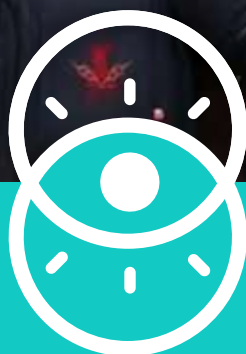


ITALY



I GET YOU

Promoting best practices to prevent racism
and xenophobia towards forced migrants
through community building

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Co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship (REC) Programme of the European Union*



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A rehearsal of the Luz y Norte
Musical group, formed of migrants
and Italians in Rome, Italy.
(Still taken from the Italian / Get
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I GET YOU ITALY

National chapter no.5 of the European / Get You report

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Introduction

Despite the enormous challenges linked to forced migration, in Italy, as well as across all of Europe, progress is being made to make a more welcoming society. Whilst, over the past few years, many citizens have shown solidarity with forced migrants arriving to Italy by building compassionate communities, there are now further opportunities for substantive changes. Supporting forced migrants and refugees to be included in society can mean many different things. This support involves large, institutional programmes as well as simple opportunities for building interpersonal relationships, such as sharing meals, learning languages and simply being together.

In Italy, I Get You has found a broad range of CBIs. Some CBIs are newly established in the last two or three years, in response to the increased number of forced migrants who have arrived. Others have a long tradition of existence, dating back to the early 1990s when the first relevant arrivals of refugees came to Italy. Given the variety witnessed in national and local contexts, I Get You provides a possibility to learn about the different experiences of CBIs, and through analysis, we have come to understand the factors of success and challenge that they have faced over the years. I Get You hopes to share these experiences, which can provide inspiration to others looking to start new initiatives while at the same time it contributes to shaping the narrative about forced migration in our societies in a positive way. Policymakers can also learn from the experience of CBIs what concrete support is needed on the national, regional and local levels in order to continue to promote best practices through their initiatives.

JRS Italy (known in Italy as Centro Astalli), in its 36-year experience of welcoming and supporting refugees in six Italian towns (Rome, Palermo, Catania, Trento, Vicenza, Naples), has always promoted more inclusive societies, where citizens and refugees build spaces of mutual knowledge and understanding, exchanging experiences and planning together a common future. JRS

Italy strongly believes that forced migrants and refugees positively impact Italian society and that more dialogue in public debates is needed to explore the positive experiences of interaction between forced migrants and local citizens.

1.1 CONTEXT: RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA TOWARDS FORCED MIGRANTS IN ITALY

With more than 180,000 arrivals in 2016, Italy has become Europe's major forced migrant point of entry. The Italian Government is making efforts to cope with the increasing number of asylum seekers and refugees on its territory. A plan to reform the Italian reception system was announced at the annual meeting of the Ministry of Interior and the National Association of Italian Municipalities (14 October 2016, Bari). The reception system, theoretically, distinguishes between first-line and second-line reception. Newly arrived asylum seekers and migrants are placed in Regional Hubs, including emergency reception centres (CAS), managed by the Ministry of Interior and Prefectures.

Subsequently, second-line reception is provided through Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR). The SPRAR projects, run by local institutions, in cooperation with voluntary sector organizations, offer 'integrated reception' interventions going beyond the simple distribution of food and housing. The SPRAR provide complementary services such as legal and social guidance and support, and the development of individual programs to promote socioeconomic inclusion and integration.

The newly announced plan envisages the phasing out of the CAS, with a possibility to consolidate a uniform reception system across the country. This system would entail an expansion of the SPRAR system, through equitable distribution of asylum seekers and migrants across 8,000 municipalities in the country. One important challenge to the implementation of the plan will be ensuring

participation of municipalities in the SPRAR system, given that, at the moment, municipalities are not obliged to take part in SPRAR and migration is a sensitive issue in terms of electoral consensus.

The political debate in Italy concerning migration has been contentious for many years. Populist or right-wing parties have profited from this debate as it has fuelled their negative rhetoric. At the same time, the combination of economic crisis, the increase in the number of arrivals, and several emerging scandals regarding the use of public funds in reception systems¹ has resulted in an increasingly negative public opinion towards forced migrants. Mainstream media is promoting the visibility of populist leaders, social conflicts and violent reactions. This has resulted in constant messages of diffidence, fear and xenophobia being passed to the general public. Therefore, this narrative has overshadowed the numerous actions, initiatives and projects carried out by civil society and individual citizens that help to meet the basic needs of forced migrants and refugees and help them to integrate in their host communities.

Italians' views on migration have been growing increasingly polarized over the last two years. According to research by AudienceNet, from 1,001 people that were interviewed in January 2017, 62% of respondents who said that their opinion had changed over time had become "less sympathetic". Nonetheless, it is important to note that 1 in 4 had become "more sympathetic," and a further 13% did not feel strongly either way. Regarding the refugees' intention and ability to work, approximately 1 in 3 were optimistic, saying that "refugees are willing to work hard" to be independent and fit into their new communities. However, a larger proportion (55%) believed that "refugees are just looking for handouts."

1.1.1 Legislative and policy developments on anti-discrimination

Anti-discrimination legislation in Italy has been strengthened in the last years and the authorities are working on improving data collection regarding

racist offenses. The Chamber of Deputies has set up an Observatory on Xenophobia and Racism. The National Federation of the Italian Press and the Order of Journalists have adopted a code of conduct (the "Rome Charter") aiming to make the media's handling of issues related to asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants more objective. Draft laws attain major improvements in the legislation against racism and racial discrimination, such as: the ratification of Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights and on the Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime; harsher penalties with racist propaganda and public incitement to hate crime are based on Holocaust denial; and considering homophobia as an aggravating circumstance in any offense. The law does not criminalize, though, discrimination on grounds of skin colour or language and the penalties are not always an effective, proportionate and dissuasive response to offenses involving racism and racial discrimination.

