FROM EXTRAORDINARY RECEPTION CENTERS TO THE INTEGRATED RECEPTION SYSTEM IN THE PROVINCE OF PARMA.

GUIDELINES AND OPERATIONAL TOOLS FOR THE TRANSITION

ASYLUM, MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION FUND (AMIF)

2014-2020

-PROG-1721-

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1 - Introduction and purpose

The project proposed to the FAMI 2014-2020 Capacity building funding line (National Objective 2.3- Specific Objective 2) was aimed at improving and strengthening the organizational and operational capacities of the Offices of the Prefecture of Parma in the preparation and management of the first reception system for International Protection Applicants. The proposal was meant to outline interventions aimed at the strengthening and qualification of the first reception system that would help integration, autonomy, empowerment and socio-economic integration of migrants, as provided for in the proposed National Integration Plan for International Protection Holders presented by the Ministry of Interior (2017).

The extraordinary and emergency character of the reception was by now overcome by the persistence of events and therefore required that the reception strategies be transformed into ordinary actions, predictable and shared by all the institutional actors involved. This transformation, in the greater interest of all parties involved, was intended to limit institutional fatigue in terms of means and time, while favouring a reduction in social conflict and the strengthening of links between citizens and institutions.

However, even before the first project activities were launched, profound changes in Italian reception policies led to a drastic redefinition of the objectives and implementation methods of the strategies aimed at Asylum Seekers (from now on called AS) and international protection, substantially changing the tasks of both the Prefectures and the managers. In order to avoid that the realization of the project be reduced to a mere "historical" research, it was necessary to decline the objectives according to the new situation.

Therefore, the aim of the work was to formulate a series of proposals **for the system of competences acquired in these years** by all the actors involved in the reception system.

In fact, it was necessary **to outline a model based on the capitalization of what has been achieved so far**, developing and strengthening it, in order to define a system able to operate both in a context of ordinary management (scheduled and limited number of arrivals of AS) and to resist and react to important changes, such as a possible new state of emergency.

However, beyond the specific political contingencies, migration phenomena remain an inherent issue in the history of mankind and the particular geopolitical situations suggest that another period of "emergency" is not such a remote hypothesis. It is, therefore, a matter of taking advantage of the experience and knowledge acquired so far, so as to be able to resort to it should circumstances require it, saving the effort of having to "build a new world every morning".

2 - Scientific references

The project, in line with the concerns expressed by the AMIF National Program 2014-2020, has the following general objective:

To contribute to strengthening the management capacity of the Prefecture and other institutional entities in order to implement the AS reception strategies and to overcome the characteristic of emergency that distinguishes them.

Specifically, the aim was to identify areas for the improvement of the policies and management practices of institutional subjects through the evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency and cost-effectiveness of ERC interventions in Parma and province. To this end, actions have been carried out with the aim of:

a) Obtain a detailed picture of the structures, services provided, social and institutional networks involved;

b) Evaluate their effectiveness with respect to the objectives of the AMIF and with respect to the needs expressed both by AS and by the subjects involved in the management;

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c) Assess the cost-benefit ratio of the interventions and their social sustainability.

Given the multiple sectors involved in the reception system, it was decided to create a multidisciplinary team of professionals, consisting of psychologists, economists and anthropologists. In this way, an attempt was made to ensure a complex look that would take into account the organizational, socio-economic and psychosocial aspects of the entire system. In particular, the research group wanted to adopt an emic approach, in order to bring out the internal perspective of the system, putting in communication all the voices of the main actors of the reception process and enhancing the cultural and professional identities of all interlocutors. From a methodological point of view, each professional was able to adopt the tools best suited to the objectives given and their own style of research. Therefore, a set of results was obtained by comparing methods and different interpretations.

Specifically, the following were involved: the managers of the ERC, the operators, the AS, some of the territorial services most involved and the prefecture's staff. Different methodologies were applied with respect to each of the participants: questionnaires, individual interviews, focus groups, etc.

3 - A matter of public expenditure

The issue of the costs of reception services, like those of all other public services, has dominated public and political discourse over all these years. The issue of the acceptable, or desirable, relationship between public spending and service rendered is clearly a too broad topic to be addressed in these few pages. It may be useful, however, to share some of the data collected during the research which may help to enrich the terms of the debate.

