

# HLR 1

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## THE HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS EXPERIENCE

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Report



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## INTRODUCTION

On December 15, 2015, the Community of Sant’Egidio and the Italian Federation of Protestant Churches signed a joint memorandum with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior officially launching the Humanitarian Corridors initiative, a private program established and completely financed by these Christian organizations. The program provides asylum seekers with a safe and legal pathway of migration to Italy, enabling them to avoid being exploited by human traffickers and to prevent them from embarking on a dangerous journey across the Mediterranean. The program also seeks to integrate the newly welcomed refugees into Italian society after their arrival.

The legal framework of the 2015 memorandum initiated a two-year project that brought one thousand Syrian asylum seekers to Italy, many of whom had previously sought refuge and shelter in Lebanese camps.<sup>1</sup>

On January 12, 2017, a protocol was signed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior, the Community of Sant’Egidio, and the Italian Bishops’ Conference, the latter acting through Caritas Italy and Pro Migrantes<sup>2</sup>. This protocol sought to bring five hundred vulnerable refugees—mostly Eritreans, but also South Sudanese and Somali—from Ethiopia to Italy. Ethiopia is one of the so-called “transit countries,” hosting about one million African refugees in refugee camps and in its capital city of Addis Ababa.

The first airplane operating under this joint protocol landed at Rome’s Fiumicino airport on November 30, 2017, and since then a total of five hundred refugees from the Horn of Africa have safely reached Italy. Forty-five dioceses and parishes, eleven local Sant’Egidio communities, and other Catholic organizations have been hosting refugees across eighteen Italian regions, from the far north of the country near the Austrian and Swiss borders to the southern Sicilian.<sup>3</sup>

1 - These initial asylum seekers arrived in Italy in the biennium 2016–17. The program was then renewed for two more years on November 7, 2017 and brought one thousand more Syrians who were living in Lebanese refugee camps to Italy. All of the refugees were hosted by Sant’Egidio communities and Waldensian parishes in various Italian regions, and were granted access to Italian language classes, health care, legal support to obtain refugee status, and pocket money. Sant’Egidio reported that some refugees were able to find a job in Italy while others went abroad, especially those who intended to reunite with family members.

2 - According to the protocol, the costs of the project were covered by private sponsors—the Community of Sant’Egidio received private donations and the Italian Bishops’ Conference provided funding to Caritas Italy by means of the “eight per thousand” system established by an Italian law requiring Italian citizens to donate eight per thousand of their annual income to one church or religious communities to support their pastoral needs.

3 - Caritas Italiana, *Oltre il mare: Primo rapporto sui Corridoi Umanitari in Italia e altre vie legali e sicure d’ingresso*, 2019.

## 1. BACKGROUND AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

On October 3, 2013, a ship carrying five hundred migrants from Misrata, Libya, to Italy sank near the Italian island of Lampedusa. This event became one of the bloodiest shipwreck in the history of immigration to Italy: 368 deaths were officially reported. It was reported that many of the migrants were from Eritrea, Somalia, and Ghana and that some of those who perished still had their documents in their pockets. If they had reached Italy, they could have been granted political asylum, which is frequently granted to Eritrean and Somali refugees. This tragedy sparked a political and social debate about the lack of a safe and legal pathway for asylum seekers to enter Italy and the European Union. Some national and international NGOs and political activists began a political and legal campaign to raise awareness and to put pressure on the government to find a legal and safe solution for migrants seeking to enter Europe.<sup>4</sup>

The Italian government reacted by financing a military operation in the Mediterranean to find and rescue boats carrying people from the southern coasts of the Mediterranean; the operation was called “Mare Nostrum.” The operation lasted from October 2013 to October 2014, but then, on April 18, 2015, there was a second tragedy: another ship carrying mostly Eritrean migrants sank near the island of Lampedusa. This event was far worse than the previous record-breaking shipwreck in 2013: this time, only twenty-eight migrants were rescued and 675 drowned. While EU institutions were planning further military operations to find and rescue boats in the Mediterranean,<sup>5</sup> a few NGOs focused on finding legal ways to bring migrants to Europe without having them face the perils of the sea. Among those NGOs were two Christian groups—the Community of Sant’Egidio and the Waldensian churches.<sup>6</sup>

