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## HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS IN THE TIME OF CORONAVIRUS

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Report

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## INTRODUCTION

On February 19, 2020, the first case of infection from the Covid-19 Virus, also known as Coronavirus, was diagnosed in an Italian patient who had recently arrived from China, at the Codogno Hospital (Lodi). From that moment on, Italy experienced a health emergency like none other seen since the Second World War. In just a few days, the epidemic had spread to other European countries, rapidly causing both a health and economic crisis on the continental scale, before spreading to the United States and throughout the Americas.

The spread of the virus on the global level was so rapid that the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a state of pandemic on March 11.<sup>1</sup>

A few days after the positive diagnosis of “Patient 1,” the Italian government focused efforts to contain the number of infections on a territorial level by trying to encircle the so-called “hotspots,” that is, the geographical areas in which infected patients had been identified immediately after February 21. By February 23, the parliament had approved a law establishing “urgent measures in the containment and management of the epidemiological emergency of Covid-19,” through which the President of the Council of Ministers was given the right to issue successive decrees to regulate in detail these urgent measures, “Decrees of the President of the Council of Ministers” (DPCM).<sup>2</sup>

This report aims to explore the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on Caritas Italy, on the Caritas dioceses and on the beneficiaries of the Humanitarian Corridors program that, until February 2020, were still being completely or partially assisted by Caritas.

In this regard, it is necessary to specify that, as of February 21, 2020, none of the beneficiaries had achieved total economic and professional autonomy sufficient enough to no longer require help from Caritas. Some beneficiaries have started the journey to personal and familial economic (and more rarely) housing autonomy, having obtained internships, labor exchanges and full-time employment in the preceding months. In those cases, the diocesan social workers and beneficiaries were designing and implementing the stage of definitive independence from assistance. The halt of economic activities and the restrictions on leaving the house have radically impacted such journeys, momentarily blocking them and, in some cases, causing the loss of work or the indefinite postponement of the openings of internships and work experiences. This report therefore focuses first on the impact of Coronavirus on the national economic system in general, and then looks at the economic and professional consequences for those beneficiaries that as of February 21, 2020, had a more or less stable working condition from which they drew economic resources to live.

The report also intends to highlight the social aspects of this emergency: the reaction of the welcoming community; the model of accompaniment that was applied to explain to the beneficiaries the sequence of events, the restrictions of personal freedoms and scholastic and professional activities; and the support to beneficiaries, both individuals and families, in a totally new and unexpected context. Ultimately, the report brings attention to the reactions of the beneficiaries towards the welcoming community, the diocesan teams and Italy more generally.

1 - The official announcement was reported in English on the World Health Organization website: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic>

2 - The decrees of the President of the Council of Ministers (DPCM), in the Italian legal system, is an administrative act issued from the head of the government, in the context of functions of coordination and and political-administrative address and is assigned by the Constitution. Being an administrative act, the decree calls for a law approved by Parlamento or a Decree-law that indicates the material that will be the object of the successive decree of the President of the Council.

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## 1. THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

From February 23 until April 29, the President of the Council enacted a series of decrees (DPCM), the first three of which had the objective to contain the epidemic and to address the health emergency. So-called “red zones” in the areas of Codogno (Lodi) and Vo’ Euganeo (Padova), prohibiting entrance and exit from the municipality and the conduct of many non-essential economic activities, were established. On March 8, after forcing the closure of all schools and universities, the red zone was broadened to include the entire region of Lombardy and parts of Piemonte, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna and Marche. This was soon followed by a nation-wide lockdown, restricting all but essential free movement until April 3, forcing the closure of all economic activity with the exception of those considered “indispensable” such as supermarkets, pharmacies, hospitals, banks, public transport etc. The lockdown was extended twice more, until May 4. This virtually complete closure of economic activities had an absolutely devastating impact on the social and economic life of the nation and, as a consequence, also on the work of Caritas Italy and those dioceses that manage the Humanitarian Corridors program.

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## 2. THE REPERCUSSIONS ON THE HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS PROGRAM AND ON THE WORKS OF CARITAS ITALY

The first of the three decrees had a decisive effect on the activities of Caritas Italy concerning the Humanitarian Corridors program. Beyond the implementation of the first red zones, the government decided to block entrance into Italy to people benefiting from the program that were due to arrive from Niger to Rome on February 25. Reentrance into Italy was permitted only to the Italian Caritas workers and one Syrian family due to the serious state of health of its members that required immediate medical care.

