

## Refugees and asylum seekers: men and women like us

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In the European context Italy registered a drastic decrease in economic migration – a fundamental agent of development and growth in our country – and a resumption of youth emigration (over 100,000 Italian youngsters left the country). In 2015 and the first few months of 2016 there was a sizable influx of forced migrants, landing in particular on the coast and ports of Sicily but also of Calabria, Puglia, Campania and Sardinia. In 2015, however, it was 9% lower than in 2014 (170,100 people in 2014 and 153,842 in 2015). In 2015 the route changed, especially for those leaving from the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and Asia who travelled to Turkey and then crossed over to Greece: over 850,000 people followed this route. For every person who landed in Italy five landed in Greece. In 2016 the picture changed again and Italy has become once more the preferred arrival point due to the closure of several European borders and the agreement between the European Union and Turkey. So far, however, arrivals are still about the same as last year.

### **1. Which countries do they flee?**

In the first months of 2016 migration increased, compared to 2015, and is expected to keep increasing given the Middle East's continuing instability, the risk of serious disruption in North Africa and the dramatic situation of sub-Saharan countries and the Horn of Africa.

In these last 25 years more and more countries have become prey to wars, guerrilla warfare, insecurity and instability. On top of ongoing wars and guerrillas and 59 countries where political and religious freedom is violated or at risk, there have been over 2,000 natural disasters between 2000 and 2012: over 60 million people have been forced to leave their homeland. The path of those who flee violence crosses the path of those who flee hunger and thirst: 840 million and 1 billion people respectively. Violence, fear and the "rage of the people" – as Paul VI warned in his encyclical *Populorum progressio* almost 50 years ago – accompany the movement of migrants, a small portion of whom crossed the Mediterranean sea in 2015 (154,000 people) and keeps crossing, landing mostly on the Italian coastline. Looking at the international situation we cannot but acknowledge our responsibilities: the responsibility of those who invaded other people's land, of those who exploited people and natural resources, of those who have been selling arms and making money out of war. Evil practices that divided the world and weakened solidarity are the cause of these new migrations, landings and deaths. The responsibility is ours. This movement of people generated by us, by our indifference, lack of solidarity, exploitation, "just" wars and

forgotten wars, as well as by climate change, has sorely challenged asylum laws. The right to asylum has been denied again and again, also by Italy in 2011.

## 2. Arrivals in Italy

In Italy Lampedusa was again the top landing spot (168 landings and 21.160 people), followed by Augusta (146 landings and 22,391 people), Pozzallo (104 landings and 16,811 people), Reggio Calabria (90 landings and 16,911 people) Catania (64 landings and 9,464 people), Palermo (61 landings and 11,456 people), Trapani (55 landings and 8,136 people), Taranto (45 landings and 9,160 people). More people arrived in Crotona, Cagliari, Salerno, Corigliano Calabro and Vibo Valentia. The high number of arrivals in Lampedusa was partly due to the implementation of the “hot spot” system, for the island is the European territory closest to North Africa.

Most of the migrants crossing the Mediterranean left from Libya (over 85%). 8% left from Egypt and a few thousand from Turkey, Greece and Tunisia. Overland crossings to Europe’s North-Eastern borders by the Balkans route also increased.

Change in migration routes was of course mirrored by a change in migrants’ nationalities: the Horn of Africa and Sub Saharan countries became the top source. In 2015 38,612 migrants came from Eritrea (a 10% increase on 2014); 21,886 from Nigeria (a 110% increase on 2014), 12,176 from Somalia (more than double than in 2014), 8,909 from Sudan (three times as much as in 2014) 8,123 from Gambia (a little less than in 2014) 7,444 from Syria (6 times less than in 2014 when Syria was in pole position). The number of people fleeing Senegal and Bangladesh is unchanged (a little over 5,000). On the other hand there are fewer migrants from Mali (5,752, about half as in 2014), Egypt (2,594 compared to 4,095 in 2014), Palestine (1,650 compared to 6,017 in 2014). All together the countries of origin of migrants landing in Italy are 65.

Broken down by gender there were 115,000 men and 20,000 women (for the latter a 15% increase on the previous year). Minors were over 15,000: 4,000 travelling with their families and 11,000 unaccompanied minors, 6,000 of whom disappeared after landing and are untraceable.

