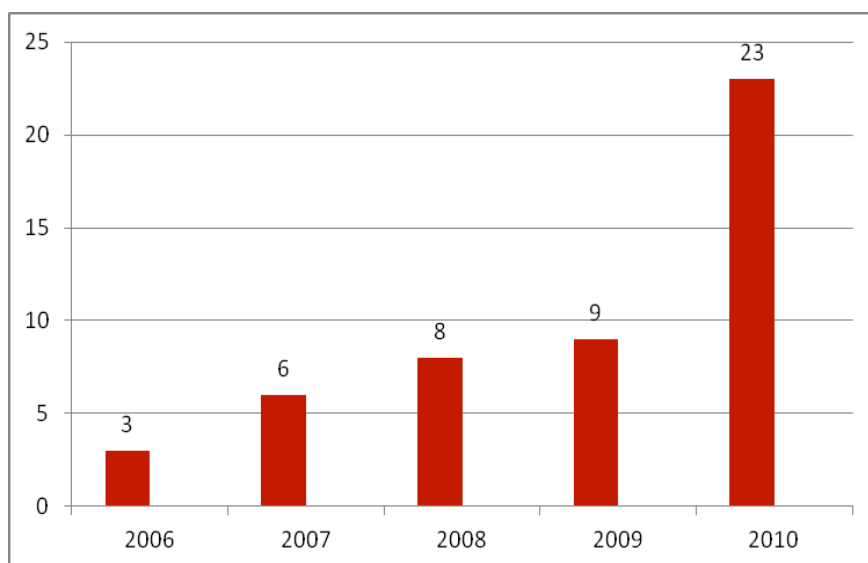


Figure 2. Percentage of MENAs in relation to the total number of immigrants entering the Canary Islands through illegal entry points 2006-2010. (Source: Canary Islands Government)

The island of Tenerife houses the majority of the MENAs under the care of the Government of the Canaries, 63.2% of the total in 2010.

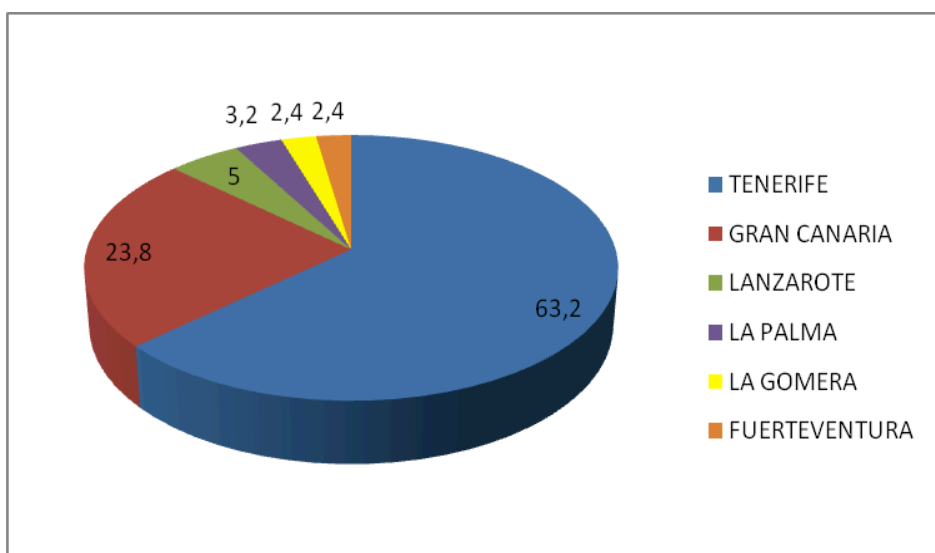


Figure 3. Percentage of MENAs under the care of the Autonomous Community of the Canaries, by island. (Source: Canary Islands Government Department of Social Welfare, Youth and Housing)

The action protocol stipulated in Spanish regulations states that from the time the protection measures are determined (by a judge after evaluating the results of a medical exam<sup>2</sup>) and the minor is issued a number in the MENA registry, said minor must be admitted to a centre for the protection of foreigners, called a Reception Centre for Foreign Minors (CAME in Spanish). The participants in our study, thus, are directly or indirectly involved with these centres where the MENAs receive the resources necessary to ensure the protection of their rights.