On September 6, 2015, Pope Francis, during his Sunday Angelus, asked every parish and local religious community to host a refugee family. Following his statement, the Community of Sant’Egidio and the Waldensian churches formally launched Humanitarian Corridors, a project aimed at providing refugees not only with a safe and legal way to enter Italy, and thus Europe, but also a local host community to provide them with twelve months of financial support. It was intended that these host communities would help integrate the refugees into local communities and Italian society and included programming aimed at helping refugees find employment, learn the Italian language, and attend school.<sup>7</sup>

4 - Among those NGOs was Amnesty Italia, whose campaign is described at <https://www.amnesty.it/sesta-giornata-della-memoria-e-dell'accoglienza-le-iniziative/>

5 - <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/it/press/press-releases/2015/04/23/special-euco-statement/>

6 - <https://www.santegidio.org/downloads/Dossier-Humanitarian-Corridors-DEF.pdf>

7 - Pedro Gois and Giulia Falchi, *The Third Way: Humanitarian Corridors In Peacetime as a (Local) Civil Society Response to EU's Common Failure*, in REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana, 2017, vol. 25, n. 51, pp. 59–75.

As the 2017 protocol carried out by Caritas Italy and Community of Sant'Egidio approached its expiration date, Humanitarian Corridors was renewed for another two years on May 3, 2019. Under this new agreement, the Italian government granted Caritas and Sant'Egidio six hundred new visas to be given to refugees living in Niger, Ethiopia, and Jordan. The legal basis for granting these visas is art. 25 of the European Union's Visa Regulation no. 810/2009 approved on July 13, 2009, the "community code on visas." Under that article, it is possible for any member state to issue visas for humanitarian reasons. The humanitarian visa is governed by criteria defining various personal vulnerabilities under the EU's definition of "humanitarian reasons."<sup>8</sup> Notwithstanding the current EU regulations relating to political asylum and visas for non-EU citizens, this kind of visa carries with it a territorial limitation confining the recipient to the boundaries of the state that granted the visa.

This territorially limited visa based on "humanitarian reasons" is a partial derogation of the current EU rules. Since 1990, EU member states have agreed to place the right of political asylum and the visa system in part under European competence. To enforce this, the EU passed the Dublin Regulation, which entered into force in 1997. The aim of the Dublin Regulation (Dublin I) was to ensure a shared European system for the examination and disposition of asylum requests. The two most recent versions of the Dublin Regulation were adopted by the majority of EU member states in 2003 (Dublin II) and 2013 (Dublin III). The Dublin III Regulation (No. 604/2013) came into force on July 19, 2013. Its core legal principle is that asylum seekers must claim asylum and international protection in the EU member state in which they first arrive. This "first state" rule was established to prevent situations in which no member state takes responsibility for individual asylum seekers and to prevent an asylum seeker from submitting multiple requests for asylum. The rule has, however, been the target of considerable criticism since 2015, as geopolitical events- including the Arab Spring, the related war in Syria, the Gaddafi regime's collapse, and the endemic political and economic crisis throughout sub-Saharan Africa- have contributed to a dramatic increase in both asylum requests and deadly shipwrecks.<sup>9</sup>

EU efforts have failed to find a solution that will successfully prevent tragic shipwrecks, and art. 25 of the Visa Regulation no. 810/2009 appears to be the only officially permissible way to ensure that asylum seekers have a safe and legal means of coming to Italy.

8 - The Schengen and EU regulation does not provide a clear definition of "humanitarian reasons," but the Italian government established a nonexhaustive list of applicable reasons to grant a visa for "humanitarian reasons" at the time the first memorandum for the Humanitarian Corridors program was signed: "Victims of persecution, torture, and violence, as well as families with children, elderly people, sick people, persons with disabilities, and individual cases as determined by personal situation, age, and health status which are not a priority in the Geneva Convention."

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/150782/eprs-study-humanitarian-visas.pdf>

9 - Pedro Gois and Giulia Falchi, *The Third Way: Humanitarian Corridors In Peacetime as a (Local) Civil Society Response to EU's Common Failure*, in REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana, 2017, vol. 25, n. 51, pp. 59-75.