A 2016 report on Italy notes that the country does not have a national, systematic or transparent system for the collection of data on hate crimes.² Each public agency, depending on their mandate, collects different data with different methodologies and classification systems. These agencies are UNAR (National office against racial discrimination), OSCAD (Observatory for the Protection against discriminatory acts), SDI (the database of the investigation system used by the police), the Ministry of Justice and ISTAT (National Statistics Institute).

Moreover, in 2016 a database specifically dedicated to hate crime was established on the basis of a Memorandum of Understanding signed by UNAR and the Ministry of Justice. Despite this being a positive initiative to strengthen systematic monitoring in fighting against discrimination and racism, it does not have the financial resources to ensure its effective accomplishment. Therefore, authorities are not always able to collect data on hate related incidents in a coherent manner, official figures recorded 369 racist and xenophobic

¹ "Mafia Capitale" is the name given to a scandal involving the government of the city of Rome, in which alleged crime syndicates misappropriated money destined for city services. The scheme took advantage of the recent influx of refugees, with one of the group's associates boasting that they made more money from the new arrivals than they did from drug trafficking. The criminal organization also used its connections to secure lucrative public contracts, before accepting payments for substandard or, sometimes, non-existent services.

² Council of Europe, *ECRI Report on Italy* (fifth monitoring cycle). Adopted on 18 March 2016, published on 7 June 2016: www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Italy/ITA-CbC-V-2016-019-ENG.pdf



📷 A refugee and a local speaking as part of the initiative Rifugiati in famiglia, Parma - CIAC. (Photo: Rifugiati in famiglia)

crimes in 2015³. The main reasons of this ‘under-reporting’ are that victims are reluctant to report crimes due to fear and lack of confidence in the police, especially by irregular migrants, fear of retaliation, and the scarcity of legal, social and psychological mechanisms. As well as being in a hostile cultural, social and political environment towards migrants and refugees.⁴ Therefore, these are inherently linked to a lack of holistic safeguarding mechanisms.

Civil society in Italy is active in collecting data on hate crimes, complimenting the official records. Different organizations provide tools for monitoring, with different focus and methodologies. Lunaria, a NGO active in monitoring thanks to an online database⁵ has registered 5,369 cases of discrimination, hate speech, propaganda, injuries, property damage, physical violence and racist murders between 1 January 2007 and 30 June 2016.

The discriminatory motives were physical characteristics, nationality, national or “ethnic origin”, religious practices, ideas and cultural practices.

1.1.2 Islamophobia in Italy

A specific aspect of xenophobia in Italy is Islamophobia⁶, which is present in specific contexts, for example, in the far right and particularly the Lega Nord party and Fratelli d’Italia. Italian authorities cannot be sweepingly characterized as Islamophobic, but due to their inability to implement the existing legislation, such as on the construction of new mosques, they can be perceived as such.

According to existing data and information, Islamophobia is also present in education and in the workplace and especially in the media – the Internet and social media are spaces for such

³ Italy regularly reports hate crime data to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Italy’s Criminal Code contains general penalty-enhancement and substantive offence provisions. Hate crime data are collected by law-enforcement authorities and the Ministry of Interior. <http://hatecrime.osce.org/italy>

⁴ See the report *Together. Fighting against hate crime. Report nazionale sul monitoraggio dei delitti d’odio* : <http://www.togetherproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Together-dossier-italia.pdf>. The report is one product of the project TOGETHER! Empowering civil society and Law Enforcement Agencies to make hate crimes visible, financed by the Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme of the European Union.

⁵ www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org

⁶ Claudia Giacalone, Islamophobia in Italy: National Report 2016, in: *Enes Bayraklı & Farid Hafez, European Islamophobia Report 2016*, Istanbul, SETA, 2017.



📷 Bee my Job, Cambalache, Alessandria (Photo: Daniele Robotti)

views to flourish. In Italy, there is an evident lack of awareness of the diversity of Muslim communities which means that the majority of the Italian population does not distinguish the different Muslim groups.

In 2016, and particularly after the Nice truck attack (July) and Berlin Christmas market attack (December), Italian media, politicians and the public talked up “Islamic terrorism,” transforming Islam and Muslims into something inherently dangerous. For example, an article from 3 July 2016 in *Il Giornale*, on the front page concerning an attack that took place in Dhaka on 1 July 2016, causing the death of 20 people, called the terrorists “Islamic Beasts.” However, as a response the Carta di Roma and the Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration (ASGI) presented a complaint to Lombardia Journalists’ Association requesting a retraction of the article. In October 2016, almost all the national newspapers reported on the front page that a teacher of a Venetian school posted on Facebook insults to people of the Islamic faith. The insults were short and not articulated and were addressed to refugees and Muslims; their arrival in Italy was called an “invasion.”