The existing literature, in addition to providing data on the presence of minors, has basically aimed to identify their profile (Human Rights, 2007a; Red Europea de Migraciones, 2009; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2009, among others) or to describe the context of the country of origin (Human Rights, 2007b; Amnesty International, 2008, among others). Studies into their lives at these reception centres are scarce (Barranco et al., 2007). In this paper, taken from a more wide-ranging investigation, we present our findings on the elements that affect the social and affective interactions of these individuals, paying particular attention to their emotional experiences, the development of skills necessary to integrate into the host society and their transition from minors into adult immigrants.

## **II. Objectives**

The ultimate goal of this project, besides giving a voice to those who, in their varying roles, bear witness to the experiences of the MENAs, is to be a useful tool in improving the lives of these youths. The aims are, specifically, to:

- - Identify the minors' opportunities to interact, particularly with their peers, at the community level, paying special attention to the emotional sphere and analysing the incidence of these opportunities on the process of social integration.
- - Present the particularities of the personal goals of the unaccompanied foreign minors (and their feasibility), placing particular emphasis on their education and on the repercussions of current legislation and its application once the minors have reached the age of majority.
- - Analyse discussions with youngsters and adults regarding the presence of unaccompanied foreign minors.

## **III. Methodology**

The use of qualitative techniques yields a better understanding of the information describing situations and facts, as well as of processes that are internal, vital and closely linked to people's behaviour. In the words of Orti (1989:185), this is:

*a form of empirical approach to the social reality that is specifically suited to meaningful understanding and in-depth motivational interpretation of the behaviour of social actors, in terms of internal orientation (beliefs, values, desires).*

Our aim was to acquire relevant knowledge on the life processes of the minors in Tenerife, which required, in addition to listening to them, obtaining data from the corresponding actors and institutions that would allow us to attain the level of complexity required for the study. To this end, we designed the methodological approach outlined in the following table.

<b>Social research technique</b>	<b>Sources of information</b>
Semi-structured interview	Qualified participants (14) *
Structured interview	External professionals <sup>3</sup> : Teachers (16) Training activities counsellors (12) Sports counsellors (10)
Focus group	Educators at protection centres (7) MENAs (8) Tenerife populace: - Youths (7 male) - Youths (8 female) - Adults (8 men and women)
In-depth interview	MENAs (10 male and 1 female) <sup>4</sup>
Active observation	Sessions <sup>5</sup> with under-18s (20) Sessions <sup>6</sup> with over-18s (210)
Document analysis	Educational Projects at the Centre (7) Individual Educational Projects (11) Regulations (5)

\*The number in parentheses indicates the number of participants, documents or sessions.

Figure 4. Data collection techniques and sources of information. (Source: Compiled by author)

The minors (10 male and 1 female) who participated were from Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal, and their official age (obtained through bone tests) ranged from 13 to 17 years and 7 months. They came to the Canary Islands between 2006 and 2008 and were taken into protection centres run by the Tenerife Island Council (when the participants were selected – January 28, 2010 – Tenerife was host to 63% of the MENAs under the care of the Canary Islands Government). The remaining sources of information, except the external professionals (teachers and sports or educational counsellors) and members of the populace (recruited through a strategy designed by the focus groups), were directly involved with the CAMES.

#### IV. Results

Human mobility is not new, but what is new is the growing number of migrants under the age of 18 crossing borders of the European Union at illegal entry points; moreover, they are afforded special treatment in line with international legislation which privileges the

interests of the minor over their administrative status as irregular migrants. These migrants are causing a breach in the strict policies, established by European Union directives, with regards to irregular immigration.