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## 2. PREDEPARTURE

Shortly after the execution of the 2017 protocol, representatives from Caritas and Sant'Egidio visited a number of Ethiopian refugees camps in cooperation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR<sup>10</sup>), the Ethiopian government's Agency for Refugee & Returnee Affairs (ARRA), and Gandhi Charity, a local grassroots organization.<sup>11</sup> Both the UNHCR and Gandhi Charity support people living in refugee camps. Since its foundation in 2003, Gandhi Charity's main activities have been focused in Sudan and Ethiopia, where it helps Eritreans who have escaped their country and entered into refugee camps. The organization also works in the Sinai desert and in Libya to free Eritreans and other African migrants detained in illegal jails. Gandhi Charity focuses on minors without parents, teenagers, women, and victims of violence. In the Ethiopian refugee camp of Mai Aini, Gandhi Charity provides 850 children a daily meal, has built fifty houses for the elderly, and runs a mill.

10 - UNHCR is a global organization dedicated to saving lives and protecting the rights of and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people. It works through resettlement programs, family reunion programs, and private sponsorships.

11 - Gandhi Charity works in a number of West and North African countries to help migrants in various ways.

## 2.1 SELECTION: VULNERABILITY CRITERIA

The selection of program participants, also called “beneficiaries,” is a key task undertaken by the Humanitarian Corridors initiative. A team of specialists, including doctors, interpreters, and aid workers is required in order to select refugees who best fit with the aims of the program and with the host communities. Selection is based on various criteria, including each individual’s physical, psychological, and sociopolitical vulnerabilities.

According to the EU Visa Regulation of 2009 and to the UNHCR’s definition of “vulnerable person,” beneficiaries are to be chosen based on physical vulnerabilities such as health problems or disabilities, or on the presence of family or personal difficulties, such as single mothers with minors or minors without parents, or because the beneficiary is part of a political opposition in his or her country of origin.

Staff from Caritas and the Community of Sant’Egidio carefully cooperate with the UNHCR and Gandhi Charity to select beneficiaries corresponding to the established criteria. The UNHCR provides a list of possible candidates, and Caritas and the Community of Sant’Egidio plan at least three interviews with the potential beneficiaries on the list. The first interview provides an opportunity to understand something about the potential beneficiary and his or her physical, personal, and family situations. In the second interview, the refugee’s personal documents are verified and he or she is given information about the Humanitarian Corridors program. A list of finalists is created after this second interview. Then, Caritas and Sant’Egidio staff conduct a final interview with refugees to clarify any details about the rules of Humanitarian Corridors.

After the final interview, the list of beneficiaries is finalized. The Caritas and Sant’Egidio teams spend time with the selected refugees and give them information, not only about their rights and duties as part of the Humanitarian Corridors project, but also about Italy and its legal rules and social norms. They also provide geographical and social information about the place where they will soon live.

The Ethiopian Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs (ARRA) must approve the persons on the final list; after it has done so, the list is sent to the Italian authorities (the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior) for additional security checks. The Italian embassy in Addis Ababa then issues temporary visas allowing the selected refugees to legally travel to Italy. The flights are operated by Ethiopian Airlines. Once the plane lands at Fiumicino Airport in Rome, the refugees are required to apply for international protection, a process that must be initiated at the border and completed within a few days of their arrival at the local police station in their respective communities. Upon issuing a formal request, refugees receive a C3 form<sup>12</sup> allowing them to remain in the country and then must wait to be heard by the Territorial Commission for the Recognition of International Protection.<sup>13</sup>

12 - The C3 form is entitled the “Verbale delle dichiarazioni degli stranieri che chiedono in Italia il riconoscimento dello status di rifugiato” (Report on the Declarations of Asylum Seekers When Applying for Political Asylum): <https://www.refugee.info/italy/example-forms/c3-example>

13 - Italian immigration legislation provides that normally an asylum application can be made either at the police office at the border or at a local police station (questura); however, all beneficiaries of Humanitarian Corridors are required to make an asylum application at the border. The border police then invites applicants to present themselves at the questura for formal registration, fingerprinting, and the taking of photographs. Once it receives the formal application, the questura sends the formal registration form and the documents related to the asylum application to one of the Territorial Commissions for the Recognition of International Protection located throughout the country. The questura then notifies the asylum seeker of the date of an interview with the Commission. By law, each Commission must be comprised of four members and must interview the applicants within thirty days of receiving an application. According to Caritas, the thirty-day time limit is rarely respected in practice because of a backlog in applications. Should the Commission need additional information, the examination procedure may be extended for a period of not more than nine months. Extensions may also obtain for other reasons, meaning that the asylum procedure may take up to a maximum period of eighteen months. Asylum seekers can appeal a negative decision issued by the Commission within thirty days before a competent civil court.