To highlight gaps and responsibilities about this situation, the first Italian research on hate speech, journalism and migration entitled “Hatred is not an opinion” was published in March 2016 by COSPE. This was part of a European project against racism and discrimination on the internet entitled “Bricks - Building Respect on the Internet by Combating Hate Speech.” The research was carried out through the qualitative analysis of case studies, monitoring of articles and interviews with journalists of the main Italian newspapers and industry experts⁷

Social networks and the Internet are currently the main propagators of racist and xenophobic hate messages because such platforms provide a powerful and quick megaphone for hate speech. In the last three years, Italy has distinguished itself as producing the largest amount of discriminatory statements (towards migrants, asylum seekers and Muslims), mainly on the Facebook pages of political candidates or in TV interviews. For instance, some Facebook pages, such as “No all’ Islam in Italia” (No Islam in Italy), “Di sinistra e antirazzista, ma contro l’invasione straniera” (Left wing and anti- racist but against the foreign

⁷ “ Letizia Materassi/Marta Tiezzi/Camilla Bencini, “L’odio non è un’opinione. Ricerca su hate speech, giornalismo e migrazioni,” BRICKS Building Respect on the Internet by Combating hate Speech, (March 16, 2016): http://www.cospe.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ricerca_odionon%C3%A8opinione.pdf.

invasion) continue to spread false news and use inflammatory language when reporting on Muslims and migrants in general. After tweets about women, Muslims represent the group with the largest number of detected tweets. Between 2015 and 2016, there were 1,014,693 tweets about Muslims with 22,435 negative tweets and 7,465 discriminatory messages.⁸

1.2 GIVING VALUE TO MIGRANTS' CONTRIBUTION

The quantitative mapping research of I Get You has revealed the existence of many bottom-up initiatives by civil society organizations and volunteers. These are often in connection with local SPRAR centres, which play an important role in filling the gaps left by national policies and in changing the negative narrative on migration which fuels division and fear.

People are increasingly recognizing the considerable contribution that forced migrants bring to Italian society and the economy. The President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, when visiting a reception centre run by JRS Italy in Rome in June 2016, publicly declared: "Refugees enrich our country. Italy suffers from a low birth rate and the arrival of talented and capable young people will enrich it if managed correctly." Refugees who have settled in towns with shrinking population due to internal migration, are revitalizing communities and services that were under threat. The arrival of migrants is bringing new life into towns that were struggling to survive in the face of economic deprivation and population decline.

Another significant voice in the recent narrative around forced migration in Italy has been Pope Francis who, over the past four years, has frequently voiced his concerns for the plight of refugees. He has perpetuated the message that welcoming refugees is a Christian duty. In a private audience during September 2013 he said, "Empty convents and monasteries should not be turned into hotels by the Church to earn money... [the buildings] are not ours, they are for the flesh of Christ, which is what the refugees are." In September 2015, Pope Francis called on all European parishes and religious communities

to take in one refugee family.

In April 2017 - the campaign "Ero Straniero - L'Umanità che fa bene" (translated as "I was a foreigner. The good humanity"), supported by many NGOs and civil society actors, was launched. The campaign's aim is to counter the widespread perception of migration as a security threat and to promote the idea that a successful reception system could expand the concept of citizenship. To face these challenges, not only at the cultural level but also at the legislative level, there has been an initiative to overcome the "Bossi-Fini" law (incarcerating or returning irregular migrants) to guarantee better living conditions to migrants willing to settle in Italy. The initiative "New rules for the promotion of regular residence permits and for the social and employment integration of non-EU citizens" was filed in the Italian Court of Cassation on April 13 by the promoters (Centro Astalli, Radicali Italiani, Fondazione Casa della carità "Angelo Abriani", Acli, Arci, Asgi, Cnca, A Buon Diritto, Coalizione Italiana per le Libertà e i Diritti civili), and the call for signatures was officially opened.

⁸ Manuela Malchiodi, "L'Islam nei Social Media. Analisi di Twitter," Osservatorio di Pavia, (May 22, 2016): http://www.osservatorio.it/download/Articolo_Islam_Twitter.pdf.

Methodology

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In order to reach CBIs during the Mapping Phase of the research, JRS Italy invited people to connect with the campaign through its social media channels. Established contacts, such as NGO partners and other organisations working in the fields of reception and integration in Italy, were contacted via email and asked to further diffuse I Get You to their own contacts. JRS Italy also invited the members of its national network to actively promote the mapping in their local area.

Therefore, through social media, email and phone calls among JRS Italy's contacts and networks, the I Get You online Mapping Questionnaire was able to be effectively and broadly distributed across the country. This resulted in mapping 62 CBIs that were representative of the richness and the variety of activities taking place at the community level in Italy (25 in northern Italy, 28 in central Italy and 9 in southern Italy). However, there was a lower degree of participation from CBIs in southern Italy, not because there are less initiatives but rather due to difficulty in contacting them because they are not as present in national networks of stakeholders and their interventions tend to be very local or small in scale.

2.1 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS AND EVALUATION

The research team selected 20 of the 62 CBIs to conduct in-depth interviews with in the Qualitative Research Phase. In selecting the 20 CBIs, the Delphi criteria were taken into account as well as the geographic distribution of the initiatives. JRS Italy's researchers visited 10 different cities and towns to conduct all of the interviews in person and at the CBIs (from north to south: Trento, Alessandria, Arquata Scrivia (AL), Parma, Rome, Marino (RM), Formia (LT), Naples, Palermo, Marsala (TP))

Between January and March 2017, three qualitative interviews were conducted for each of the selected initiatives and the results were

analysed using an evaluation grid established by JRS Europe. Six members of the JRS Italy team (3 permanent staff and 3 volunteers) were involved in the visits to the CBIs in different parts of Italy and participated in a committee to evaluate all of the CBIs. The information collected was completed with additional information collected by the interviewer during the visit such as personal notes and observations. In most cases 3 or 4 interviews were conducted. All the interviewees were willing to take part in the research and were open to answer questions.

After completing the interviews, the evaluation committee discussed all of the CBIs over the course of three meetings. As a result of this evaluation, 5 CBIs emerged that ranked very high on the evaluation grid against the Delphi criteria. The evaluation team also recognised an additional 4 CBIs who scored well in certain criteria related to the values and strategies indicated by the Delphi experts.

