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May, 21 2020

HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS and RECEPTION: PRE-ARRIVAL PREPARATION AND CHALLENGES

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Report

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INTRODUCTION

The Humanitarian Corridors (hereafter “HC”) project provides a safe and legal pathway for asylum seekers to come to Italy. The project aims at helping applicants for international protection who have previously fled their own countries, are in third countries—“third countries of first asylum” or “transit countries,”¹ and face personal and / or family vulnerabilities.² The subject of this report is the year-long project organized and financed by Caritas Italy³ using funds made available by the Italian Episcopal Conference. As described in the memorandum of understanding (MOU) that Caritas Italy entered into with the foreign and interior ministries of Italy on January 12, 2017, the Italian state granted five hundred visas for asylum seekers who were selected from a number of refugee camps and from among urban refugees in Ethiopia to emigrate to Italy.

The first asylum seeker arrived in Italy through the HC project in November 2017 and the last arrived on January 31, 2019. Most of the beneficiaries of the program were Eritrean but there were also some South Sudanese and Somali nationals.

In June 2019, Caritas Italy and the ministries of foreign affairs and the interior signed a new MOU for a two-year renewal of the project, expanding the number of visas for refugees in Ethiopia, Jordan, and Niger to six hundred. Expanded operations began on November 29, 2019 with the arrival of refugees from Niger. A second flight from Niger was scheduled on February 25, 2020, but was suspended due to the Covid-19⁴ health emergency.

HC is aimed at not only creating a legal and safe pathway for asylum seekers to enter Italy and a first stage of reception, but also (and above all) their social and labor integration—personalized to the extent possible based on the individual characteristics of the beneficiaries—all to take place over the course of twelve months.

1 - Caritas Italy, *Oltre il Mare: Primo rapporto sui Corridoi Umanitari in Italia e altre vie legali e sicure d'ingresso* [Beyond the sea: First report on Humanitarian Corridors and other legal and safe entrance routes to Italy], 2019. Available on https://www.caritas.it/caritasitaliana/allegati/8149/Oltre_il_Mare.pdf

2 - The memorandum of understanding (MOU) governing the operation of HC does not define “vulnerability.” It relies on the assessment of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees concerning whether individuals are in a position of vulnerability and are potentially recipients of refugee status, as provided for by the Geneva Convention of 1951 (and its 1967 protocol) as these relate to the status of refugees.

3 - The Community of Sant’Egidio partnered with Caritas Italy in shouldering the costs of the program and organizing the reception of asylum seekers into Italy.

4 - Covid-19 is an infectious disease caused by a coronavirus. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that can cause disease in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more serious diseases. The most recently discovered coronavirus, the one that causes Covid-19, was unknown before it appeared in an outbreak in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (for more information visit: www.who.org).

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The complexity of the various phases characterizing this project is evident, both in their conception and realization. These phases can be described as follows:

- 1 The pre-departure/pre-arrival phase taking place in both Ethiopia and Italy
- 2 The initial reception in Italy
- 3 Management of the beneficiaries' social, linguistic, educational, and employment-related needs, all of which contribute to their achieving autonomy and integration over the project's twelve-month period.
- 4 The exit phase including the management of cases where beneficiaries choose to leave the program unexpectedly or in an unannounced manner.

This report is limited in scope to analyzing the pre-departure/pre-arrival phase, i.e. all the activities carried out in Ethiopia and in Italy by Caritas Italy and by diocesan Caritas aimed at organizing and preparing the beneficiaries' welcome, while at the same time preparing Caritas social workers, volunteers, mentor families, and ecclesiastical and civil communities to contribute to the ultimate goal of the beneficiaries' autonomy and integration.

The following were used in the drafting of this report: information provided by Caritas Italy on the ways in which its social workers carried out the pre-arrival work for various groups of beneficiaries; interviews with social workers, volunteers, and mentors as part of a qualitative, longitudinal research project on HC⁵ (part of which is included on the [HUMANLINES](https://www.humanlines.org/) website), and reports prepared by a Caritas unit that has been recognized for implementing efficacious practices in the pre-arrival phase.