## 2.2 HEALTH CHECKS AND CULTURAL TRAINING

The pre- departure process also involves health assessments required by the Italian Ministry of Health, as provided for in the protocols adopted by the International Organization for Migration. Pre- departure training is part of the selection procedure. Its goal is to make refugees as aware as possible of the Italian legal, social, linguistic, and economic contexts so that they are ready to navigate a new country and culture. To help accomplish this difficult task, Italian host communities send pictures and videos about their communities in order to provide beneficiaries a realistic introduction to their new lives.

## 2.3 CARITAS'S COMMUNITY MATCHING PROCESS

Any diocesan Caritas can express to Caritas Italy its availability to host one or more beneficiaries. Caritas Italy matches the list of beneficiaries with local diocesan host communities. The matching process takes into consideration both the refugees' vulnerabilities and the host communities' particular resources and abilities. The main difference between the hosting procedures of Caritas and Sant'Egidio is that Sant'Egidio does not do this, but rather considers only the availability of their communities.

The Caritas model's matching process seeks to place beneficiaries in communities that best suit their idiosyncratic needs in order to facilitate their integration. The process takes into consideration the following particular needs and disabilities of beneficiaries:

For beneficiaries with health problems, the host community should be located near specialized hospitals, especially with respect to pediatric needs.

If the vulnerabilities of children arise out of long-term disabilities, specialized schools might be needed; for instance, for deaf children, there should be a nearby school with an Italian Sign Language program.

For those with physical disabilities, housing should be accessible.<sup>14</sup>

Every host community must arrange for a proper apartment under relevant Italian rules.

Before the refugees' arrival, representatives from Caritas Italy visit participating Caritas communities to explain the program to volunteers and family tutors. They also hold prearrival training for host communities so that the communities are aware of any cultural, historical, or political problems in the refugees' home countries. Host communities are provided with critical context about the refugees' former lives and the experiences they may have had in refugee camps. During this visit, the quality of the refugees' lodging and other amenities, and the availability of social services, are verified. Caritas Italy's investigation allows for the constructive matching of beneficiaries to necessary and available social structures and services, as well as human resources, within the vicinity of a specific local Caritas. After the matching process is complete, beneficiaries are given information about their destinations in Italy, and the selected diocesan Caritas social workers are given full information about the refugees' personal and family problems and needs.<sup>15</sup>

14 - Caritas Italiana, *Oltre il mare: Primo rapporto sui Corridoi Umanitari in Italia e altre vie legali e sicure d'ingresso*, 2019.

15 - The European Resettlement Network (ERN+), *Expanding Complementary Pathways Of Admission To Europe*, April 2018, available from [www.resettlement.eu/page/ern-publications](http://www.resettlement.eu/page/ern-publications)



## 2.4 FAMILY MENTORS

In addition to involving social workers, the Caritas Italy program relies on various kinds of volunteers, including a person who acts as a “Family Mentor.” This person is given a leading role in the integration process once the refugees arrive in their host communities. The family mentor shares everyday life with beneficiaries and explains the social and cultural norms and practices that pertain to a refugee’s particular community and city. The family mentor does not receive remuneration from national or diocesan Caritas; his or her status as a volunteer supports the cultivation of a genuine relationship with the refugees, which is a key element in contributing developing their human resources and social capital.<sup>16</sup> Other volunteers are trained by the local Caritas staff to assist the family mentor. In addition to the family tutor, Caritas Italy strongly recommends that the local Caritas should enlist the help of an intercultural mediator, someone who can act as a liaison between the host community, diocesan Caritas staff, and the refugees. The intercultural mediator helps resolve cultural conflicts and misunderstandings.