The countries of origin of the youth interviewed rank among the top in the United Nations Development Programme's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which is based on three indicators: health (infant mortality and nutrition), education (school enrolment and years of education) and standard of living (goods, dwelling, electricity, running water and fuel for cooking). Thus, their level of human development is low, not only as regards the satisfaction of the people and the amount of resources available to enjoy a particular standard of living, but in terms of what these people are and are not able to do, not just in the sense of economic growth but of social development as well. It is obvious, then, that the bleak political, social and economic conditions of the places of origin and the associated lack of opportunities had a clear influence on the voluntary decision of our subjects (who are given fictitious names here<sup>7</sup>) to emigrate.

Our respondents lack primary education and, in many cases, have had paid jobs (though in very precarious working conditions). They come from families with an average of between three and four children. All of them had relatives who emigrated before them, be they grandparents, parents, uncles, cousins or siblings. Their preparations for making the crossing to the Canary Islands probably began while listening to the procedure used by another relative or neighbour or acquaintance to undertake the voyage, before the future emigrants were even aware of their own intentions. Or they may simply have looked on as day after day vessels full of strangers left their town. As for the financial cost of the journey, there were various responses. Some did not want to talk about it, others stated having paid in cash (only Rachida admitted to having paid two thousand euros), and yet a third group did not make any kind of payment, either because they were related to the skipper of the vessel (Cheikh) or because the skipper proposed that they pay for their voyage by recruiting other paying clients (Lamin and Selen).

Most of the time the voyage, as Salif indicated, started before getting on the *patera* since seven of them had to travel over land to reach the port, two within the territory of their country of residence (Youssef, Braima) and the rest (Malick, Salif, Selen, Lamin and Kouba) crossing a border. The ports of departure identified by them were Sidi-Ifni (Morocco), Dakar (Senegal) and Noaudhibou (Mauritania), with most departing from the latter, a port that, according to a study conducted by the Oficina Municipal de Inmigración de Noaudhibou (2010), remains a strategic point of departure for Europe.