## 3. Housing facilities

On January 1, 2016 out of 154,000 registered migrants 103,792 are staying at various housing facilities. 7,394 are housed in frontline facilities run by CDA, CARA, CPSA (2,000 less than in the previous year); 76,394 are housed in temporary housing facilities spread over the whole of Italy (over double as many as in 2015 ). **SPRAR** facilities for asylum seekers and refugees house 19,715 people, a little less than in 2015. Broken down by region Lombardy houses 13,480, Sicily 12,373, Lazio 8,232, Campania 8,034, Piedmont 7,933, Veneto 7,922, Emilia Romagna 6,493, Puglia 5,839. Most of the people housed in CARA centers are in Sicily (3,389), Puglia (1,734) and Calabria (1,007). Most of the people housed in temporary facilities (CAS) are in Lombardy (12,499). Most of the people housed in **SPRAR** facilities are in Lazio (4,362), Sicily (4.023), Puglia (1,848), Calabria

(1,730) and Campania (1,145). Two thirds of **SPRAR** beds are in these five regions, evidence that **SPRAR** projects were set up mostly by towns in the center and South of Italy. Overall the situation is still very difficult, both at ports of arrival and in many of the frontline facilities, and procedures vary considerably from region to region.

Most of the unaccompanied minors are aged 16 to 17 (80,6%) and come from Egypt (2,499), Albania (1,241), Eritrea (1,218), Gambia (1,028), Somalia (771), Nigeria (627) and Bangladesh (608). Unfortunately most of the 10,952 unaccompanied minors in Italy (as of November 30, 2014) are housed in temporary facilities in Southern Italy; only about 10% live with host families or in foster homes. Half of these minors live in two regions: 3,967 in Sicily and 1,123 in Calabria. Piedmont hosts 285 and Veneto 283. In 2015 there have been 82,940 asylum applications, a 40% increase over the previous year, and the Commissions ruled on 70,737 cases (a 95% increase over the previous year). In 2015 asylum was granted to 29,182 applicants (about 42%) and denied to over 52%. 6% have disappeared. Compared to 2014 the ratio is inverted: it was 60% granted to 27% denied.

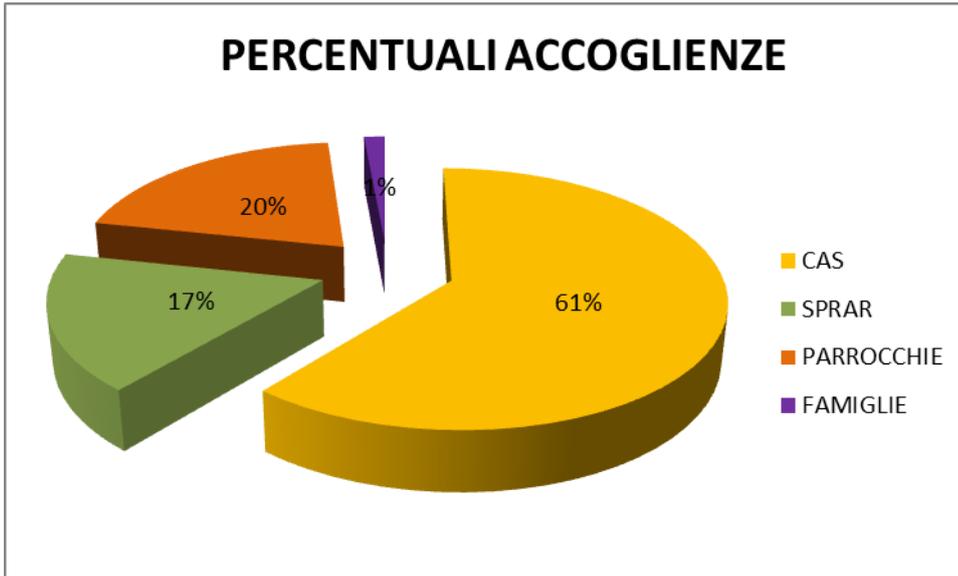
#### 4. Housing in religious facilities

On September 6, 2015, when the Pope made his appeal, about 23,000 asylum seekers had been offered hospitality by parishes, religious communities, monasteries and sanctuaries (according by a first survey made by the Italian Episcopal Conference). From that day on, following an appeal by the local Ordinaries, there has been a great show of solidarity which in many cases does not translate, unfortunately, into actual hospitality. In some dioceses parishes are having trouble promoting open doors and integration, which is why CARITAS and MIGRANTES have offered their help to promote solidarity at diocesan level.