As explained by the manager of the Office of Migration Policies and International Protection at Caritas Italy, Oliviero Forti, in an interview published on the [HUMANLINES](#) website, this event was the start of the understanding of the seriousness of the situation and of the effects that it would bring for the Humanitarian Corridors program and for the activities of the immigration office. He recalled that: “we were ready with more than 60 people to transfer from that country into Italy and some hours before our departure we were informed by the Italian government that we had to halt our proceedings because of the Covid emergency, entrance to these people was no longer permitted. Only the Italian personnel could reenter. There we understood that something was changing and we had to reorganize everything, because to leave these people that already had luggage in hand and to explain to them that their dream ended there... This is the situation of suspension that worries us more in this phase. Because, beyond our work, it is the knowledge that some people are waiting for answers, waiting to know when their incredible stories will finally end... And so we are now in a period of waiting, the government does not give us, rightly and understandably, any dates and so we are waiting to understand when they can restart and when we can move the people...”

The office has therefore proceeded to modify the model of work for as many as possible, to maintain a relationship between beneficiaries, social workers, the welcoming communities and Caritas Italy staff itself. Two elements in particular have emerged: the link between the beneficiaries remaining in Niger and the communities that would have welcomed them in Italy; and the continuing willingness and determination of these communities to receive them, despite the extraordinary difficulties of the current time and the economic crisis that looms in the imminent horizon: “It is not the end of our activity, however, because the fact that we cannot physically move them to Italy for us does not mean we abandon them. In fact, it means we will be with them with the technology that allows us to be near, to periodically hear from them and to try to share with them everything that is happening here in Italy... Even though these are people that may be fleeing from death, from torture, and so they have a unique objective, a unique thought, that of leaving the place they are in, but they say to you, ‘we understand what is happening, we are here for you’... the mentors are constantly Skyping with them. We are imagining also in this period, in which we have the time, to organize some Italian courses through distance learning, so that when they arrive they will already have some element of our language that will facilitate their journeys of integration. And, at the same time, in Italy we have national mentors, Giovanna and her colleagues, who are continuing to follow the dioceses that should be hosting. Because we also have this side of care, of a person that, despite the challenges, asks us when they will arrive?”

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Among the communities that are maintaining such willingness to host, it is important to underline the presence of some dioceses that are among the more exposed to the pandemic, namely Brescia and Milan.

These relationships cultivated and shared despite the geographical distance proves the principal characteristic of Humanitarian Corridors as a program of integration over a long period of time, rather than immediate acceptance. The geographical distance and the imposed limits of current legislation have impeded the physical arrival and welcoming but not the building of personal relationships among the hosting community and accommodated beneficiaries which makes it possible to begin to build, in a totally unexpected way, a shared path of knowledge and of mutual integration.

This dimension of the program was well captured by Alessandra Morelli, UNHCR representative in Niger, who recounted in an interview on [HUMANLINES](#): “we are living this waiting in a very creative manner, thanks also to the distance teachings of Caritas, these people are learning Italian... in a certain sense this time of waiting is not a time seen with anxiety or uncertainty. We have transformed this time of uncertainty into certainty through the study of the Italian language and with the very beautiful contact that they are continuing to have with Caritas. So in a certain sense Humanitarian Corridors is never closed... The takeoff and landings are closed but Humanitarian Corridors is not only about the takeoff and landing but I think it is about this contact of care that continues to develop the good of others... I love understanding that about Humanitarian Corridors, it is not only a logistical operation but an organization of 360-degree care that continues even if there is no flight.”