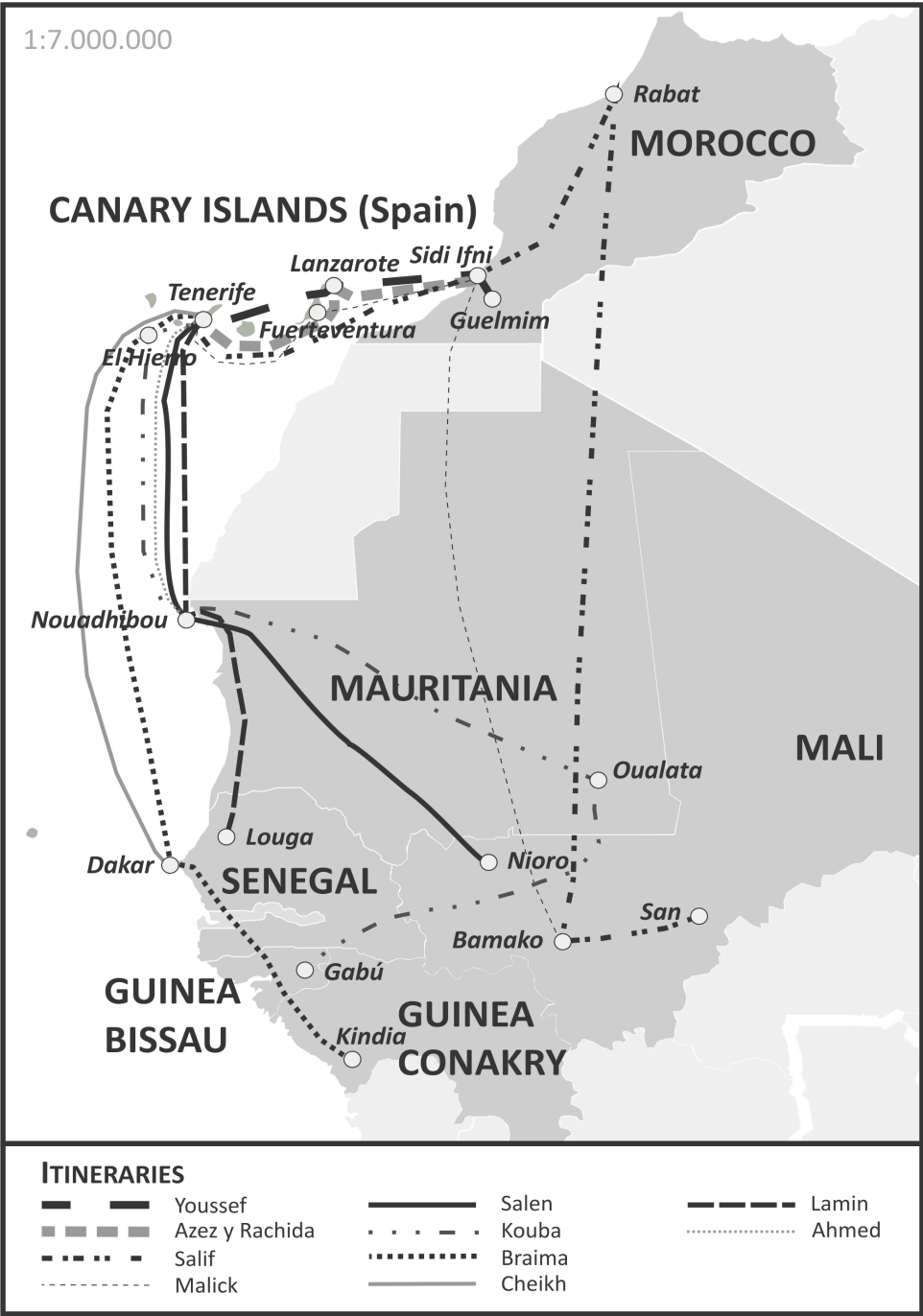


Figure 5. Itineraries of the MENAs. (Compiled by the author.)

The most significant finding with regard to the participants' profile, besides obvious motivations such as economic aspirations, the search for a better life or the assurance that they will not be repatriated, relates to the voluntary nature of the decision to migrate and, especially, to their growing up in a culture of migration (Schoorl et al., 2000; Pensátez, 2000), which considers mobility to be a very important resource. They saw how their grandparents, or those of their friends and neighbours, returned from other countries every summer and sent money or gifts to support the family and possibly to improve their social standing in the community.

As soon as the youths reach Canary Islands territory, a MENA arrivals protocol is placed into effect (Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales, 2005). Our findings indicate that the protocol has certain weak points, including the absence of interpreters both to provide an adequate explanation of the process affecting them and to ensure that they understand their rights, especially as regards asylum requests, which the respondents claimed to be unaware of when they were interviewed.

As soon as a migrant is determined to be a minor and is assigned a MENA registration number, the Canary Islands Government becomes their ward, although it is the Tenerife Island Council that is responsible for executing the protective measure through its Child and Family Unit, the body which administrates the CAMEs. The specific protection facility for foreigners is normally a house or apartment, typically located in the suburbs, sleeping a maximum of 12 and whose objectives are (Instituto de Atención Socio Sanitaria, 2007:107):

- *Execute the protective measure.*
- *Provide a safe environment, meeting their basic and integral development needs, promoting their independence.*
- *Encourage personal adaptation and integration into the host community, paying special attention to learning the language and culture of the host society as well as raising the awareness of the latter.*
- *Locate their family or, failing this, the child protection services in their country of origin, thus facilitating family reunion.*

In short, they have managed to successfully cross over both the geographical and political border. These migrants are opening up a breach in the firm policies of restriction, established by European Union directives, with regards to irregular immigration. In response to this situation, institutions have created the term MENA and the procedures for protecting these migrants while they are still minors, and which are automatically deactivated when they reach majority of age. To express it in more graphic terms, it is the equivalent of labelling them *on hold*, and when they turn eighteen, the label disappears and they become just another irregular immigrant. During this holding period, they have the chance to reinvent themselves, though to do so they must overcome other symbolic borders, like the language, the culture and, especially, the one involving their emotional life (López-Reillo, 2011).