As of **April 13, 2016** 196 dioceses answered the form sent out by the Italian Episcopal Conference to survey the situation. They are hosting 22,659 people, broken down as follows:

- 13,847 in facilities approved by the Prefectures and operating with funds of the Ministry of the Interior
- 3,904 in SPRAR facilities (funded by the Ministry of the Interior)
- 4,580 in 468 parishes (diocesan funds)
- 328 with 158 families or other arrangements (private or diocesan funds)

**Chart 1 Breakdown of distribution among various facilities**



(source: MIGRANTES Foundation)

Analysis of data in the four geographical areas (North, Center, South and Islands) shows that migrants housed in **CAS** facilities are divided as follows: 36% in the North, 11% in the Center and South and 3% in the Islands.

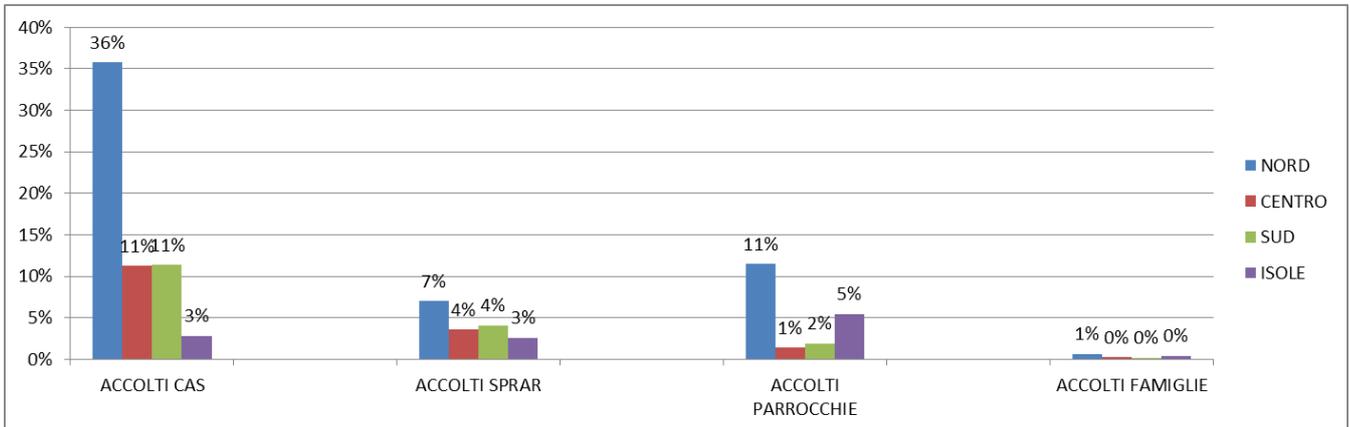
7% of people housed in **SPRAR** facilities are in the North, 4% in the Center and South and 3% in the Islands.

11% of people housed by **parishes** are in the North, 1% in the Center, 2% in the South and 5% in the Islands.

1% of people living with **families** are in the North. A few live in the Center. South and Islands <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the North 68 families host 148 people; in the Center 18 families host 52 people; in the South 27 families host 37 people and in the islands 45 families host 91 people.

**Chart 2 Migrant distribution by geographical area and type of facility**



Source: MIGRANTES Foundation

The five Italian regions where dioceses host the greatest number of migrants (at CAS or SPRAR centers, parishes and families) are:

- **Lombardy**                                **5,632**
- **Triveneto**                                **2,740**
- **Sicily**                                        **2,210**
- **Piedmong/Val d’Aosta**                **1,998**
- **Calabria**                                 **1,772**

196 dioceses filled and returned the form sent out by the Italian Episcopal Conference (29 are unable for various reasons to receive migrants). It can be assumed that they host about 1/5 of the total migrant input.

**5. Improving reception policies: problems and recommendations**

1. The possibility of granting residence permits for humanitarian reasons to migrants who have been denied asylum should be urgently explored. It would prevent many undocumented people to stay in Italy illegally, prey to insecurity, exploitation and criminal gangs. Legal status is fundamental for those who can stay in Italy as well as those who must go back to the country of origin.
2. The outcome of extant migration management policies should be forcibly brought to the attention of EU authorities: hotspots, relocation and repatriation are border control measures that result in immediate selection of nationalities eligible for entry (Syria yes, Iraq no ....) For thousands of people the only alternative is turning to human traffickers. Three **hotspots** are already operative in Italy (Lampedusa, Trapani and Pozzallo). Identification procedures carried out by FRONTEX, EUROPOL and EASO result in a