At the time of the research, the pro-capita/pro-die expenditure for each AS was € 34.

According to the data of the Prefecture of Parma, it appears that the pro-capita/pro-die expenses were distributed as follows:

€ 2,50 (7,35%): pocket money

€ 6.33 (18.6%): food

€ 15,93 (46,85%): salaries of ERC operators

€ 9.24 (27.2%): includes rents (90% of ERC facilities were rented) and other expenses.

In this perspective, it appears that the AS were direct beneficiaries of 7.35% of the pro-capita/pro-die share (pocket money). They also benefited from the food, accommodation and work of the operators, but ultimately it was the traders (food), the owners of the buildings (rents) and the operators, through their salaries, who received the largest share of the funding allocated to reception.

Considering that expenditure on language courses or vocational training also weighed on the 9.24€ quota, it appears that **almost all the expenditure allocated to the reception of AS contributed to the income of Italian citizens who carried out professional or commercial activities in the territory.**

4 - Some operational proposals

In order to define some operational lines for the management of the ERC system, we can consider the work of the reception on three different organizational levels, necessarily interconnected:

- 4.1. Management of primary services.
- 4.2. The organization of functional relations between Prefecture, managers and territories.
- 4.3. The functional organization within the structures and coordination between the different managers.

4.1 Management of core services

In a situation where the number of new AS is not exponential, but is reasonably constant and predictable, health, education, training and job search should be managed by existing public structures. The resources made available for reception should be used to strengthen those services, rather than creating new ones on an unprepared basis.

In the event of an emergency situation, temporary operational units could be defined to manage the needs at that particular moment. A separate share calculated on the number of AS received by each manager could be used to finance this core.

We will consider some services, which must respect fundamental human rights, to be guaranteed in all conditions to the AS in addition to those of mere subsistence.

      a. Linguistic and cultural mediation
      b. Access to health
      c. The psychological support
      d. Legal assistance

a. Linguistic and cultural mediation

The issue of linguistic mediation is a fundamental mainstay of the whole reception process. In most cases, communication between operators and beneficiaries takes place in English or French. However, many of these languages may be the official languages of the AS's countries of origin, they are generally acquired in school and do not correspond to the language used in their daily communication. Considering the relatively low level of education of the AS's population, it can be expected that **the official languages are not sufficiently mastered to ensure effective communication**. A similar problem may arise with the language skills of the staff members who, in most cases, have a strictly school-based knowledge of the same languages. Under these conditions, **problems**

arise which go beyond simple lexical understanding, as a shared understanding of meaning is difficult to achieve. In particular, **the engagement required of the AS**, upon their arrival in the facilities, with their signature affixed to the regulations, protects them from a formal point of view, but risks not allowing the achievement of the aim, that is **to obtain substantial adherence to the rules of behavior** as a result of their understanding and sharing. Finally, it must be determined whether, and to what extent, the request to sign a document, which is in fact incomprehensible to the person who has to sign it, is acceptable in law. Investing more time in the initial stages in the construction of the cooperation agreement makes it easier to manage the subsequent stages of the reception. The use of linguistic mediation appears, as we shall see, to be equally **fundamental in relation to health and legal issues.** The possibility of conducting an effective anamnesis and preparing a precise and complete memory cannot be separated from a good understanding between operators and beneficiaries.

However, the use of linguistic/cultural mediation **presents some critical points** which must be taken into account in order not to compromise its effectiveness. It was found that, in many cases, language mediation was provided by other ASs or immigrants who had been settled for some time. Now, **simply coming from the same country of origin is not sufficient to guarantee the quality of the intervention**. In fact, without adequate training, mediators may incur in inappropriate behavior such as the risk of omitting elements they consider useless in the translation, of over-interpreting what the person reports in the light of their own experience or of assuming highly judgmental attitudes towards their fellow countrymen. Considering the delicacy of the situation, the fact that the AS are called to share very intimate and delicate aspects of their existence, it is necessary that the relationship with mediators and operators is perceived as fundamentally safe, respectful and confidential. The use of **qualified staff** guarantees the fundamental rights of the AS and at the same time **the interventions of the operators** is made **easier and more effective.** From this point of view, the question of the quality

of the training of linguistic/cultural mediators should be raised at political level upstream of the specific issue of reception.