The most relevant findings in connection with the aforementioned objectives are presented below:



a) Identification of the minors' opportunities to interact, particularly with their peers, on a community level, paying special attention to the emotional sphere and analysing the incidence of these opportunities on the social integration process.

The brave youths that set off from some place in Africa have now become MENAs (a term which is, incidentally, unfamiliar to the interviewed minors). And there, in their places of origin, it is possible that social concepts such as child and man are seen as such through identifiable rites of initiation that determine the passage from one to the other. Needless to say, these rites are very different, not only in each of the countries of the origin, but also in each of the regions and different geographic areas where living standards are as much the result of cultural conception as they are of socioeconomic status. In fact, in some cases they introduce the concept of 'extended family' to explain that people, after marrying and having children, continue to live with their families for a long time and that they feel protected by them. Whatever the case may be, these minors spend those years of their life here, a period that, together with the historical and sociocultural context, marks their self-perception as adolescents, a psychosocial construction that their peers share and which will undoubtedly be a platform for initiating and consolidating relationships with them. This affirmation is backed up by the great majority of participants, who recognise the complexity of the occasionally difficult process that youths have to undergo. In fact, from the very first day that they arrive at the protection centre a transition begins, a difficult journey during which they soon become aware that what they know is of very little value, and moreover, of little use for daily life. They have to begin to ask themselves many questions about their identities, their capacities, their skills, and they have to do so at a critical juncture when they are also evolving as individuals. They undertake this personal journey at such a delicate time in their lives, without the support of a family figure, without the emotional ties that give them the confidence to deal with it, and usually with a deep-rooted anxiety that they do not manifest and do not, of course, share with their family, with whom they maintain contact over the telephone. Nor do they, regrettably, open up to the professionals at the protection centres, with whom they all emphatically claim to have no emotional ties. As for the professionals themselves, while there is disagreement between those who claim these ties exist and those who do not, they point to the mistrust shown by these minors, making them responsible for this deficiency. In any case, it can be objectively noted that the key figure of the guardian does not exist for any of the wards. Fortunately, in their favour, and in addition to the solid emotional education given to them by their families (in the majority of cases), they have a dynamic personality – both in their psychological development and construction of identity – that will help them to carry out the tasks (always in rudimentary conditions) aimed at their continuous adaptation to their environment and the development of skills necessary to reinvent themselves within it.

In terms of strategy, a command of the language, as a basic element of successful interaction, is the first task they must undertake, not forgetting that, as well as linguistic competence; they must develop intercultural communicative competence<sup>8</sup> which, according to Vilá's definition (2005: 50), is:

*the set of cognitive and emotional skills for manifesting behaviour which is appropriate and effective in a specific social and cultural context and which favours a sufficiently effective degree of communication.*

Somehow, these minors, in the midst of constructing their own identities (understanding that an individual is capable of assuming diverse and complementary identities that make it possible to both maintain their cultural heritage and integrate new ways of life,

which in turn allows them to still feel part of their group of origin and create, at the same time, a sense of belonging to their host society<sup>9</sup>), must learn to interpret certain non-literal meanings and understand their meaning within their context. The data indicate that they do not receive targeted support in this area. Their development is seriously compromised and compensated only by the effort that they themselves make to interact with their peers: this becomes the source of their knowledge, not only of the language, but also of the keys necessary to decode cultural meaning. In a basic way, they learn to make a suitable interpretation and this in turn helps them adapt their behaviour and create positive attitudes of respect, responsibility and interest towards their new context. The space and time that produce these interactions are attendance at the educational centre, sporting activities (mainly football) and participation in social networks.