2.2 LIMITATIONS

In Italy, obstacles came with the phrasing of some of the questions of the mapping questionnaire. Because the original questionnaire was written in English and was purposely broad to apply to initiatives in different countries and to describe an array of initiatives, at times the questions were not fully understood. Particularly, many CBIs were not comfortable with the use of the word "beneficiary" to describe forced migrants taking part in the initiatives. They noted that that word suggests a logic of traditional service, which many of the CBIs work towards avoiding. For the same reason, some were reluctant to define their activity in terms of "services."

Furthermore, the mapping questionnaire tool did not encourage the detailed sharing of personal experiences as most of the questionnaires had short answers. Finally, many people who completed the mapping questionnaire experienced technical

difficulties in uploading high resolution pictures to the site. Some CBIs mitigated this difficulty by sending the pictures to JRS Italy by mail.

Restrictions in the budget allocated for travel to conduct the qualitative interviews limited the number of Italian towns that could be visited to 10. This still allowed for a broad geographic spread of initiatives due to forward planning.

Finally, one challenge during the qualitative interviews was language. I Get You was not able to provide for paid translators or interpreters. Most of interviews were conducted in Italian, but in three cases it was necessary to simplify the questions or to rephrase them in order for the refugees to feel more comfortable in providing an answer. In general, because of the many different languages in which the project was carried out, in addition to all of the native languages spoken by forced migrants interviewed, some details or nuances of the data were lost.

SONAM TSERING



REFUGEE FROM TIBET, CASA SCALABRINI 634, ROME

“I am known as Sonam Tsering, 32 years old, from Tibet. I am a refugee in Italy. In 2014, I forcibly left my country because of the persecution I suffered from Chinese power. In the last three years, I had to change from Tibetan noodles to Italian spaghetti.

After 2 years of life in different reception centres, in November 2016, I got involved with Casa Scalabrini, where I found a very good opportunity to mingle with many cultures, different languages and different religions.

The home provides lots of advantages, like education: two languages classes, Italian and English, driving lessons, and a tailoring class etc. For entertainment and communication, we can use a computer room and television room. For our fitness we have a gym. For praying we can access a Church and a mosque. Last, but most important is the huge kitchen where all the people cook their daily meal.

Here in the house we are 32 members from more than ten different countries, we live together like brothers under one roof. I’m having a very good experience with this beautiful multicultural family. In particular, here I met a family with a 4-year-old daughter who became very close to me: they come from Senegal and I consider them as part of my family.

Here at home, everyone has his own special journey with this beautiful extended family: as for me, I feel that life is beautiful. I wish to thank Casa Scalabrini, the Director, all the staff, volunteers and those who give their support to this initiative. A big thank you from the bottom of my heart to all of you for supporting us and making our life easier.”

Data Findings

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3.1 SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS FROM MAPPING PHASE

A summary of the main quantitative findings is presented below and further details can be found in the Italian Mapping Report.

Geographic distribution

- Territorial distribution of CBIs: North 25, Central 28 and South 9
- Geographic coverage: 86% are present at the local level, 11% at the national level and 3% at the regional level

Budget size

- In most cases, the activities are financed in a grassroots way or by private funding (private grants or foundations), but a relevant 24% are partly or totally financed by public funds, mainly in connection with SPRAR centres.
- 66% operate on a relatively small budget of less than 25,000 Euros
- 13% of have a much higher budget of more than 100,000 Euros per year

Beneficiaries

- The number of beneficiaries served varies greatly from one CBI to another, depending on the nature of the activities.
- Most forced migrants involved in CBIs are young people, between the age of 19-25
- The nationalities of origin are broad, single males from Mali participated in 69% of CBIs mapped, Nigerians (in 68% of CBIs), Gambians (61%), Pakistanis and Afghanis (48%) and Eritreans (39%). This roughly corresponds to the main countries of origin of asylum seekers in Italy in the last 3 years.
- 69% of the cases beneficiaries have lived in Italy for more than one year and only 4 CBIs are frequented by migrants arrived less than 6 months before

Activities

- More than 70% of the mapped initiatives had

- regular meetings, on daily or weekly basis
- 37% of CBIs described their main field of action as "intercultural activities"
- 24% of the initiatives are about sport, crafts and recreational activities such as trekking, music, cooking.
- 22.5% of CBIs are somehow connected to teaching language (mainly Italian but there are also classes of English and other languages, often involving refugees as teachers).
- The courses offered by CBIs are centred on socialization and have the main goal of facilitating daily life in the new context and getting to know Italy better through lessons about its cultural heritage and habits.

Scattered reception approach

- The 'scattered reception' approach, allows a positive interaction with local communities and is encouraged also in public reception system.
- 19% of the mapped CBIs provide accommodation models for forced migrants that promote hospitality. Here, migrants are accommodated by families, parishes, religious congregations or in apartments offered by the local community.
- 11% of the CBIs are centred on activities aiming to facilitate the inclusion in the job market through the acquisition of professional and life skills.

Networks

- Some CBIs started from interactions with other local actors, such as Universities, schools and association of citizens; others are promoted directly by larger NGOs who set-up the CBI structure with the help of volunteers.
- 19% of CBIs are linked, usually directly, with the SPRAR system or (less frequently) with emergency reception centres (CAS).

3.2 RESULTS OF THE QUALITATIVE PHASE

Here is a breakdown of the main findings from the qualitative interviews of 20 CBIs. I Get You has seen that CBIs tend to be flexible and creative in



📷 Refugees take part in archeological excavations in Motya, Marsala – Consorzio Solidalia, collaboration with University of Palermo and municipality of Marsala. (Photo: Consorzio Solidalia)

how they approach their work depending on their experience and on the amount of time that they have been operational. In any case, the research shows that the willingness of Italian citizens, of different age, status and background, willingness to participate in CBIs is relatively high and widespread.