b. Access to health

The opportunity to take advantage of a health area dedicated to people who have recently immigrated is a strength of the reception system studied. This organizational choice benefits both the patient and the local health service. The ability to collect, interpret and define the health needs of these people requires specific skills, in terms not only of the ability to identify regional diseases, but also of an intercultural approach to health. It must be considered, in fact, that AS often come from places where access to health is not guaranteed and the health system does not have an organization as complex as ours. The same conceptions of health and care and the different customs related to pregnancy, childbirth and child raising, in the cases of women, require that health workers have specific intercultural competences.

A health worker, whether doctor, nurse, midwife, specialist and trained in this field, will have the tools to work well and ensure care for his patients. It is likely that an untrained practitioner may be exasperated by the patient's non-compliance and that the patient in turn is not or does not feel cared for.

Account should also be taken of the fact that in recent years, many of the people arriving have been victims of torture and serious physical, psychological and sexual violence. Here, too, the approach to patients must be based on specific skills that, first and foremost, protect these people from the risk of secondary victimization.

c. The psychological support

For the dramatic experiences and the risk of death to which they have been repeatedly exposed, the need for psychological support to the AS

must be considered one of the mandatory services. The underestimation of their likely psychological fragility can seriously compromise their state of health and can make it very difficult for them to live together in the facility and the work of the operator, to the point of causing them the risk of Burnout. For the same reasons mentioned in the previous point, it must be ensured by people with specific training. Good coordination between managers could allow them to invest, according to their needs, in a common professional figure. In particular, they could secure a "psy" operator available at night and on public holidays, when public services are more difficult to reach.

d. Legal assistance

Legal assistance, an essential element of the AS's life, must be provided by experienced people. The quality of the assistance cannot depend on random factors such as the fact that it comes from one provider rather than another. The expertise available should be accessible to everyone. Managers can coordinate to finance this service together.

4.2 Functional organization of relations between Prefecture, managers and territories

Experience has shown that there is a need, and an advantage, to provide for ERC management distributed among different legal entities. In the face of an apparent organizational simplification associated with the figure of a single manager, the advantages deriving from the plurality of interlocutors appear to be significant. The Prefectures' ability to monitor and control operational choices is preferred by the fact that they do not have a relationship of necessity linked to a single management interlocutor: in the face of a violation of the agreements, failure to comply with the conditions defined in the specifications, the Prefecture has the right to terminate the contract with the managing body. The presence of

other subjects allows to proceed without the risk of questioning the entire reception system in the territory of competence.

However, the plurality of the managers requires strong coordination between them and the Prefecture itself. A non-systematic organization, which provides for essentially bilateral exchanges between the Prefecture and individual managers, multiplies the need for intervention by the Prefecture, strains the entire system and risks loosening the relationship of transparency and trust between the institution and the managers themselves.

In this perspective, it becomes useful to structure communication channels and spaces of comparison between the parts that are systematized, predictable and easy to access through, for example, the establishment of a permanent and systematic table of **Coordination between the Prefecture and the Managers**. In the next box, a possible organizational model is presented:

COORDINATION BETWEEN THE MANAGERS AND THE PREFECTURE (CPM)

1: Provide for a systematic scheduling of monthly meetings.
For example, establish that on the second Tuesday of the month at 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., the CPM meets at a specific place. The meeting will be attended by

- the Prefecture's Medical Officer
- the managers or their representatives

and, as required by the agenda,

- the representatives of the territorial services invited for the occasion.

2: Participation in these meetings must be **compulsory** for Prefectural staff and for the managers or their representatives (possibly always the same) and **already provided for in the service contract.**

3: For each meeting, a shared agenda is defined.

The Prefecture sends a proposal to all participants, who may suggest new items to add. In the case of proposals that are too numerous to be dealt with in a single meeting, a priority list is defined.

4: Depending on the problems suggested by the shared agenda, **representatives of the relevant territorial services** (health, employment, education, law enforcement, etc.) may be invited from time to time.