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## 3. THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS ON THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM

According to the estimates of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the global pandemic triggered by the coronavirus will cause a 3% reduction of the global GDP in 2020 while the member nations of the European Union will suffer an even greater reduction compared to other areas of the world. IMF predicts that the GDP of the Eurozone will drop by 7.5% and that of Italy specifically, by 9%.<sup>3</sup> The Italian Confindustria Research Center estimated since March 22, every week of the ban on production would cost a GDP percentage drop of at least 0.75%.<sup>4</sup> Among the sectors that risk damage, such where businesses and workers are almost completely at risk, include: tourism, personal care, construction and agriculture, sectors that primarily use foreign labor, both with regular and irregular labor contracts. Data from ISTAT (updated in 2018) and various other professional associations, in fact, say that before the pandemic, 26% of the workforce in the agricultural sector were foreign, 68.9% in that of domestic work and personal care, 17.2% of the construction sector and 10% of the hospitality and foodservice sector.<sup>5</sup>

With such dramatic economic forecasts, the decree from the President of the Council (DPCM) published on March 29 provided instruments of support for businesses and employees most seriously economically affected, those low income employees that were not qualified to receive forms of public economic support previously.<sup>6</sup> The beneficiaries of the Humanitarian Corridors program are among these people.

In particular, Article 1 of DPCM sees the increase of the already established base of communal solidarity whereby every municipality could provide food stamps or direct distribution of food packages for those most in need.<sup>7</sup> As foreign residents and holders of residence permits for international protection in Italy, these two forms of economic and social support have also been allocated to beneficiaries of the Humanitarian Corridors program.

3 - The estimates of IMF were analyzed in detail in the publication of the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), available online (English not available) <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/coronavirus-una-crisi-economica-globale-25789>, accessed April 15, 2020.

4 - The data from the Italian Confindustria Research Center was analyzed for the economic journal "Il sole 24 ore" during a videoconference available online at <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/confindustria-enorme-perdita-pil-semester-10percento-ADJ7hAH>, accessed April 16, 2020.

5 - <https://www.piuculture.it/2020/04/i-lavoratori-stranieri-sono-fra-chi-soffre-di-piu-della-precarie-ta-e-del-disagio-sociale-causati-dal-coronavirus/>, accessed April 29, 2020.

6 - [https://www.adiconsum.it/buoni-spesa-per-emergenza-coronavirus-come-funziona-no-e-chi-ne-puo-beneficiare/?cli\\_action=1587056354.348](https://www.adiconsum.it/buoni-spesa-per-emergenza-coronavirus-come-funziona-no-e-chi-ne-puo-beneficiare/?cli_action=1587056354.348)

7 The text of the decree is available online <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/29/20A01920/sg>

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In the first case, recipients were identified as those which have assets no greater than twelve thousand Euro and can prove to have lost their job, either from layoffs or sudden and drastic reduction of revenue, in addition to intermittent workers and people who are already taken care of by social services or other local welfare services. Many municipalities, including that of Rome, have requested registry of residence as a condition to benefit from this kind of economic assistance. However, it is important to underline that this decision of the municipality of Rome was challenged by an illegal immigrant, who did not have a registry of residence but lived in the municipality. On April 2, 2020, the district court upheld the immigrant's appeal noting that the criteria of residency was discriminatory with respect to the granting of food stamps as the right to meet basic food needs falls within the minimum core of rights, a right "that cannot be violated... regardless of residence in Italian territory."<sup>8</sup>

Even the courts of Brescia and Ferrara have received appeals against similar criteria from immigrants without residency or expired residence permits.<sup>9</sup>

The second form of aid, food distribution directly from the municipality, have been designated to those that find themselves in the country but are not officially residents and for those who before the health crisis held irregular and occasional jobs. In this case the need for collaboration with local welfare agencies is more evident, since such individuals and families can also be completely unknown to the municipality's social services .

In fact, on March 30, the Ordinance of Civil Protection announced available resources for municipalities and the opportunity to engage with organizations from the voluntary sector in the distribution of food in the framework of the operational program of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD).

8 - [https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/04/22/news/coronavirus\\_il\\_giudice\\_contro\\_il\\_campidoglio\\_il\\_regime\\_dei\\_buoni\\_spesa\\_discrimina\\_gli\\_immigrati\\_-254673450/](https://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/04/22/news/coronavirus_il_giudice_contro_il_campidoglio_il_regime_dei_buoni_spesa_discrimina_gli_immigrati_-254673450/)

9 - <https://www.asgi.it/notizie/tribunale-di-brescia-discriminatorio-limitare-i-buoni-spesa-ai-soli-stranieri-lungo-soggiornanti/>



## 4. THE ROLE OF THE DIOCESAN CARITAS: OUTREACH AND DIRECT AID

The diocesan Caritas, therefore, were found at the front line in the collaboration with the municipalities in terms of identifying recipients for these types of aid. Some municipalities, such as Trivento and Castelguidone, have signed agreements with the diocesan Caritas', that not only involves Caritas' social workers in the delivery of food packages<sup>10</sup> but sees the direct transfer of monetary resources to the diocesan Caritas' from the solidarity food fund given by the government and the Civil protection in specific communities.