5 - This study began in 2018 and is planned to last five years. It will analyze the reception and integration of refugees accepted into the Humanitarian Corridors project under the first MOU (2017–19). To date, more than 400 interviews have been conducted. For more information visit <https://www.humanlines.org/modalita-della-ricerca-6.html>

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1. THE PRE-DEPARTURE PHASE IN ETHIOPIA

The organization of the pre-departure phase by Caritas Italy involved various steps taken in collaboration with institutional actors like the Italian embassy in Addis Ababa and the Ethiopian authority dealing with refugees (the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs—ARRA), certain international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and local NGOs like Gandhi Charity.⁶

Specifically, Caritas Italy sought the cooperation of UNHCR and Gandhi Charity with operations and procedures related to the various phases of identifying and evaluating potential beneficiaries living in refugee camps. The selection of beneficiaries was conducted in compliance with the criterion of personal and / or family vulnerability, which the Italian authorities required as a condition for the refugees' inclusion in the project. UNHCR and Gandhi Charity shared information with Caritas Italy regarding the vulnerabilities of certain identified persons and collaborated in the interviews of these persons. Interviews with potential beneficiaries served a dual purpose: to understand their personal and family situations and to explain to them the overall process and structure of the HC project, including their rights and duties after arrival in Italy.

There are at least three interviews before the final selection of a beneficiary. The interviews serve several purposes; one of them is to gather information essential to the work of a cultural mediator.⁷ The first interview is aimed at understanding the specific situation of each potential beneficiary, while the second and third are aimed at explaining the details of the HC project to the beneficiaries for the purpose of giving them an awareness of their rights, the circumstances that await them in Italy, and their duties and responsibilities to Caritas and the welcoming communities. The beneficiaries are informed about the timeframe of the project and the fact that they are not passive actors (their decisions and actions are central to their integration into Italian society), the various sociocultural and economic realities of Italian society (including its ecclesiastical component), and the discretion exercised by the host diocesan Caritas unit with respect to the distribution of pocket money.

6 - Gandhi Charity is a nonprofit association founded in Milan in 2003 by Dr. Alganesh Fessaha. Its projects are aimed at providing assistance to African, and particularly Ethiopian, refugees and migrants.

7 - A cultural mediator is a bilingual professional tasked with promoting linguistic and cultural dialogue and interaction between individuals or groups of Italians and groups of migrants from his or her own country or from countries that are culturally or linguistically similar to his or her country.

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One objective of the pre-departure phase is to reduce the risk of clashes between the expectations of the beneficiaries and those of the welcoming community. To this end, Caritas Italy has, since the project's inception in November 2017, asked the beneficiaries to sign a written agreement detailing their rights and duties.

The final step of the pre-departure selection and information phase in Ethiopia is a matching process between the selected beneficiaries and the diocesan Caritas units that declared themselves available for the project. Some of the beneficiaries had experienced trauma resulting in numerous vulnerabilities that sometimes required the provision of specific kinds of medical, housing, and educational facilities; for example, hospitals capable of treating particular illnesses, housing suitable for persons with disabilities, and schools for the deaf. Not all of the participating Caritas units were able to guarantee that these were available in their localities.

Once the definitive list of beneficiaries was drawn up by Caritas Italy, it had to be approved by ARRA and then by the Italian authorities, who needed to check that the identified individuals were not likely to create problems for public order. After this step, the Italian diplomatic authorities in Addis Ababa issued the necessary "limited territorial validity" visas, which enabled the beneficiaries to travel from Ethiopia to Rome's Fiumicino Airport, where they applied for international protection.

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2. THE PRE-ARRIVAL PHASE IN ITALY: CARITAS ITALY'S SELECTION OF DIOCESAN CARITAS UNITS

As already mentioned, the pre-arrival stage involved the active participation of Italian Caritas workers in both Ethiopia and Italy.

In Italy, the pre-arrival training was accomplished through a number of actions aimed at giving volunteers necessary information, while at the same time the project was promoted and organized with the diocesan Caritas unit. A highly developed multilevel structure was created between Caritas programs operating at the national, diocesan, and parish levels.⁸

There was no need to search for additional partners because HC had already established partnerships with Caritas on the diocesan level to offer reception projects for refugees who had sought international protection. In fact, in 2014 Caritas Italy launched a program called “Protected Refugee in My Home,” through which many diocesan Caritas units had welcomed persons who possessed international protection for six months, hosted in the homes of volunteer families.⁹

In the first pre-arrival phase, Caritas Italy social workers described HC during nationwide meetings of the Immigration Office with the diocesan Caritas units. Caritas Italy then drafted a handbook that clarified the essential requirements for structuring reception at the level of diocesan Caritas, which was made available to the Caritas units.¹⁰ Based on this document, Caritas Italy requested from the diocesan Caritas units the items discussed below at 2.1–2.3.