5: At the beginning of each meeting, the secretary, who will have the task of drawing up a summary report of the meeting, will be identified.

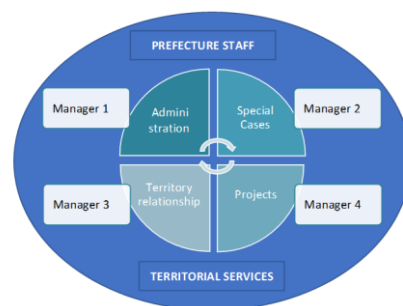**6:** At the end of the meeting the possible points for the next meeting are outlined.

7: The transcriptions together with the proposal of the shared agenda will be sent to all participants on the following days (max. one week). It will then be possible to integrate both the proposed minutes and of course the agenda items.

8: The minutes will be approved at the beginning of the next meeting.

The aim of the CPM is to ensure a constant and homogeneous flow of information between the managing bodies and the Prefecture's staff. The coexistence of all parties increases the degree of communicative transparency and fosters the relationship of trust between them. In particular:

1) The possibility for operators to add points in the shared agenda increases their degree of involvement and participation. On the other hand, in this way, the meetings are more likely to address relevant issues in the hosting activities.

2) Routine issues can be dealt with systematically and shared experiences can be useful for a general increase and consolidation of mutual expertise.

3) The ways in which managers can share resources to acquire certain services to which the public service is unable to respond (language mediation, health care availability, legal experts, etc.) can be defined.

4) The possibility of an extended invitation to the representatives of the territorial services strengthens the link between the territory and the reception system, offers the opportunity to define, together with all the parties involved, the conclusion of new agreements in order to respond in a programmatic and timely manner to the needs and requirements that have emerged.

5) During these meetings, the staff of the Prefecture has the opportunity to acquire an overall view of the state of the reception service, already pointing out any critical issues or good practices that emerge and that can be the subject of further investigation.

In the event of an upsurge in demand, the CPM is an important tool for dealing with a new emergency, starting with the resources and skills already in place.

1) The possibilities for **increasing the reception capacities** of existing managers will be explored;

2) It will be possible to define the composition and operating procedures of a possible **Emergency Operations Centre** that can respond to the sudden increase in services;

3) It could be the place where the **representatives of the Local Authorities** are invited in case of need to expand the diffusion of the reception on the provincial territory.

4.3 Functional organization within the structures and coordination between the different managers

A critical aspect of the reception system has emerged in relation to the tasks of the operators. Recruited on the emergency wave, it took time to identify what skills were required and to understand which was the most functional work organization. Over the years, each manager has changed

his or her way of working in order to try to respond better to emerging needs. At the end of this work, and taking into account their different experiences, we propose a possible organizational and functional model of internal ERC management.

Leaving aside the strictly administrative and accounting functions that should be carried out by dedicated people having a specific training or competence, the intervention of each reception operator takes place on two psychosocial dimensions that, for briefness of language, will be defined *individual* and *collective*.

Reference Operator (RO). In relation to the **individual dimension**, the operator is called to manage the specific needs of the individual AS regarding health aspects, the accompaniment and monitoring of legal aspects and, as far as possible, also those related to integration processes such as language learning, vocational training and employment opportunities. Each operator should be the *case manager* of a **defined number of AS**, a **Reference Operator (RO)**, "expert" of the cases for which he/she is responsible and privileged interlocutor of the cases.

In this way, the "one to one" relationship (from the AS's point of view) can guarantee greater effectiveness in monitoring individual paths and less dispersion of information, which often burdens operators and produces a state of misunderstanding and a feeling of uncertainty in the AS that risks destabilizing their psychophysical balance.

Linking Operator (LO). The **collective dimension** refers instead to the need to coordinate activities within and between each structure. These activities concern both the management and organization of everyday life and the support of living together. As far as the purely management aspects are concerned, the criticalities detected by managers and operators in terms, for example, of the organization of waste collection and the proper use of heating systems, seem to indicate, also in this case, a self-referential and mono-cultural reading of the issue. Managers, and their operators, should become aware of the different organization of

everyday life between AS's countries of origin and Italy. It would simply be necessary to devote time to learning how to manage what are new and unknown needs for the AS. The acquisition of these skills is also part of the integration process and should be considered an integral part of the work of the operators.