Such activities are added to the others that are normally performed: those relating to the running of counselling centers, Italian courses, canteen services, services for the homeless, the sorting of food items and clothing delivered by businesses and private individuals to the Caritas centers, the preparation of food package distributions to families and individuals that were already being helped before the crisis.<sup>11</sup>

The research produced by Caritas Italy in collaboration with 101 Diocesan Caritas, published on April 24, estimates that the food requirement of families applying for aid has increased from 20% to 50% compared to the pre- Covid period<sup>12</sup> while on average Diocesan Caritas has seen an increase of 114% of new people requesting economic aid, food assistance, and psychological and personal support.<sup>13</sup> In the survey update, published on May 2, Caritas Italy confirmed the doubling of the number of people who turned to diocesan counselling centers for the first time to report situations of economic difficulty and lack of basic necessities. The donation of 10 million Euros to Caritas Italy from the 8x1000 fund of the Italian Bishops Conference, to be distributed according to necessity found in the diocesan areas, was also announced.<sup>14</sup> Added to these funds are the actions taken on by some Caritas', which have also launched further food and personal hygiene collections for designated families through the so-called "suspended expenses."<sup>15</sup>

Social workers therefore were found to be enduring a significant increase of workload in such areas and a reorganization in the forms of service deliveries to clients, among which are also the beneficiaries of the Humanitarian Corridors.<sup>16</sup>

10 - <https://www.ilgiornaledelmolise.it/2020/04/02/emergenza-covid-19-misure-di-sostegno-alle-famiglie-disagiate-il-comune-di-trivento-destina-10mila-euro-alla-caritas-trignina/>

11 - Caritas Italy, *Accoglienze ai tempi del COVID 19. L'esperienza delle Caritas diocesane*, published April 2, 2020, available at <https://inmigration.caritas.it/node/717>

12 - Data reported by Caritas Italy on <https://www.interris.it/la-voce-degli-ultimi/caritas-il-mondo-degli-invisibili-e-dei-nuovi-poveri-durante-il-coronavirus/>

13 - Caritas Italy, Caritas Investigation: "new" poverty increase caused by the pandemic, [https://www.caritas.it/pls/caritasitaliana/V3\\_S2EW\\_CONSULTAZIONE.mostra\\_pagina?id\\_pagina=8787](https://www.caritas.it/pls/caritasitaliana/V3_S2EW_CONSULTAZIONE.mostra_pagina?id_pagina=8787)

14 - Caritas Italy, Monitoraggio Caritas on the COVID-19 emergency: new poverty and new responses, [https://Www.Caritas.it/Pls/Caritasitaliana/V3\\_s2ew\\_consultazione.Mostra\\_pagina?Id\\_pagina=8799&Rifi=Guest&Rifp=Guest](https://Www.Caritas.it/Pls/Caritasitaliana/V3_s2ew_consultazione.Mostra_pagina?Id_pagina=8799&Rifi=Guest&Rifp=Guest)

15 - <https://www.ilgiornaledelmolise.it/2020/03/31/emergenza-coronavirus-la-caritas-diocesana-di-trivento-lancia-liniziativa-spesa-donata/>

16 - To this end, please refer to the testimony of some workers of Caritas in Rome about the choice to stay open or lessen the ambulatory services for the population of a densely populated neighborhood of the capital, in the heart of the city, to increase the frequency of legal and illegal immigrants, available online at

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The Office of Immigration Policies at Caritas Italy has supported this extra effort of the diocesan teams creating online conferences on coronavirus and on its impact in specific sectors, like those of healthcare and justice, for the migrants present in Italy.<sup>17</sup>