2.1 THE AVAILABILITY OF ACCOMMODATIONS

The homes in which beneficiaries were to live were required to be habitable under the law and available through diocesan Caritas for a minimum of twelve months. These homes could be owned by Caritas itself, by the diocese, or by religious bodies and made available to diocesan Caritas for free. The accommodations could, however, also be provided by private individuals for free or pursuant to a rental contract.

Concerning beneficiaries with physical disabilities, Caritas Italy took care in the pre-arrival phase to select dioceses that had adequate housing available for the disabled as required by law. The current legislation on the matter was not and cannot be waived: the *Handbook for Reception* provided that “the local social worker is required to verify compliance with these requirements by the owners and / or managers of these structures. If the reception is carried out in apartments in which the owner does not reside, these accommodations, which are not considered to be collective or social health centers, must still meet the legal requirements for the properties to be used as a civilian home.”¹¹

8 - Caritas Italy, *Oltre il mare*, p. 51.

9 - For a more detailed description of this project, see: https://www.caritas.it/pls/caritasitaliana/v3_s2ew_consultazione.mostra_pagina?id_pagina=6146

10 - Caritas Italy, *Handbook for Reception*, 2017, available at <https://inmigration.caritas.it/sites/default/files/2017-10/VADEMECUM%20PROTETTO-CORRIDOI.pdf>

11 - Caritas Italy, *Handbook for Reception*, 2017, p. 2.

2.2 A TEAM OF SOCIAL WORKERS

Caritas Italy deemed it necessary that there be a diocesan team of social workers and a contact person to take responsibility for organizing the project and collaborating with volunteers and mentors. As specified in the *Handbook for Reception*, Caritas Italy stated that during the implementation of the project it would organize “special training moments that will be MANDATORY [capitalized in the text] for those involved in the reception project.”¹² From June 2018 to November 2019, six national training sessions were organized for diocesan Caritas social workers, each of which included training dedicated to preparing to receive the beneficiaries who had not yet arrived and to understanding the critical issues that had emerged during the reception process that was already underway.

Caritas Italy advised that it was necessary to involve a cultural mediator, a specialized, professional social worker who could train the host communities that were welcoming the beneficiaries, providing them with sociocultural, historical, and political background on the beneficiaries’ countries of origin. Caritas Italy’s first report on HC published in 2019 stated that the mediator is one of the four pillars of the welcoming phase.¹³

Because cultural mediation was not at first seen as a mandatory aspect of the welcoming phase, not all diocesan Caritas units have engaged one, especially at the time of the arrival of the first group of beneficiaries in November 2017 and the second group in February 2018. Caritas Italy’s insistence on engaging a cultural mediator resulted in friction with some of the diocesan Caritas units, particularly those welcoming Eritreans who speak the Kunama language. There were no native Kunama speakers in Italy, and even though there were mediators available who spoke Tigrinya, many of the Eritreans who arrived did not speak Tigrinya. Consequently, as respects the most recent arrivals, Caritas Italy has more carefully ensured the presence of appropriate mediators. Caritas Italy has provided assistance to diocesan Caritas units looking for such mediators and required the mediators’ presence in training sessions for the social workers, thereby connecting them to the diocesan Caritas units. These meetings, held from June 2018 to November 2019, had the dual objective of training those responsible for the projects of the Humanitarian Corridors in progress and of preparing for those had not yet welcomed a beneficiary to their dioceses.

¹² - Caritas Italy, *Handbook For Reception*, 2017, p. 4. (capitalization in original)

¹³ - Caritas Italy, *Oltre il mare*, p. 53.

2.3 MENTOR FAMILIES

The *Handbook on Reception* states that the presence of a mentor family is a “unique element” of HC. The mentor family “makes itself available to accompany the beneficiaries in the process of welcoming and integration ... and supports the beneficiaries in collaboration with the project social worker and with diocesan Caritas. It is also called to involve the community (parish or religious) to create opportunities for social integration and to pursue the objectives of a path toward autonomy (in terms of housing and work) for the beneficiaries.”¹⁴

Once the diocesan Caritas units are selected and matching with the beneficiaries is carried out by Caritas Italy, a dossier containing the details of the community’s prospective beneficiaries is sent to each diocesan Caritas so that each team can organize a path of reception and integration before and during the period of their arrival. This path toward integration is personalized by the involvement of the mentor families and the volunteers, which includes, if necessary, collaboration with schools and adult teaching centers (CPIAs) as well as hospitals and other entities operating in the health sector.