The Linking Operator (LO) is intended for these functions. He, in each structure, assists the AS in choosing the **best ways to manage the house, food and common spaces.**

The **LO** must also have skills in social mediation that allow him to intervene in **the management of any conflicts between the AS** and between them and the staff. It must also act as a **social mediator with the territory** whenever the need arises. **LO** is responsible for a defined number of structures.

The distinction of the roles of the operators makes it possible to define a clear way to define the working objectives of each one, to schedule the activities, to have a constant monitoring of the state of things both at individual level (RO) and at the level of organization and functioning of the structures (LO). This organization also allows for a timely handover when an operator needs to be replaced.

Representative of Asylum Applicants. The AS's adherence to the reception project in all its aspects is facilitated by a precise assignment of responsibilities to the same. The more people are put in a position to be active participants in the decision-making processes that concern them, the more they will take care to adhere to the project itself.

In each structure, we suggest an organization for which the AS meet once a week to plan needs and organize collective activities. In small structures, they can all bring the fruit of these discussions back together at the LO. In larger structures (more than 6 AS), the AS themselves will be invited to identify 2 Representatives (RAA) who will be the spokespersons of all at the LO. In any case, 2 RAA should be provided for each structure so as to reduce the risk of a monopolization of power in one person.

The RAA becomes the contact person for the requests, needs and requirements of the asylum seekers residing in the structure.

4.4 A proposal for bottom-up model: functional diagram

We propose below a "bottom-up" description of the proposed functional model.

1) Level single structures.
1.1. The AS of each structure are required to meet once a week to take stock of the state of the house management, the problems to be faced and the emerging needs. In the case of structures with more than 6 AS, they are called to identify 2 of their representatives (RAA).
1.2. Once a week the LO meets the AS (small structures) or their RAA to address the issues they propose and plan the activities of the week.
1.3. Each AS has its own RO, different from the LO. It will be the task of the RO to keep the project related to each AS updated and to schedule the meetings as needed.
1.4 The contribution of voluntary staff, in terms of tasks to be carried out and modalities, will have to be defined and agreed with the RO and LO.

2) The connection between the different structures
2.1. The venue for the connection between the facilities are the team meetings. Under normal circumstances, such meetings may be held every fortnight. It is suggested to keep a relatively close scan, although meetings may be short in duration. It is useful for operators and the manager to have constant monitoring of the whole system in order to be able to act in a timely manner when necessary.
2.2. The information that will form the monthly report to be submitted to the Prefecture is prepared there. The instrument already in place represents an important opportunity to transmit qualitative information on how the reception is managed by each manager. These reports could

be of two types. One, drawn up by the ROs that report relevant information with respect to the individual AS, the other drawn up by the LOs that highlight the management aspects (non-administrative) of the functioning of the structures: house management, quality of the relationship of cohabitation in each structure, relations with the neighborhood, etc..

2.3. The team identifies the person who will participate in the monthly meetings of the CPM. This person shall bring the concerns of the whole team to the attention of the CPM. He or she will also be responsible for reporting what has been discussed in the CPM at the next team meeting.