As far as the repercussions on the world of work are concerned, the diocesan Caritas have been particularly active in those areas where the phenomenon of hiring and exploitation of foreign workers, often irregular, in agriculture is particularly widespread. In fact, the protection of the health of those people was immediately more at risk, both for the difficulty in reaching those people to provide them with information on the spread and danger of the virus, and due to the absence of regular residence permits, with which one can request medical assistance through the general practitioner. For this reason, the diocesan Caritas immediately committed themselves to ask the government to regularize these agricultural workers, to be able to guarantee them adequate medical care and to be able, through this emergency, to emerge from undeclared work for their greater protection and healthcare in general.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, the exchange of information and good practices with Caritas operating in other European and non-European countries was promoted, with particular attention to the countries of origin of the majority of migrants, including those from which the beneficiaries of the humanitarian corridors come (Jordan and Niger).<sup>19</sup>

With respect to the latter, specifically, Caritas social workers have performed the following tasks:<sup>20</sup>

Provided explanation of the restrictions to personal freedom and relevant sanctions.  
Set up computers at Caritas locations or in households to allow children to attend online lessons and complete their homework, and to allow adults to attend Italian courses.  
Increased economic support and food distribution in cases of loss of work.

In many cases the social workers are carrying out such tasks together with the mentor families and volunteers, testing the model of welcoming and integration that characterizes the Humanitarian Corridors program in a situation of such extraordinary emergency. As recounted on the HUMANLINES website by the manager of the Diocese of Asti: "We have worked on the children's fear and an element of further work with the volunteers: to encourage the volunteers to stay in contact with the kids... on top of our work to support the volunteers, there was a great work done by the volunteers on us... Some volunteers called us, wrote to us, they gave us the strength to continue."

[https://inmigration.caritas.it/sites/default/files/2020-04/Chiudere o tenere aperto draft 24\\_03\\_2020.pdf](https://inmigration.caritas.it/sites/default/files/2020-04/Chiudere o tenere aperto draft 24_03_2020.pdf)

17 - The content of the different work sessions are all available online on: <https://inmigration.caritas.it/sites/default/files/2020-04/formazione%20giuridica%20online%20Covid%2019.pdf>

[https://inmigration.caritas.it/sites/default/files/2020-04/Caritas\\_parte%20operativa%20%281%29.pdf](https://inmigration.caritas.it/sites/default/files/2020-04/Caritas_parte%20operativa%20%281%29.pdf)

18 - <https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider/it/2020/04/25/news/la-caritas-urgente-regolarizzare-i-migranti-per-i-lavori-agricoli-1.38753883>

19 - <https://inmigration.caritas.it/sites/default/files/2020-04/COVID19%20e%20Immigrazione.pdf>

20 - [https://www.caritas.it/pls/caritasitaliana/V3\\_S2EW\\_CONSULTAZIONE.mostra\\_pagina?id\\_pagina=8787](https://www.caritas.it/pls/caritasitaliana/V3_S2EW_CONSULTAZIONE.mostra_pagina?id_pagina=8787)

## 5. COMMUNITIES' ACCOMPANIMENT OF BENEFICIARIES

The sensitization and communication with respect to the restrictions on personal freedom and in the social sphere

As explained by Giuditta, social worker from the Kemay Cooperative that works inside the Diocesan Caritas of Brescia, the work of the social workers now occurs mostly over the phone: “We started making the first calls ourselves, to ensure that [the beneficiaries] were doing well, that they understood the rules, that they were implementing all measures of security, of the restrictions to freedoms... the neighborhood where our beneficiaries are housed was hit in a significant way, so we do not break the rules... we video call through WhatsApp, and we downloaded the homework from websites and took it to their front doors... in that way that you put it down, you stand back, the other arrives, they take it. The families are facing this thing with the community.”

The same relational dynamic was applied on the other side of Italy, by the diocesan team of Caritas Ragusa. As the director, Domenico Leggio referred to in his **interview**: “The two families that we are following at the moment are asking us what to do and what measures to take to avoid contagion. And they respected exactly the indications that the government, through us, gave. We provided them at once with a PC and printer to allow them to continue distance learning.”

The testimony of one of the volunteers of the Diocese of Vicenza, reports on the concerns of those who host the beneficiaries for them to understand the exceptionality of the events and the rules to respect: “They were informed and informed themselves on the situation but for them it was a very hard blow. They moved from a routine that was created slowly, with different Italian lessons, the children’s school, to now suddenly having none of this and have seen how fewer people that are going to visit them.”