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3. DIOCESAN CARITAS'S ORGANIZATION OF THE PRE-ARRIVAL PHASE

3.1 THE SELECTION OF THE WELCOMING COMMUNITY

An analysis of the diocesan reception and integration projects as described by the social workers, mentor families, and volunteers and of the toolkit sent to some of the Caritas units makes it possible to outline some of the essential characteristics of the preparations for receiving the beneficiaries at the diocesan level.

The first of these is undoubtedly the selection of the “welcoming community”; that is, the group of volunteers and family mentors who act as the main protagonists of the reception. In fact, the *Handbook for Reception*, commenting on a report of the head of the Immigration Office of the Diocese of Volterra, states that this selection process is a way to ensure that “from the beginning the reception project is a community experience,” in which “all of the people and entities involved share in the various stages of reception¹⁵.”

The selection of the welcoming community takes place within the parish context, making it possible to identify the particular entity within the community that will be primarily responsible for the reception project and highlighting the pastoral dimension of HC. However, since the host is really the community as a whole, the reception is understood and implemented as a project shared by the community and not reserved only for the group of people who take direct responsibility for its implementation.

Because the project is parish-based, it is clear that the motivation driving the involvement of many mentor families and volunteers is primarily religious and only in some cases ethical and social. Thus, the willingness of people to become involved with the project is often fostered and developed by their belonging to the parish and by their perception of their needs at the level of personal and family faith. The project becomes a daily reference point for people who desire to engage with others whose history, culture, language, and sometimes even religion is different from their own.

An example of this is the words of one of the volunteers in the diocesan Caritas of Verona: “*We began to move actively, taking seriously the Pope’s proposal in July 2015 [In reality, the Pope’s words reported by the volunteer had been spoken in September 2015].*¹⁶ *In pastoral council*

15 - Caritas Italy, *Handbook for Reception*, 2017, pg. 2.

16 - The Pope’s proposal referred to here was actually made on September 6, 2015 in his Sunday Angelus. In response to the emergency resulting from the huge number of people trying to land on the southern coasts of Italy in makeshift boats, often losing their lives on the journey, Pope Francis invited every parish and religious institute in every Italian diocese to welcome a family of refugees: “Faced with the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees who flee death from war and hunger, and who have begun a journey moved by hope for survival, the Gospel calls us to be ‘neighbours’ of the smallest and the abandoned, and to give them concrete hope. It’s not enough to say, ‘Take heart. Be patient’.... Christian hope has a fighting spirit, with the tenacity of one who goes toward a sure goal. Therefore, as the Jubilee of Mercy approaches, I make an appeal to parishes, religious communities, monasteries and shrines throughout Europe, that they express the Gospel in a concrete way and host a refugee family. A concrete gesture in preparation for the

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meetings during 2015, we began asking why we are ignoring what the Pope has asked of us [...] He asked each of us to become involved, and we began reflecting on his request.” One volunteer involved in the experience of welcoming stated, “It became clear that it was the desire of the entire pastoral council to join together to create a project around the Pope’s idea, [so] we turned to Caritas and to the Samaritan [the cooperative that acts as the operational arm of diocesan Caritas] to get information about how to participate in the HC project.”

The episcopal vicar of the diocese of Brescia described what prompted many bishops and priests to join this project, accepting the requests coming from the parish realities: *“today, our community has been strongly provoked by this welcoming project; generously accompanying the work of our missionaries. Today we are living the effort, but it also seems to me the beauty of the need to change ourselves as this welcoming and this encounter happens in our territories, within our homes, in the world of work, in our society.”*

In other diocesan realities, it was not a parish that proposed itself as a welcoming community but it was Caritas itself that asked for the availability of parishes of the diocese.