Interaction and Encounter

Interaction and encounter are the main criteria that were found in all CBIs interviewed. The concept of understanding another person and feeling understood yourself served to break down barriers and helped to build deeper connections between people. Unveiling the person behind any perceived label was the explicit or implicit goal of all the CBIs. As integration can be seen as a process, I Get You has seen that when forced migrants began to feel like part of the wider community and establish social connections with locals this process is more effective.

Participation

The concept of participation within CBIs is crucial for both refugees and volunteers because it leads people to feel more active and empowered. To take part in a common action and become active members of the community, is a goal for newcomers and locals alike who participate

in civic life more fully than others who do not participate in such CBIs. Participation in CBIs is in many case an opportunity to re-think the way people live together and to look for common spaces for sharing.

In many of the interviews, mostly forced migrants but also volunteers associated participating in CBIs with the concept of freedom. They saw the opportunity to have a free space, a free activity, an activity that people are not compelled to do but rather choose to participate in freely opened up many options to them.

Awareness Raising

Not all CBIs had the resources to structure systematic awareness raising activities. However, people mentioned the importance of resources in interviews because they noticed how when activities in their neighbourhood became regular and visible, and CBIs started to interact with other stakeholders (such as schools, parishes, and sport clubs), local citizens who were not previously involved became curious and interested to learn more.

In some Italian communities, feelings of diffidence and resistance to the presence of newcomers is more present. This usually happens in smaller towns where the presence of migrants is relatively new, while in larger towns in most cases the

prevailing reaction of the wider local community is indifference to both the presence of migrants and CBIs. In Italy, some CBIs purposely choose to conduct their activities in public spaces in order to reach a wider public. Reaching a wider public is normally considered part of the mission of CBIs.

For example, in a small mountain village near Trento, a group of asylum seekers and refugees are involved in a service that accompanies children to and from school. The “Pedibus” project gives refugees the opportunity to meet families and overcome diffidence by being with children, who tend to be more open minded than the older generations.

Education

While only a few CBIs have education as a specific aspect of their activities, all agreed on the importance of educating the next generation in the interviews. In addition, some CBIs interviewed work with families and children, but none of the 20 CBIs interviewed focused exclusively on children as a target group.

In general, interviewees agreed that children are more open than adults to welcome foreigners, but this acknowledgement did not necessarily derive from direct experience. Some forced migrants interviewed expressed a contrary opinion that children’s attitudes are formed from the lessons their parents teach them.

Support and Service Provision

All CBIs interviewed are supporting refugees in many practical ways. The most common services offered are language courses, vocational training, housing, and job opportunities. The added value of seeking these services out at CBIs is that such initiatives build self-confidence, enforce relational abilities and empower forced migrants, thereby bringing them a step closer to self-sufficiency.

Some CBIs are reluctant to describe their activities by the word “services,” because they feel that this language is creating a sharp distinction between “beneficiaries” and “service providers”, which partly contradicts the spirit and the method they chose for their activity.

Interculturalism

Most CBIs feel they give space to the culture of refugees and migrants taking part in their

activities. This starts from the fact that cultural differences are taken into account in planning. Very frequently, CBIs engage in cooking activities to share traditional dishes. Cooking is considered by most Italians particularly representative of native culture, and many forced migrants have a reverence for cooking and its connection to tradition and religious importance. The general impression is that the element of interculturalism is not a specific or systematically pursued goal of CBIs, but rather a consequence of people spending time together and getting to know one another better.

In two CBIs interviewed, Casa dei Venti and Rifugiati in Famiglia, a deeper reflection about interculturalism emerged. Locals citizens involved, both staff and volunteers, reflected on the differences between cultures, avoiding carefully any superficial approach to the “exotic” and rather reflecting together on the role of specific cultural elements in human relations.

Dignity

Promoting the dignity of participants is perceived as crucial by staff and volunteers of the CBIs interviewed. Supporting the forced migrants to “recognize themselves” and not perceive themselves as victims is a main goal of many initiatives.

On the other hand, the forced migrants interviewed did not always fully understand the questions on dignity. The most common type of response was, “Of course, I feel respected here.” Somehow they found this quite obvious, since CBIs are places where people choose freely to go and no one would go to a place freely if their dignity was not respected, especially when getting to the CBI requires a certain effort and time commitment. “Sometimes we have asked them why they are spending 3 hours in a bus even when they have no money to pay for the ticket only to spend some time with us!” said a volunteer in Rome.

The level of success depends on the quality of the relations between the participants of the CBI (staff, volunteers and forced migrants). “We care a lot for this aspect. If we miss that we fail completely,” remarked one staff member of Casa dei Venti in Rome. “We train volunteers, we talk with them individually and regularly, we provide written material, we meet to evaluate the activities but also the quality of relationships between us all”.

Hospitality

Hospitality is a key and mutual element of most CBIs because it is precisely the fact that all people involved feel welcomed and well received by the other that keeps people coming back. Hospitality is not related to how much someone has to give, but how they perceive they are involved in tangible actions.

The element of personal attention people receive, as opposed to anonymous services where forced migrants feel treated as numbers, was stressed by many of the refugees interviewed.

In Italy, food and cooking were also associated with hospitality because inviting friends or guests for dinner has an important symbolic and even sacred value in many cultures of origin for refugees living in Italy. This finds a deep connection to Italian culture, where food and hospitality are linked. It is interesting that refugees to cook for the community in many CBIs, and they occasionally or regularly invite friends to dinner, even while their economic condition is precarious. One CBI in Alessandria, *Indovina chi viene a cena*, organizes dinners open to groups of locals once a month in the apartment where asylum seekers and refugees are accommodated. The forced migrants, who are guest of the community, have thus the opportunity of showing hospitality in turn by cooking and receiving locals at home. Forced migrants consider these events important and valuable.