<sup>16</sup> - Caritas Italiana, Oltre il mare: Primo rapporto sui Corridoi Umanitari in Italia e altre vie legali e sicure d’ingresso, 2019.

## 2.5 THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN CARITAS AND THE REFUGEES

Caritas Italy requires beneficiaries to sign an agreement before their departure for Italy. The agreement states that the costs of the project are fully covered by the Italian Bishops' Conference (through Caritas Italy) for only one year and that the diocesan Caritas units are responsible for the welcoming process and will be held accountable for their duties under the agreement. The financial contribution is four million Euros for the entire project, which translates to fifteen Euros per day per person. This financial support includes legally certified reception facilities, goods for daily living, and transportation (i.e., airline tickets).

One of the key objectives of the project is to support the integration of refugees into the country, and particularly into the local community, through social and legal orientation and accompaniment aimed at finding work and permanent housing. Diocesan Caritas is in charge of achieving these goals, which are aimed at fostering the beneficiaries' achievement of autonomy in their new homes, but the beneficiaries are, as outlined in the agreement, also committed to reaching the goals.

Under the agreement, diocesan Caritas provides the following services and material items for a one-year period:

- legal assistance and social orientation;
- initial furnished accommodations (apartments or houses provided by religious institutes, dioceses, parishes, families, or others);
- food, clothing, and hygiene products;
- literacy and Italian language classes for adults and school enrollment for children;
- adequate health care (including basic care and care that is more specific to individual needs, registration with the Italian health service, hospital admissions, psychological assistance, etc.), with particular attention given to the most serious vulnerabilities;
- intercultural and social mediation;
- orientation to the job market and help with the job search (drafting of a resume, skills assessments, vocational training classes, etc.); and
- help finding a permanent accommodation.

The agreement provides that the refugees must:

- respect the regulations of the welcoming facility in which they will initially be hosted;
- regularly attend all of the activities organized by the diocesan Caritas (or welcoming organization) related to developing autonomy (including language and vocational training classes, internships, sports and recreational activities, etc.);
- maintain a collaborative and proactive attitude in order to promote the success of the project;
- engage actively and personally in learning the language, searching for a job, and finding permanent accommodations in view of the end of the project twelve months after their arrival;
- contact social workers about any problems related to their accommodations or if they want to host guests.

## 3. ACCOMPANIMENT AND MONITORING

Once the beneficiaries arrive, Caritas Italy provides national tutors whose role is to regularly monitor host communities and to interact with social workers, family mentor, other volunteers, and refugees in order to assist them with specific needs and especially with any legal or psychological issues. Throughout the year-long program, the national tutors visit the host communities at least once and are available to assist diocesan Caritas with any problems or needs.

As the program evolved, it became clear that diocesan Caritas needed more information about the refugees' past experiences and cultures in order to effectively address cultural differences and expectations. For example, some diocesan Caritas aid workers faced serious difficulties in explaining to the refugees the twists and turns of the Italian public bureaucracy and administration and, more generally, Italian social rules.<sup>17</sup> To address this, Caritas Italy organized five national meetings and workshops in 2018–19 for diocesan staff representatives involved in the hosting process. Some of these meetings were scheduled for a few days before the arrival of the refugees in order to finalize certain administrative steps and to update the host communities about the condition of the new arrivals.

17 - Because of new laws related to the procedures for asylum requests and to other legal protections for migrants adopted by the two "security decrees" passed by the Italian Parliament between October 2018 and August 2019, Caritas Italy organized a three-day national meeting in Rome to explain whether and to what extent these laws might impact on the beneficiaries' asylum requests. In fact, the first security decree eliminated the possibility of obtaining "humanitarian protection status," leaving only refugee status and "subsidiary protection" status as the only means of obtaining legal status in Italy.

## 4. EVOLUTION AND CHANGE

Meeting the rising expectations of stakeholders is one of the most significant challenges this project has had to face. On the one hand, many refugees expect Italian language acquisition, the job search and the process of securing financial resources, and an understanding of Italian law and cultural rules to come fairly easily. On the other hand, host communities expect refugees to be grateful and to integrate smoothly into Italian society by overcoming initial cultural shocks and barriers.<sup>18</sup>

During 2019, cultural clashes happened more frequently in host communities where intercultural mediators were not present or were used only sporadically, confirming that their presence provides indispensable legal and cultural assistance and help. Because of the relatively high number of beneficiaries suffering from mental illness, in 2019 Caritas Italy decided to add a psychologist to the national team. The psychologist runs three workshop sessions during the national meetings aimed at helping diocesan social workers deal with refugees with mental illness, including its detection and prevention where possible.