The data conclusively indicate that attendance at an educational centre is a transcendental element in the incorporation of the youths into a social context which, in particular, they see as very positive since they point to it as the place where they initiate their first friendships, feel part of a group and begin to decode many of the ways of living and doing. This is closely followed, in terms of opportunities for interaction, by the systematic and organised practice of a sport in which they are often, due to their responsibility, discipline and attitude, singled out as leaders who even mediate in possible group conflicts. At the same time, their presence in school and on the sports field leads to more relationships in the online social networks to which they subscribe. As well as using these networks to keep in touch with those they have already met in real life, they also establish contact with their online friends, thus generating a multiplying effect. This kind of interaction, however, is quite inconsistent, not only between them and Tenerife youths, but also amongst the latter since this is a general trend at this stage of life. In any case, the closest and most complex relationships are always those they have established with the other youths in the reception centres, united by common concerns, difficulties and desires, and these become virtually exclusive as they approach the age of majority. At this moment a paradox arises because, while relationships with their peers has so far been a positive influence on their integration process, it now has negative repercussions on the decisions they have to make in the next stage of life. The reason for this is the considerable difference in resources between them and their friends and schoolmates in the Canaries, who can rely on the support of their families and do not have to worry about having their legal documents in order or having a roof over their heads. Any efforts made to integrate and form intercultural relationships are now abandoned as this is now perceived to be a threat to their futures as adult irregular immigrants.

- b) Presentation of the particularities of the personal goals of the unaccompanied foreign minors (and their feasibility), placing particular emphasis on their education and on the repercussions of current legislation and its application once the minors have reached the age of majority.

Their first goal is to find work, although many of them know that they will have to spend an undetermined length of time<sup>10</sup> in a centre for minors. From the moment that the age testing process begins and they are transferred to a protection facility, they start to be aware of the changes they must make in their personal goals, although they do not know with any certainty how they are going to achieve them. According to them, this learning process is basically achieved through contact with other, more experienced youths. Suitable guidance will undoubtedly help the youth to obtain maximum returns from their own efforts and activate their full potential. In this sense, another of the important contributions to this study has been to dispel the belief that it is the feeling of frustration

at the impossibility of finding work which makes them reject education and training. It has been made quite clear that they value education highly and understand the importance it holds for their professional future, not only in specific work-oriented skills, but also the basic education received in secondary school, which can give them greater access to a better job and, consequently, an improved quality of life. Sadly, this conception is not shared by a great majority of those who work in the protection facilities and who, regardless of the young immigrants' skills and potential, systematically distance them from academic training, even though they may not have any other training possibilities available to them; they limit them to job seeking, which could in any case be perfectly compatible with any kind of professional training activity. However, these youths are also capable of crossing that boundary and do so on their own terms, enrolling in an adult education centre to obtain the Spanish School Leaving Certificate (ESO) as soon as their situation allows (after they have turned 18).

With regard to the teachers consulted, although their response was favourable, they indicated an absence of specific intercultural education projects in the design and development of the educational programme<sup>11</sup>, noting the inefficiency of the system and emphasising the lack of adequate response strategies, thus reinforcing the perception that Secondary Education teachers lack training in their approach to diversity in general, and to multicultural contexts in particular (López-Reillo, 2005, 2006). While the Europe 2020 Strategy insists on the importance of well-educated young people, the European Youth Pact focuses on youths with fewer opportunities, and the social need for educated people who actively participate in their communities grows more urgent. It defies belief that human capital is being lost and that decisions are made based on an individual's origins and not on his or her abilities<sup>12</sup>.

These young people, therefore, revise their personal goals to include education and training. Up to the age of 16 they are schooled in Secondary Education centres which in some cases send them, regulations permitting, to various Diversity Programmes: the Social Guarantee Programme (before September 2009) or the Initial Professional Qualification Programme (after September 2009). Selection and participation in a school workshop is the highest aspiration they can have in this time frame (16-18 years) since, as well as learning a trade, they also receive remuneration that their guardians deposit in a savings account so that they can make use of it when they reach majority of age. However, this is a very limited resource and most of them find themselves actively job seeking or engaging in other, informal, training activities. This is when they begin to perceive that their time, as well as their way of life, is drawing to an end. The message they receive is that they have to remember who they are and what they came for (they have to remember that they are irregular immigrants) and distance themselves from any interaction with their Canarian peers, who can afford to lead a life that is now beyond their reach. This means that a proper adaptation to the context and culture of their destination country, so highly valued before, is now considered a grave error, blamed, incidentally, on the young migrant; and failure to overcome this will have terrible consequences for their adult lives, which begin the very day after they reach majority of age. On that day their personal goals shatter into a thousand pieces. They have completed all the objectives, revised their expectations, received an education, been patient, and the very day that they leave the protection centre they find themselves in an irregular situation, without a work permit, with extremely limited possibilities of obtaining one, and with no place to live. Only a few manage to cover their basic needs, some because they are given one of the very few places that exist in residential centres, others because they benefit from the solidarity of other youths who left before them and have managed to find stability, and others because they receive aid from certain people who