preselection of migrants allowed to apply for asylum. Those who come from countries deemed to be “safe” are denied the right to request asylum. This violates the Geneva Convention (and the Italian law that implements it) according which asylum applications can be submitted by all, and every applicant has the right to have his/her application screened individually and thoroughly. Even people coming from Sub Saharan Africa often receive border rejection notification. As to **relocation**, envisaged by EU authorities to distribute hot spots identified asylum seekers among EU countries, the procedure is neither speedy nor effective. Applicants are kept waiting two or three months before transfer to the few countries that have agreed to receive any. EU countries are not obliged to receive a fixed quota of asylum seekers transferred from countries such as Italy and Greece, which are under the heaviest migratory pressure. And the countries where most asylum seekers would like to go (Northern Europe) are not among the few who have agreed to receive some. For instance, EU guidelines envisage 39,000 relocations from Italy over a two year period, at a rhythm of 1,600 per month, but in actual fact only 190 asylum seekers have been relocated as of December 2015 (i.e. three months after implementation of the procedure). Furthermore only nationals of Eritrea, Iraq and Syria are given this possibility and Italy has very few of them (Eritrea excluded). Europe wide identification and relocation procedures must be urgently introduced, respectful of human dignity and human rights, truly enforceable and based on the solidarity of all EU countries. And new procedures must be found to manage arrivals, both of migrants and asylum seekers, endorsed by all EU countries, setting up fixed quotas for each country and, as much as possible, crosschecking availability/refugees’ wishes.

3. Asylum applications should be processed more competently and faster: (a) reforming the system of territorial commissions and providing better training for staff; (b) hiring more staff so that all applications are processed within the six month period envisaged by EU norms. At the same time every effort should be made to speed up processing of appeals: at present one year, sometimes two, go by before these people receive a reply. In the meantime they are left in limbo, no longer eligible to reside in accredited facilities; prey to insecurity and exploitation they often disappear and become untraceable.
4. Reception procedures should be the same throughout Italy: same standards and same system of controls and audits. As is the case with other social services, charitable and no profit organizations should be given a role, within the framework of a regional plan, *overcoming the impasse of a statist approach that gives the right to submit refugee reception projects only to municipal authorities*. This, by the way, would be in accordance with European regulation on services to the person and Italy’s Law #328. Transparent procedures would be advantageous both to refugees and those who provide for them. An October 2015 report of the Italian Ministry of the Interior shows that money spent on refugees has a positive impact on hosting communities: out of the €30 to €35 daily allowance per person about 37% goes to cover staff wages while about 23% is used to pay rent and buy food and clothing, positively impacting local suppliers. Once refugees are sure they can stay in Italy, efficient planning must be in place to provide them with housing and help them find a job. Without it, we create frustrated social outcasts, easy prey to

exploitation. To this end we need specific programs at national and regional level to facilitate social and economic integration of the refugees, as of any other homeless and jobless individual. The synergy State-NoProfit-Church can be extremely fruitful (there are many positive examples of such a joint approach throughout Italy).

5. As regards unaccompanied minors, housing in inadequate collective structures has proved totally unsatisfactory. We need ad hoc facilities: not just small structures but foster homes and similar solutions: a specific system of family based services within the general one for asylum seekers, as advocated by the 2014 State – Regions Conference but not yet put in place. Finally, unaccompanied minors should be rapidly given tutors: trained volunteers, not mayors or aldermen who are unprepared and unfit for such a job.

## 6. Conclusion

Today Europe is split in two: countries willing to welcome refugees and countries who build barriers against a new “Lepanto”, where the enemy is no longer the Turk but the world’s poor. What Europe lacks is a feeling that social justice is a must: without it Europe risks to disintegrate, failing to appreciate a precious resource: immigration brings children, young people, families, what Europe needs to build its future. A great effort to learn and understand is asked of Christians and communities: from a social and political viewpoint in order to protect the dignity of the human person; from a cultural and pastoral one, while it is important to stress our Christian identity and the need to respect the basic rules of social coexistence, we must also be open to dialogue, set up rules and programs welcoming the wealth of different cultures and religions, especially – as Pope Francis reminds us in the Bull *Misericordiae vultus* – Jewish and Islamic ones. The quality of evangelization depends on how effectively and sincerely we put into practice the commandment “love thy neighbor”. Migration is the test.