Sustainability

The criteria of sustainability was understood very differently by the various people interviewed. While staff members spoke mostly about funding strategies, volunteers spoke of ways their needs were managed by the organisation (such as training, support and burnout prevention) and most refugees were not able to answer the questions.

Such variations in responses were also due to the size CBIs and the level of engagement the interviewees had with the overall organisational structure of the CBI. While sweeping conclusions are hard to draw, it can be supposed that supporting volunteers with adequate resources is important for the sustainability of projects and for the quality with which they are carried out. Such support also allows people to build relationships more easily and freely. The enthusiasm of volunteers, especially when they first start, brings

a lot of energy and potential to CBIs, but the interviews show it has to regularly be fuelled to be sustained.

Innovation

Quite surprisingly, many interviewees pointed to simplicity as the most innovative element in their CBIs. Interviewees expressed this saying, "It is a simple project to match the need of the locals and the need of refugees," and, "It is a simple idea, but it works". We can surmise that the general perception of staff and volunteers is that the "traditional way" to answer the challenges of forced migration are big scale, expensive and complex projects, which in many cases are ineffective.

Another innovative aspect is the attempt to overcome the distinction between service provider and beneficiary. "In the services to migrants often the distinction between who gives and who is supposed to receive is sharp. Here we do everything together, as a single community," remarked a staff member of *Facciamo Casa Insieme*, a project in Marino. Or, as the staff member from *Casa dei Venti* puts it, "We work for migrants and with migrants. Innovation is in the word with."

All forced migrants pointed out that their experience in CBIs is special and very different from the service they have experienced before. They expressed that elements such as participation, dignity, hospitality, and even friendship all contributed to this.

3.3 ANALYSIS OF QUALITATIVE DATA FINDINGS

The creation of CBIs is linked to the presence of refugees in local communities. Over the last 3 years in Italy, the number of territories involved in reception of forced migrants has grown because immediately after people arrive in the harbours in the South, asylum seekers are distributed amongst all Italian regions. The challenge of reception and integration is a burning issue, which contributes to divide public opinion. The research of *I Get You* has shown that reception works best when it is organized in small centres, and it is not isolated but well connected to urban areas. This allows civil society to interact with migrants directly, proving that the creation of personal relationships is the best way to prevent hostility between groups while at the same

time facilitates more effective integration. The structures and methods of the SPRAR system contribute to creating the conditions for positive encounters to happen because synergy exists between many CBIs and reception projects of the SPRAR system.

A key element of many CBIs is a space for meeting that is different from the reception structures and also open to the general public. The most successful experiences show that having a meeting place where all the participants feel “at home” is important for participation and involvement. As a refugee frequenting Casa dei Venti says, “We feel responsible for this place, under all respects: beauty, tidiness, atmosphere.”

Many CBIs do not exclusively target forced migrants. They rather aim to strengthen social links, to make communities more inclusive in general. Many other social groups face isolation, discrimination and challenges of different kinds. Some CBIs target other vulnerable groups (such as people who are homeless, people with disabilities, and the elderly), but others are working more on creating a welcoming context for all people who wish to feel useful and create social links in their neighbourhoods. The element of “saying hello when we meet on the street” is a recurring theme in many interviews as an added value of many CBIs’ activities. This daily mutual recognition is of course vital for a newcomer, but it is pleasing also for other members of the community, such as elderly people living alone, students studying far from home, and professionals who spend most of their time at work.

Especially when CBIs are offering activities with an element of service, such as vocational training, psycho-social support, and language classes, it is important that they devote enough time and resources to train volunteers and to provide the necessary supervision. It is equally important to build sustainable collaborative relationships with service providers, NGOs and other stakeholders, as well as work with existing services instead of duplicating them.⁹

A last element which appears particularly relevant for the prevention of xenophobia and of Islamophobia is the element of interfaith dialogue which is present in many CBIs. In most cases this element is somehow implicit and a collateral effect of mutual knowledge and friendship with forced migrants who are, in many cases, Muslim. “There was a deep interest for Ramadan and a lot of admiration for their capacity of fasting and working in the heat for so many hours!” tells the coordinator of the students on the archaeological excavation in Motya. A similar experience was reported by volunteers in a Caritas project in Rome: “Once one old woman was worried because the girl we had with us sometimes was ‘lying down on the floor’. We explained that she was praying and she was reassured and started to look at her with a new respect.”

One of the mapped CBIs, in Formia south of Rome, organized moments of common prayer to “The Only God” involving locals and migrants as a reaction to the acts of terrorism and in solidarity for loss of refugee’s family members. “We gather in one room, with a table, an African blanket, a candle, universal symbol for light and hope. We share mourning songs, music and prayers, each in his own language, gestures and dances of all our traditions. Many people living in the neighbourhood, students, believers and non-believers have shared these moments of intense mutual solidarity.” One result of this experience was the unusual decision of the members of local parish to appoint Sellou, a Muslim refugee from Senegal, as member of the Parish council, with the specific task of facilitating the dialogue through initiatives involving the community to promote mutual understanding.

⁹ Useful guidelines can be found in JRS’ publication *Working with urban refugees. A handbook* (<https://www.jrs.net/assets/Publications/File/UrbanRefugeesBooklet1.pdf>).

Inspiring Community Building Initiatives

The five CBIs which will be presented here in more detail received a high overall ranking during the evaluation of the qualitative interviews against the Delphi criteria.