Also in 2019, Caritas Italy increased the number of national tutors to four, one of whom is a lawyer.

<sup>18</sup> - The European Resettlement Network (ERN+), Expanding Complementary Pathways Of Admission To Europe, April 2018, available from [www.resettlement.eu/page/ern-publications](http://www.resettlement.eu/page/ern-publications)

## 5. THE 2019 PROTOCOL

On May 3, 2019, the Humanitarian Corridors project was extended by means of an additional protocol signed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Italian Bishops' Conference, Caritas Italy, and the Community of Sant'Egidio. The first arrival under this protocol was scheduled for November 29, 2019 and the program is expected to last two years. Beneficiaries were once again selected again on the basis of personal and family vulnerabilities. Niger and Jordan will serve as additional "transit countries," with Ethiopia continuing in this role.

In the meantime, it is interesting to note that other countries have followed the Humanitarian Corridors model. In France in 2017, various Catholic and Protestant organizations cooperated to bring 150 Syrians living in Lebanon and Turkey to the country. In Belgium in 2018, the Community of Sant'Egidio launched a project aimed at Syrian refugees living in Turkey. In Great Britain, Caritas and the Church of England are among the sponsors of the Community and Private Sponsorship Program launched by the NGO Citizen UK, whose beneficiaries are Syrian refugees.<sup>19</sup>

### 5.1 CHANGES CONTAINED IN THE 2019 PROTOCOL

Caritas Italy made some changes to the program in 2019 so that it can more effectively carry out its mission.

The first is that under the new program, each diocesan Caritas wanting to host beneficiaries will be required to provide a mediator for the purpose of reducing linguistic barriers and cultural clashes.

A second change affects the refugees after they arrive in Rome: once certain administrative tasks are completed at the airport, aid workers, refugees, mediators, and Caritas Italy staff participate in a two-day workshop in Rocca di Papa, near Rome, at a Caritas-run hosting facility. The goal of this workshop is to provide refugees and diocesan social workers an opportunity to meet and become familiar with one another. One of the main objectives of the workshop is to discuss the program's guidelines and goals, as well as the duties and responsibilities of both parties.

The aim of the workshop is also to prevent a clash of expectations as between refugees and host communities concerning the exact amount of pocket money the refugees will receive, the administrative tasks needed to secure asylum and the delays that are common in dealing with Italy's public administration, the need to respect Italian laws and cultural rules, and the legal and medical assistance that aid workers and host communities will provide to refugees. During the first workshop, held in November 2019, some refugees who arrived in Italy under the 2017 protocol were invited to speak. They recounted to the new beneficiaries the details of their year-long involvement with the program and shared the positive experiences they had had in Italy.

<sup>19</sup> - In Germany and Austria, faith communities (both Catholic and Protestant) have for decades operated programs to help and support refugees already in their countries, and recently (since 2015) have begun providing financial support to private sponsorship programs.

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A third change relates to the training programs local Caritas provides for volunteers, including potential family tutors. These training meetings must describe in a more detailed way the experience of the beneficiaries in refugee camps and their culture, religion, and social life, allowing the Italian volunteers to become aware of the differences between refugees and more capable of addressing their needs. For the first group of beneficiaries that arrived on November 29, 2019, Caritas Italy organized workshops for tutors. Moving forward, every diocesan Caritas that has been selected to be a new host community has been encouraged by Caritas Italy to plan various training programs in cooperation with refugees, local mediators, and experts.

At the beginning of this new round of Humanitarian Corridors, Caritas Italy stated their plan to bring the project closer to the status of a Community and Private Sponsorship Program, which would result in the host communities becoming involved in the project even before the refugees arrive in Italy.