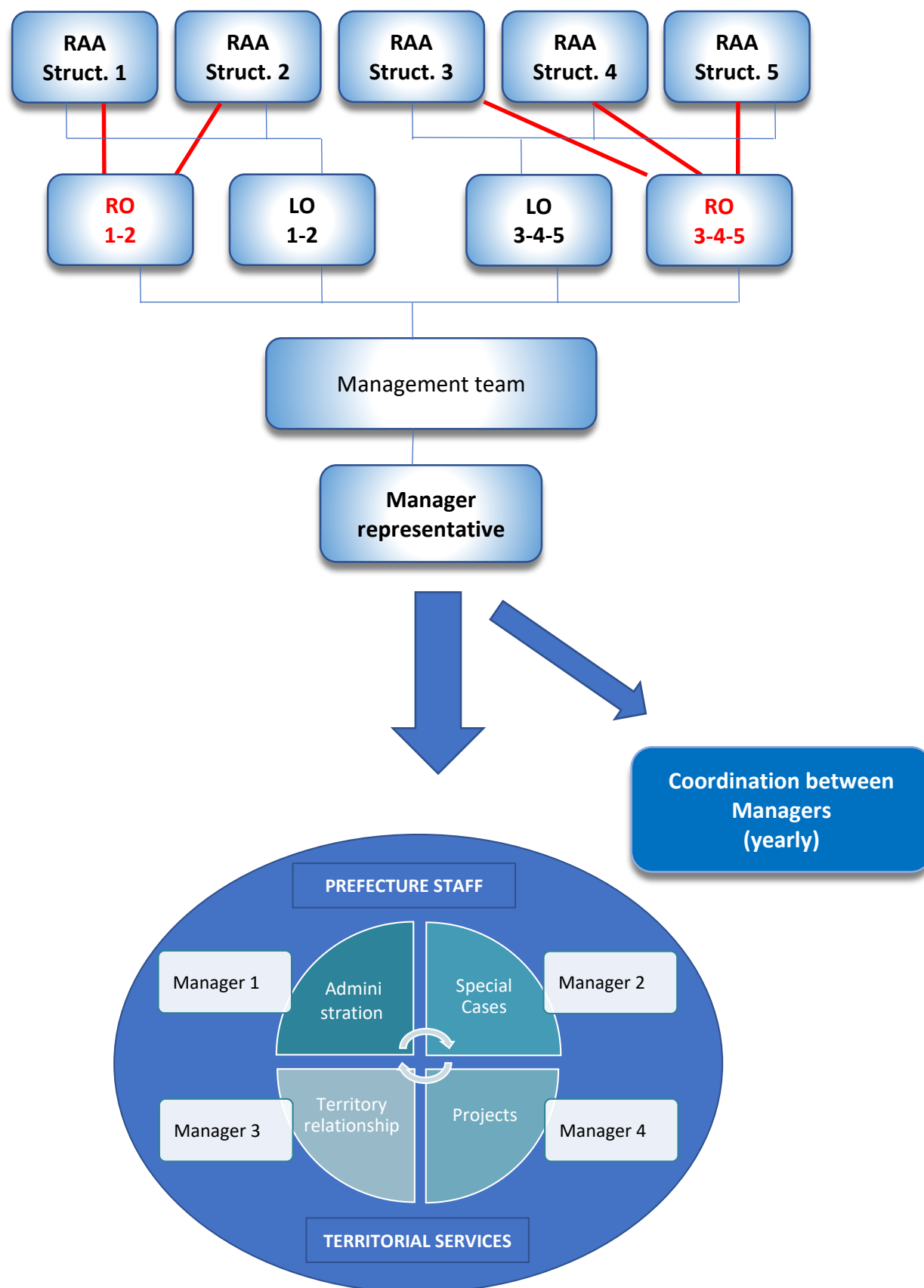*3) Coordination between managers.*

The different managers, or at least their representatives, shall have the opportunity to meet on a monthly basis in the CPM. However, it may be useful to provide for an annual meeting between the Managers to identify and plan the services to be managed jointly. The annual meeting makes it possible to assess the effectiveness of what has been achieved and to reschedule the following year's activities on the basis of experience and any new needs.

The sharing of resources between managers can not only ensure the continuation of services already existing and consolidated in the ERC reception practices, but also the promotion of new ones. For instance, the establishment of the figure of the psychologist on call seems to respond to one of the operators' major concerns. In fact, many of them have had to face up to the following imbalances psychological or psychiatric without the proper tools. These episodes can have even dramatic consequences in terms of violent behavior and are in any case highly destabilizing for all the people who are somehow involved. A timely intervention by a professional would allow to protect from these consequences the suffering AS, the operator and all the other people involved.

Finally, the CM (Coordination between Managers) can become a planning table of Continuous Training for all the reception professionals involved

in the ERC system. It will be possible to identify specific training needs and technical-operational tools to be equipped for the achievement of a quality service. It will be possible to share training opportunities between the different managers, so as to further contribute to the formation of a professional culture, but also to propose new multi-professional training strategies and between different ERC teams.