CASA DEI VENTI | ROME

Laboratorio 53 and Servizio Civile Internazionale, in collaboration with ASGI

Casa dei Venti is a project that attempts to create a space where forced migrants, especially the most vulnerable ones, can feel at home. The day centre is open 5 days per week and many activities are organized by volunteers (locals and resident international volunteers): help desk for newcomers, self-help group, legal support, individual counselling, and Italian language classes. At least once every month, the wider public is invited to take part in the activities.

A peculiar aspect of Casa dei Venti is the constant reflection about the methods to follow which involve the staff members, volunteers and the migrants. As Monica Serrano, one of the founders of the NGO Laboratorio 53, puts it: "Here we ask questions, we look together for the answers." The main goal of the project is empowering refugees, making them feel competent. Volunteers are also trained and offered constant support. Migrants, volunteers and staff are treated equally. This allows refugees to demonstrate a high sense of belonging and involvement and they also feel that the support received is a long-term one: "Friendship stays, respect stays, the language we learn remains and also feeling good is something that continues out of here".

Casa dei Venti provides constant training and supervision of its volunteers and has a shared reflection time for the volunteers regarding the methodology of the activities. In addition, refugees are involved in the planning and evaluation of the activities.

TANDEM | PARMA

CIAC (Centre for Immigration, Asylum and International Cooperation)

"The name Tandem means that integration and welcome has to come from both sides," explains one of the volunteers involved in this project of co-housing. The main idea of the project is to bring together young Italian university students and refugees in the SPRAR where they share an apartment without paying rent but by doing social activities and volunteering in the apartment block and in the district where it is located. Two flats were made available for free to the project by some local donors. All flatmates, locals and refugees, share the bills and pay a little every month to contribute to the costs of the awareness raising activities and trips they do together. The purpose is not merely that of giving place where to live, but also to give them the possibility to build social bonds with Italian young people, to become a part of the city's social fabric, and to be accepted by people living in the same district. "The added value is the possibility of sharing time: time for work, for prayer, for hobbies", explains one of the organizers, "The will of being involved in this challenge offers both to refugees and locals the opportunity to grow."

Tandem does not exclusively target forced migrants, instead it tackles similar needs and challenges faced by different vulnerable groups. This has mitigated potential conflicts with the host community and has improved the quality of life for the community as a whole.

ARTE MIGRANTE | PALERMO

Arte Migrante Palermo is part of a national network which aims to promote social inclusion through art. The activities of the network are implemented in 14 Italian towns (Como, Torino, Settimo torinese, Cuneo, Bologna, Modena, Reggio Emilia, Imola, Latina, Palermo, Padova, Rimini, Napoli) and in Germany and in Spain. The

concept is very simple, a social night is organized once every two weeks, open to anyone (migrants and locals, of any age and background), structured in 4 phases: introduction of the participants, free sharing of art performances (dance, singing, poetry, and reading), social dinner and “goodnight” phase, where all participants stand in a circle holding hands and each one tells “goodnight” in his/her own language.

In Palermo the initiative is very successful, with about 100 participants gathering for each meeting in Santa Chiara, a parish in the historical neighbourhood of Ballarò. “We do not organize awareness raising activities, but regular and open participation is the best message against stereotypes and xenophobia. Everybody can come here and make this experience,” explain the organizers.

Numu, the Gambian refugee we interviewed, remarks how taking part regularly in this activity made his life in Palermo much easier and enjoyable: “This initiative changed completely my attitude and my way of approaching people. Now I am self-confident, I even conduct a radio programme

on a web radio and I am thinking more concretely to my future here”. One of the participants, Laura, a German woman living in town, thinks that a point of strength of the CBI is the fact that it is not expensive (food is brought every time by the persons who come) and that the “coordination group” is flexible: everybody is welcome to join, even temporary. “In this way nobody feels the pressure of having all responsibility on him/her. The structure is simple and light, if I go on holidays or I don’t feel like doing it anymore, I am sure that someone else is coming in my place”.

This CBI more strongly refused to use labels such as “staff”, “volunteer” and “beneficiary”, because one core value of Arte Migrante is equality between all participants: “Our idea is to live here and now our utopia of a world without migrants and volunteers, without borders and permits to stay. This dream of equality brings us together.” Arte Migrante also provides a physical space and a structured time for its meetings. The success of this CBI has depended on the gathering of people in a central, lively location and the recurrence of the meetings once every other week.

LAURA



PARTICIPANT IN ARTE MIGRANTE, PALERMO

“I find it hard to tell in a few words the feelings that the nights in Arte Migrante raise in me. A mixture of hope, surprise and gratefulness for the opportunity of being part of this amazing reality. I close my eyes and I can remember the rhymes by Amadou and Ali, Numu’s jokes and the rhythm of the drums played by Imam, Mourtala and Jamal that makes you dance.

I think of the shy look of some of the participants, of their initial reluctance to be involved, of the smiles of complicity between friends who are meeting for the first time and who share the desire of being part of our project. We all hope in a little more justice in the world, we leave our fears and worries outside the door, at least for one single night, to give relief to our mind and to our heart, enjoying an atmosphere of welcome and solidarity.”

CASA SCALABRINI 634 | ROME

Agenzia Scalabriniana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo Onlus and Comunità Accogliente e Inclusiva

The centre was formerly a Scalabrinian seminary and was created after Pope Francis' plea to open empty religious structures to migrants. The congregation decided to create a link with the project Communities of Hospitality run by JRS Italy, to welcome refugees, both families and young adults, for up to one year. One of the refugees welcomed in the centre highlights the following: "We are like a family, each of us receives attention and consideration."