The most relevant aspect of the 2019 protocol for Sant'Egidio relates to family reunification. Sant'Egidio has opened the Humanitarian Corridors program to relatives of refugees who are already in Italy, providing a legal and safe way to reunite families. Pursuant to this change, the new refugees will enjoy the presence of a family network once they arrive in Italy, a network that will help them with their integration into the society, their study of Italian, and in finding a job. Because these refugees will be hosted by their families, Sant'Egidio will not provide them with housing and food; however, it will still provide administrative and legal help to refugees seeking legal status. For other beneficiaries, the Sant'Egidio program will remain the same as before—those selected beneficiaries who do not have relatives in Italy will be hosted by Sant'Egidio local communities throughout Italy depending on their availability.

## 6. COMMUNITY AND PRIVATE SPONSORSHIPS AND PUBLIC RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMS

Even though migration has historically proceeded at a political level according to national laws, EU member states have agreed to allow civil society groups and citizens' groups to launch projects aimed at hosting asylum seekers.<sup>20</sup> In this regard, the EU has established a legal framework allowing member states as well as private sponsors to run resettlement programs: in 2012, the EU Commission passed the Joint EU Resettlement Program to create a unified set of EU practices relating to resettlement. Then in 2017, the Commission approved a recommendation to solicit from member states places for 50,000 refugees as part of any resettlement projects.<sup>21</sup> Community and Private Sponsorship programs share three key characteristics.<sup>22</sup> First, the private sponsor chooses the asylum seekers to be resettled and then a list of beneficiaries must be approved by state authorities.<sup>23</sup> Coordination with governmental agencies varies, mostly depending on whether a particular program is part of the official state resettlement program or whether the government considers the program to be adding to an already established quota for refugees.<sup>24</sup>

The second key characteristic of the Community and Private Sponsorships is that the sponsor is required to pay for refugees' travel and accommodations, and for supporting them with the asylum application process, although in some private sponsorship programs, public financial support may be available to pay for some of the travel costs. The third characteristic is that the sponsor is tasked with providing language classes for both children and adults according to the legal requirements of each country. Because the fundamental aim of these programs is to provide a path for refugees to integrate into the local society, the private sponsor should have available a framework for accomplishing this. The sponsor should have the means to insert refugees into the national school system and into professional traineeships.

20 - In 2016, the European Resettlement Network's ERN+ project titled "Developing Innovative European Models for the Protection of Refugees and Providing Support to New Resettlement Countries" began monitoring the emergence of various private sponsorship programs across Europe. For further information, see The European Resettlement Network (ERN+), *Expanding Complementary Pathways Of Admission To Europe*, April 2018, available from [www.resettlement.eu/page/ern-publications](http://www.resettlement.eu/page/ern-publications)

21 - In the same year, Canada resettled more than 21,000 people and the US more than 78,000.

22 - The very first private sponsorship program in Canada dates back to 1968 but was officially launched pursuant to the country's 1976 immigration law.

23 - In contrast, according to the terms of the Canadian resettlement project known as "Blended Visa Office-Referral," refugees are first chosen by UNHCR agents and then the government matches private sponsors and refugees, taking into consideration the refugees' origin, religion, health status, and personal/family links to Canada.

24 - Caritas Italiana, *Oltre il mare: Primo rapporto sui Corridoi Umanitari in Italia e altre vie legali e sicure d'ingresso*, 2019.

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Both EU and non-EU countries like Great Britain, Switzerland, and Canada have a long history of experience with Community and Private Sponsorship Programs. With respect to the non-EU countries, diaspora communities have funded and run programs offering legal pathways to asylum for their fellow countrymen. Based on the experience of these programs, it seems that a community-based sponsor can more effectively offer a path to integration than a state sponsor. In fact, if the local community as a whole participates in a project, its members can create personal and direct relationships with refugees, which can facilitate their integration into the local community. In fact, the large social network that can be built by community sponsorship programs can more effectively and efficiently explain to the refugees local history, laws, religious rules, traditions, and ways of life. Moreover, a community can create a stronger support system for refugees (thus providing them with more social capital) while they are dealing with their asylum claims and searching for job opportunities.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> - The European Resettlement Network (ERN+), Expanding Complementary Pathways Of Admission To Europe, April 2018, available from [www.resettlement.eu/page/ern-publications](http://www.resettlement.eu/page/ern-publications)