believe in equal opportunity (anonymous citizens, businessmen, professionals working for certain associations and NGOs, etc.). The transition to a working life is especially difficult for them as they do not know the administrative procedures and legal requirements for securing a contract. The distress and uncertainty they are feeling is compounded by this ignorance that, on occasion, leads them to work in the underground economy, an option now closed to them in the present economic crisis.

Some of them revise their personal goals and manage to successfully cross that boundary which, metaphorically speaking, once again pitches them into the middle of the Atlantic Ocean where, to continue with the analogy, they are buffeted by great waves of loneliness, discrimination, deceit and bureaucracy.

- c) Analysis of the discussion with youngsters and adults regarding the presence of unaccompanied foreign minors.

In the three discussion groups, the participants made contributions that we consider essential to identifying those elements that are key to understanding how the presence of MENAs on the island of Tenerife, where they all lived, is perceived. The variable of contact with the African youths (one of the criteria for selecting the sample group) was the central theme to the discussion in the groups and guaranteed that they concentrated on the specific subject, avoiding digressions on, for example, migration in general. Therefore, the group discussions did not focus on specific experiences or practices with these minors, but rather on perceptions, opinions and evaluations regarding public management of this demographic group. The groups undertook the tasks of, on the one hand, diagnosing the current state of this issue, and on the other, noting strategies and practices “to enact” with these youths. All three groups agreed on the importance of interaction and integration in daily life. Their always moderate positions were manifested through constructive and proactive discussions which kept exclusion and alarmism at a distance. At no time did they openly oppose the presence of MENAs on the islands, nor did they express rejection or direct discrimination on first impression, although they did ascribe xenophobic language, behaviour and attitudes to other people and social groups.

The people who made up the three discussion groups were not generally aware that the CAMEs existed or where they were located, even if they were in their own towns, but they did perceive the presence of large groups of young Africans in certain areas of the towns and coast at the weekend. They also demonstrated a clear awareness of the fact that the MENAs migrate to find work. There was general consensus on the idea that employment, on reaching majority of age, was the principal element of integration into society although, at the same time, they identified and evaluated the difficulties, both general (economic crisis, underground economy, etc.) and specific (administrative obstacles to obtaining legal documents), that became serious barriers to that wished-for entry into the job market.

The mixed group (men and women) of adults manifested their concern for the realities that the MENAs have to face, expressing a certain protectiveness and a critical attitude towards the dominant social model. The group of young women, for their part, clearly explained the motivations behind immigration and looked into the possible points of view that bear relation to it. They also showed a protective attitude and were supportive of equality and equal opportunities. And finally, the group of young men focused on the theme of resources, of material considerations and the economy, in contrast to the politics, culture and personal interaction that characterised the discussions of the

previous group. The young men constituted the most fragmented and resistant group with respect to the MENAs: their discussions did not arise from an intellectual appreciation of the subject, but they turned to stereotypes and material and physical references to make their point. In all three cases, aware of their links to international migration, they treated the theme of minors as a specific fact, placing more emphasis on their evolution than on their status as foreigners.