"We try to be a place of sharing with the community, open to everybody. We organize dinners, labs and initiatives with the locals, in collaboration with school, parishes, scout groups and volunteers from all parts of Rome. We work hard to be perceived as a positive presence for the neighbourhood. We promote conferences, activities in school, parties and community initiatives," explains Marianna Occhiuto, head of Fundraising and Communication. Casa Scalabrini 634 is partner in service learning programs of several American Universities in Rome, such as Loyola Chicago and John Cabot University. Among other activities, Casa Scalabrini 634 promotes "Dialoghi" (dialogues), a project to raise awareness on migration issues in schools, churches, companies and other associations in Italy. What is interesting about this project is that it entices refugees and locals to change the narrative of migration together, through regular communication activities.

Casa Scalabrini 634 is one of the few CBIs interviewed which invests on communication in a systematic way, especially through social media. But one of the basic principles of their activities is precisely to make their presence visible to the neighbourhood, to explain constantly what happens in the place and to be always open to anyone who wants to join. Also other CBIs do not let occasional hostility and polemics on the issue of migration discourage volunteers from communicating their message to a wider public: "We often organize awareness raising activities", explains a volunteer in Naples, "Closing the doors to avoid polemics is the wrong move: it would only increase ignorance on these issues."

ARCHEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS | MOTYA, MARSALA

Consorzio Solidalia, collaboration with University of Palermo and municipality of Marsala

Consorzio Solidalia invited five refugees to a camp with Italian archaeology students on the island of Motya. The refugees were taught archaeological techniques and were fully involved as members of the archaeological mission.

Madia, a young refugee from Senegal did not even know the meaning of the word 'archaeology' before starting the training. He underlined an element of empowerment and socialization with Italians of his same age:

"My training involved many different aspects. I asked questions and they were always answering. Most of all they made me believe that I could do it! It was special to be in contact with many Italian boys and girls and to show what I am able to do. The teachers told me that I learned much more than some of the students managed to do in years of experience... I was really proud to hear that. And for the first time I went to eat pizza in a restaurant with Italian friends. We are still in contact."

Caterina Ferro, from the University of Palermo, was the supervisor of the students. Sabrina Accardo, from Consorzio Solidalia, tells us that this particular cooperation was part of a more general strategy of their SPRAR project aiming to create new partnerships on the territory, in order to facilitate the integration of the refugees: "It turned out to be much more innovative than we expected. It is part of our attempt to think outside the box, to try new possibilities, also looking for collaboration of other stakeholders."

Policy Recommendations

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Drawing conclusions from the best practices identified, JRS Italy has elaborated a set of recommendations for the Italian government and local authorities.

Recommendations for Italian Government:

Create a conducive environment for encounter and community building by:

- Actively promoting reception in small-scale facilities, distributed throughout the whole territory, including urban areas, and accessible to asylum seekers immediately after their arrival. This allows direct interaction of forced migrants with the local population.
- Making the SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) the only national reception system, both for asylum seekers and refugees. Its structures and methods have been shown to contribute to fruitful cooperation with local community building initiatives.

Recognise forced migrant's integration efforts and potential for positive contribution in society by:

- Amending the relevant legislation to allow rejected asylum seekers to receive a permit to stay if they have completed a successful integration process.

Support the creation of inclusive communities that combat racism and xenophobia by:

- Prioritising and allocating sustainable funding to community building policies and initiatives, and especially to initiatives meant for broad target groups (such as forced migrants, homeless people, people with disabilities, and the elderly) or educational projects in schools.
- Promoting initiatives to foster a dialogue between religions and cultures contributing to the construction of a peaceful and non-violent

society. Examples of effective activities are moments of common prayer involving locals and migrants (as it happened in Formia) and initiatives of encounter surrounding different religious festivities.

Recommendations for Local Authorities (regions and municipalities):

- Engage in SPRAR projects, which provide a higher standard of reception and integration opportunities for refugees, and economic opportunities for the territory. Small-scale reception facilities run with the active participation of local authorities facilitate a good interaction between locals and newcomers and the prevention of conflicts.
- Promote and invest in initiatives that are meant for broad target group, including both forced migrants and other vulnerable social groups. Initiatives aimed at finding solution for similar needs of different vulnerable groups (such as Tandem, Parma) prevent conflicts and improve the quality of life for the whole community.
- Support CBIs making available suitable places for the activities, which are difficult to identify and expensive to maintain especially in big towns.
- Counter racist and xenophobic discourse by giving public visibility to successful initiatives on the territory.
- Implement sustainable policies to combat and prevent racism and xenophobia, in particular by providing permanent funding for educational projects and training for teachers and staff members in schools.

VALENTINA**VOLUNTEER, CASA DEI VENTI, ROME**

“Reception centres are remote places, which not surprisingly are called ‘camps’ by the ones who live there. The rules which are supposed to regulate the reception system are a nebulous vagueness reminding you of waiting rooms, bureaucracy and scandals. We could consume all our time talking about do’s and don’ts, but what happens if we create a place where none of these rules applies? This happens in Casa dei Venti.

At the beginning I found it confusing. I was not used to this. Any label is overcome by the most urgent need: communication. We use hands, we try to translate, someone misunderstands and we laugh. Language brings us near and apart, unveils cultures and personalities and, relentlessly, helps us to get to know each other.

In spite of our activities, games, common reflections and shared meals, we are touched by news of evacuations, denials of refugee status, lost jobs, bad news from too distant homelands, homesickness and hurting memories. Every day we speak about abuses, belated answers and we share a sense of total abandonment from a bureaucracy impossible to decipher. Casa dei Venti is a place out of place, it confuses and catches the visitor unprepared. It is a home, a fireplace, a resting place, and the opportunity of a new start. It is that for all of us, it was that for me too.”



Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) is an international Catholic organisation with a mission to accompany, serve and advocate for the rights of refugees and others who are forcibly displaced.

Jrseurope.org

Igetyou-jrs.org