Functional diagram of the ERC organization

RAA Struct. 1   RAA Struct. 2   RAA Struct. 3   RAA Struct. 4   RAA Struct. 5

RO 1-2   LO 1-2   LO 3-4-5   RO 3-4-5

Management team

Manager representative

Coordination between Managers (yearly)

PREFECTURE STAFF

Manager 1   Administration   Special Cases   Manager 2

Manager 3   Territory relationship   Projects   Manager 4

TERRITORIAL SERVICES

4.5 - The monitoring system

In order to respond to the need for control and evaluation of the reception system in Italy, the Ministry of the Interior, through FAMI funds, launched the MI.RE.CO (Monitoring and improvement of reception conditions) project in 2017, with the aim of developing a common methodology for monitoring both SPRAR and CAS, through the definition of quantitative-qualitative standards that can be adopted by all the Prefectures of the country. In this perspective, the Prefecture of Parma has developed its own functional monitoring system based on three main tools: 1) reporting by managing bodies, 2) MIRECO visits, 3) MIRECO reporting.

1) With regard to the reports due from the managing bodies, the Prefecture of Parma has already provided in the call for tenders for 2018 that the following monthly documents will be delivered:
1.1. A statement of all expenses incurred, complete with supporting documents;
1.2. A register relating to the disbursement of pocket money and a register for the supply of goods, bearing signatures for receipt;
1.3. A progress report on the implementation of the Convention.

1.1. The performance of the first task requires, in all evidence, qualified staff who are able to gather the necessary information, to instruct their colleagues so that the documentation meets the formal requirements and is competent to organize, systematize and send this material. It appeared that small operators were generally more in difficulty than others. The problem they encountered was, in general, that they did not have a competent person dedicated to these activities. The need for financial reporting, especially in the area of public expenditure, is a priority and therefore the successful tenderers of the relevant contracts need to have the appropriate skills and resources to carry out these tasks properly.
1.2. As regards the second task, it could be the task of each RE to

complete and have each client sign the pocket money and goods delivery register.

1.3. Finally, the third document, generally overlooked by managers, should be the space for qualitative reporting of activities. As suggested above, the compilation of these reports could be the task of the NOW and RE in order to account for both the overall qualitative aspects of the activities carried out (NOW) and the case-specific aspects (RE).

2) Within the framework of the MIRECO project, "surprise" visits by Prefectural staff to the individual facilities are planned, in order to ascertain the conditions of suitability, habitability and healthiness, as well as to verify that the individual services (e.g.: the supply of foodstuffs, their correct storage and cooking; the state of wear and tear of the lettering and clothing; the cleanliness and hygiene of the environments; etc.) are correctly carried out. An observation grid guides the surveys of the personnel involved.

The Ministry of the Interior is periodically informed of inspection activities, which may lead to the adoption of financial penalties for managers, or the reduction of the fee when an inadequate service is found (which, moreover, occurred with a certain frequency, especially in 2018).

3) Managers compile and transmit to the Prefecture on a monthly basis a qualitative report on the state of implementation of the individual agreements, which is both the key to reading the accounting documentation required for payments and the basis for carrying out control and evaluation activities on reception and integration routes.

The CPM can facilitate the monitoring process, as critical issues may emerge there that can be explored in depth later.

In the monitoring process, some items are missing, in particular those of the operators and those of the beneficiaries themselves, the RAs.

Without further burdening the whole process, "random" meetings with some operators and RAs could be envisaged.

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The latter could be convened, separately, in a confidential manner and with the strictest anonymity, at the Prefecture for a brief interview. This information could contribute to a better understanding of the activities taking place in the individual structures and their quality.

4.6 - Comments on the degree of applicability of the proposed model

The proposed model is, of course, not binding for existing contracts with the managing bodies. However, the part of the CPM can be suggested in the course of work, in a collaborative spirit, once it has been found to be effective also to facilitate regularity and punctuality in the performance of services already contractually provided.

On the other hand, it is possible to consider including aspects concerning functional organization within the structures as an item to be added to the criteria underlying the evaluation of the quality of the technical offer in a future tender. In that case, by including this item as an ex-specialist in the call for tenders, the selection board could certainly exercise the power to make appropriate use of the proposals for improvement made by those candidates who present a model of their functional organization as closely as possible to that outlined here.