Support and accompaniment to the beneficiaries that lost work

With respect to the new rules limiting freedom of movement, this need for closeness was felt in a very particular way in the welcoming communities in which the beneficiaries of Humanitarian Corridors carried out their work activities. In fact, in these cases, the journeys to economic and personal autonomy were initiated and then, suddenly, such activities and the income attached to them were becoming less and had greatly diminished. The social workers and mentor families took action with employers to structure any new ways to carry out the work, or, to check if and in what way the beneficiaries could request subsidies and forms of income support, where work activities had to be suspended. In the experience of the Diocese of Jesi, the director of Humanitarian Corridors supported the beneficiaries in the evaluation of the inherent risks of working in facilities for the elderly, unfortunately often the hotspots of infection, explaining to them the risks and safety standards taken by the management of the facility.

In the experience of the Diocese of Macerata, the social worker of the cooperative through which Caritas manages Humanitarian Corridors had to deal with a beneficiary in a difficult moment of job loss from a business in which they had been working within for months already, exactly in a moment in which they were considering to look for completely autonomous housing without any more financial assistance from Caritas.

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A social worker from the Diocese of Avezzano also had to come to terms with the cancellation of traineeships that two beneficiaries should have started, through which they should have begun their progressive disconnection from Caritas assistance. The decision of Caritas Dioceses was to continue to support the beneficiaries financially, such as those of the Diocese of Arezzo, in which the volunteers that hosted the family of beneficiaries listed the family to be among the recipients of food package distributions from the parish (of which many of the volunteers were a part) at the beginning of the health emergency, that also coincided with the closure of the business in which one of the beneficiaries was preparing to begin their internship.

Social workers and volunteers/mentors all express their great concern that the loss of work for the beneficiaries could signify a regression in their journey of autonomy and, therefore, a return to a form of total assistance, both economic and material, on the part of Caritas: nullifying the arduous work done in the twelve months of the project.

In fact, it is necessary to highlight that the jobs of the beneficiaries are the results of paths of specific study. This is the case of some beneficiaries that attended courses to obtain a certificate in social care and find themselves having to interrupt their required internships to complete their studies and to obtain professional certification. This was the case for other professional courses, in the areas of tourism and commerce, studies were economically supported by Caritas Dioceses. As explained by the director of Caritas Ragusa: “one [of the beneficiaries] began a job in a restaurant that is now closed because of the emergency. Another was completing an internship after our hospitality course that was unfortunately cancelled. They return to us to ask for closeness... we continue to accompany them... it is traumatic, after an investment from Caritas to pay for the hospitality formation courses, he begins his internship, he is extremely motivated, he is welcomed very well into the restaurant, he told me, ‘I feel at home,’ and immediately on April 10 he could be offered a job, but instead there is the ban on the activity.”

For this reason, the anxiety of losing work and not being able to find another can add to the worries that are already present with respect to becoming independent from Caritas’s assistance and to the need to handle everything economically and psychologically with their own personal effort: something which is still fragile due to the trauma seen in the long years lived under the Eritrean regime, in flight, and finally in the refugee camps in Ethiopia.

The network of contacts in the host communities therefore reveal to be even more fundamental during this emergency. In Caritas of Trivento, as in other Caritas, social workers and mentor families, adhering to social distancing guidelines, looked to maintain daily contact with beneficiaries. As recounted by a beneficiary in this diocese, beyond video calls, the only possible contact with the mentor family now comes when “she calls me and tells me ‘look out from the balcony!’”.

The experience of the Diocese of Macerata is also particularly significant in this situation, as explained well by the manager for Humanitarian Corridors in the diocese, “the group of kids with whom the beneficiary shares an apartment has been successful in his social integration. They are university students, a little younger than he is and, even if he works, they go out of their way to include him in their group, in their friendships, so much so that one of them even took him to his home for Christmas lunch. He began to create a network of friendships outside of the welcoming center for migrants. That’s why we hope that the intention of his boss to confirm his contract as soon as business activities will start again will really happen.”

## 6. THE BENEFICIARIES' REACTION IN SUPPORT OF THE HOST COMMUNITY AND TO ITALY

The experiences of many dioceses demonstrate that the social workers and welcoming communities' worries for the beneficiaries are often reciprocated in equal measure by the beneficiaries for the people who have provided them help and support for months. This is particularly apparent in the Diocese of Brescia, one city at the center of the epidemic in the country. The social worker there explained that the beneficiaries, who have been in Italy for nearly two years, not only understood and accepted the new rules and limitations on personal freedom, but were also concerned for the social worker's family: "I wake up every morning with 4-5 messages from boys and girls that we have in the program, that ask me how I am, they are concerned about my parents."