## **Conclusions**

In all the cases studied, beyond evident motivation such as economic aspiration, the search for a better life and the assurance that they will not be repatriated, they also share the common factor of coming from a culture of migration. The flaws detected in the implementation of the MENA Protocol owe basically to the lack of an interpreter to communicate information to the minors about the process and their rights, in particular their right to asylum. The CAMEs meet the basic needs of the minors. However, the emotional sphere receives no attention as the presence of a guardian as a reference figure is non-existent. Furthermore, they are not given sufficient education to develop their linguistic competence, and none whatsoever to develop intercultural communicative competence. The educational centre and sports activities seem, in that order, to be spaces in which the minors interact with the local populace and develop their social competence, which often extends to social networks, and which begins to diminish as they approach their 18th birthday, the point at which they will become an adult irregular immigrant. They are now under constant pressure in the knowledge that their condition is not the same as their Canarian peers. Education and training, whether basic or professional, is highly valued by the minors and teachers, although this opinion is not shared by the educators and administrators of the CAMEs.

Reaching majority of age leaves the youths without any protection in their transition to a working life, without the resources or the knowledge necessary to overcome the administrative hurdles and obtain a job contract. The Tenerife populace have a favourable attitude to the presence of the young Africans; young women and adults are more protective and better disposed towards their social integration. The initial impression at their presence, the allocation of resources for them, and the opportunities for interaction form the central theme of their discussions.

## **End Notes:**

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Cayuco crisis' refers to the rise in the influx of vessels who were transporting people entering Spain via illegal routes in 2006.

<sup>2</sup> The typical methods are Greulich & Pyle and Dermijian, whose application, as recognised in the 2009 Ombudsman's Report, proposes technical and ethical objections that were originally conceived to ascertain the level of biological maturity, and not the age. The report exposed various cases where the rights of minors were violated. Moreover, the flaws in the bone test help to build an urban legend among the population, who deem it as 'useless' or, even worse, as a loophole used by adults to be treated as minors. This all serves to muddle the process of receiving and integrating minors, and to overlook the numerous cases in which the test yields an age in excess of the biological age.

<sup>3</sup> Professionals who work outside the reception centres in educational centres or in other types of facilities related to education, training or sport.

<sup>4</sup> The sample does not aim to be statistically representative, since its purpose is to explore and provide an indication of the processes analyzed. The sample was constructed on the basis of the following criteria: 1. Presence of minors housed in all of the centers. 2. An adequate representation of the gender variable in terms of the number of boys and girls. 3. Weighted presence of all the nationalities. 4. Age diversity. 5. Diversity in the number of years living in Spain. 6. Diversity in education. 7. Diversity in language level. 8. Diversity in communication skills. The interviews held with the UFM began in May 2009, immediately after their participation in the discussion group, and concluded in July of that year. Contact with the interviewees relied on the technique of participant observation, with a total of 230 sessions taking place through June 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Limited time periods that basically occurred in the centre, during leisure activities, on public transport or in the street.

<sup>6</sup> Limited time periods that occurred in the street, near the reception centre, at home, in the offices of the Local Authorities, in different companies and in all those places that the youths frequent.

<sup>7</sup> Ahmed, Azez, Braima, Cheikh, Kouba, Lamin, Malick, Rachida, Salen, Salif and Youssef.

<sup>8</sup> The importance of intercultural communicative competence in the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language is one of the areas of research and action recognised by ASELE (Association for the Teaching of Spanish as a Foreign Language), the Ministry of Education's redELE (Electronic Network for Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language) and the Cervantes Institute, among others.

<sup>9</sup> At present, thanks to Information and Communication Technologies, this process is even more viable now that they can 'live here and live there', in the sense that they can stay informed of the decisions and events that occur in their families and communities.

<sup>10</sup> The information they have is imprecise and lacking specific data on rules and regulations that are completely unfamiliar to them. They know that their status as minors will protect them from being returned to their countries and afford them shelter in a centre for minors, but they do not know for how long or the implications of this.

<sup>11</sup> The Educational Programmes do not consider the intercultural dimension of the curriculum, which, aimed at all pupils, would make the development of suitable competences possible.

<sup>12</sup> This path to compulsory education is not without difficulties but, undoubtedly, it is a commitment to a fair and quality educational system.

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