In other dioceses too, the beneficiaries have shown a great concern for their social workers and mentor families: in Jesi, for example, the social worker affirmed that the beneficiaries "inform themselves about the disease because the husband had worked as a nurse in Ethiopia and had the competency to understand the disease. In fact, he decided at once to only talk to the volunteers over the phone, they hear from each other every day."

The attention and the concern for the hosting community that many beneficiaries have is the same for all Italy and Italians.

Some beneficiaries, as in the case of the Dioceses of Avezzano and Milan, are learning to explain the risks of the epidemic to their peers and to help combat the spread of fake news in the Eritrean community in the country. Since the beginning of the emergency, the various social networks have been particularly useful in this regard, particularly Facebook, as many beneficiaries have been active in the dissemination of correct information about the epidemic.<sup>21</sup>

The social media activities are also an expression of solidarity and closeness with the Italian population: some beneficiaries have, for example, shared messages of encouragement for the health care workers and for all Italians.

On March 23, they published a "message to the entire Italian population, from the Eritrean refugees that find themselves in different parts of the world." This message, accompanied by many icons representing the Italian flag used as images for different personal profiles, is available on HUMANLINES and shares the sentiments of those who thank Italy for having been able to begin a new life in peace and safety: "now, to give our support to the Italians is a form of gratitude for all that they have done for us... Beyond welcoming us as refugees, we give you our admiration for that fact that you became our moral leader in this moment of tragedy... Courage, Italy, we are with you!"

<sup>21</sup> - [https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10156978014282621&id=629947620](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10156978014282621&id=629947620)

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## CONCLUSION

This emergency has forced all actors of the Humanitarian Corridors program to rethink the program itself and their own actions.

Two elements emerge with great clarity: the first, more specifically, touches closer to the realities in which the beneficiaries are moving towards personal and familial autonomy thanks to work; the other relates, more generally, to all the beneficiaries, employees and hosting communities.

The first element is synthesized in the words of the director of Caritas Ragusa, referring to one of the young men in the program that had begun to work: “I believe that we have in the next few months an important job to do... in some way this situation will make 10 steps backwards because it takes you back to zero. He had touched the point of autonomy, to not have to ask for help... instead he came back.”

The second element is the need for social ties, as indispensable instruments to address hardships and to share worries, as summarized well by one of the volunteers in the Diocese of Verona: “Once again I understood how it was important to be near, to be together, to remind each other.”

In more general terms, as explained in this report, the director of the Immigration Office at Caritas Italy detailed the technological model with which the office is organizing to guarantee this closeness and to be together both with the welcoming communities and the beneficiaries still waiting in Niger since February 25. But his reflection caught another important element: the upheaval of daily life and the restriction of personal and social freedoms that Italy is experiencing has touched the lives and the work of the social worker and the communities in a profound way which can be a significant occasion to go even deeper into the experience of the Humanitarian Corridors. In fact, the monumental lack of liberty experienced by the social workers, volunteers and mentor families is emerging as an unexpected and new way to share in the past life experiences of the beneficiaries, experiences that have caused their migratory journey, in conditions evidently worse than those seen currently in Italy. However, this experience can be a precious tool for the welcoming communities to understand better, by allowing themselves to see the life experiences, in part, of those who are being hosted. For this reason, Dr. Forti sees also in these beneficiaries a great capacity to handle this emergency: “They are more well-equipped, because we are living in conditions that, for them, have unfortunately been the norm for many years. That is, an expansion of time and a restriction on space, that for us were unknown dimensions. Because we have always lived with these two dimension reversed, that is an infinite space and an increasingly reduces time because we are always so busy and with so many activities to carry out that it seems it's never enough.

Today we must manage this new dimension and in them we rediscover the strength of those who over time have been forced, in some way, to experience this double dimension in a perspective that was totally unknown to us. So, even this is enriching. Because, probably tomorrow, when everything is over, we will emerge even more understanding of that which is their life experience, because we will have understood, and luckily without having to endure everything that they had to endure: the flight, the hardships... because we, yes, we have, as you say, the restricted spaces and the expanse of free time but we also have full shopping carts. That is not a problem. We have the doctors that give us the services we need.”