One of the most structured procedures for selection was implemented by Caritas Vicenza, which started an awareness campaign in various parishes- *“the center of all reception projects”*- presenting their own activities in the field of immigration, including that of HC. From their availability, given to Caritas by formal decision of the pastoral council, the work of the diocesan teams with the parish officially started; the circulation of information related to HC and to raise awareness among potential volunteers and mentor families.

The official and formal decision by the pastoral council is fundamental as a public passage, as the responsible of HC for Vicenza’s Caritas explains *“the foundational idea is that the volunteer group is recognized as part of the parish community, receiving the mandate. This step is very important, because it concretely underlines that the reception project - in this case the Humanitarian Corridors project - is an institutional expression and constitutive of the parish.”*

The centrality of the personal faith experience implicated in being hosts is made explicit by one member of a mentor family in the diocese of Vicenza. He in fact states in his interview: *“my role was to give a slight start to this experience, asking within our parish community to begin this experience because it had been asked from our bishop, from the Pope ... and above all from the Gospel, to welcome people in need. And in this area, in this situation ... I encouraged the pastoral council, and there ... and from there arose the group: they were people who said yes, and they got together to form this group, which has been called the ‘reception group.’ At the same time, they asked for help from Caritas, which gave a hand in preparing and informing them.”*

Holy Year of Mercy. May every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every shrine of Europe welcome one family, beginning with my Diocese of Rome.” The full text of the Pope’s declaration is available in English at http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2015/documents/papa-francesco_angelus_20150906.html.

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In some cases, as in the diocese of Modena-Nonantola, the parish that took on HC, had for years already been developing a pathway on the theme of immigration, both on the pastoral and social level, such that the relationship with local political institutions had already been favored. The social worker responsible for the immigration area at Caritas explains that: *“the reception project through the corridors is part of a path that began more than 4 years ago, in a situation in which a group of citizens had formed (among them several parishioners) sensitive to immigration and hospitality issues. The diocesan Caritas entered in 2015.”*

In other diocesan realities, the welcoming community was identified from the parish of which the director of Caritas was parish priest, as in the case of Volterra, which had at the same time the necessary housing availability, and a suitable mentor family. Even in this context, however, local Caritas tried to promote the community dimension of hospitality, by including the mentor family as much as possible in a community network, as the mentor family of this diocese reports: *“Since the launch of Humanitarian Corridors, I started to read some things about it on my own and then I spoke with Father R. [parish priest] [who] wanted to create a network of available families.”*

Finally, the selection of the welcoming community also occurred on the basis of the availability of housing that could be allocated to the reception projects in the diocesan territory. In those communities where the parish itself or on-site religious bodies could guarantee the availability of lawful housing for at least one year, the diocesan Caritas sought to find volunteers and mentor families. In this context, the testimony of a volunteer from the project carried out by the diocesan Caritas of Vittorio Veneto, who gave his availability after hearing that Caritas was looking for volunteers from his parish to prepare the reception, is significant. He said: *“Even when you read the word of the Lord it helps you live these things, you cannot turn away, if you are a Christian you cannot turn away, even if it is tiring. Because sometimes you ask yourself ‘but in short, who makes me do all this?’. But then later you ask yourself ‘Lord, but why did you call me to do something for others?’ And then it is really difficult to withdraw from this call.”*

3.2 PREPARATION OF VOLUNTEERS AND MENTOR FAMILIES

As mentioned before and as Caritas Italiana underlines, the mentor families are one of the most uniquely relevant aspects of HC and play a fundamental role in the daily integration process of the beneficiaries in the local social and working fabric.

Therefore, at the diocesan level, two elements were fundamental in their pre-arrival preparation: providing them with skills and knowledge on the socio-cultural context of the beneficiaries' countries of origin; and clarifying the tasks and limitations of the social workers' roles, explaining also the limited duration and finances of the assistance project.

Cultural and organizational aspects in the reception preparation meetings

Many Caritas' organized a series of preparation meetings for volunteers and mentors, following the method used by Caritas Italy in organizing national trainings for the reception project's representatives. These representatives were able to learn about elements of the culture, history and previous living conditions of the beneficiaries from Eritrea and Ethiopia. As stated by the mentor family of the diocesan Caritas of Cuneo: *"It was very useful to learn about the culture of the beneficiaries that we received, to understand their ways and above all, their customs first."*

In this context, Caritas Vicenza's way of organizing these meetings was particularly significant, as at each reception phase, it structured a cycle of three meetings with the group in the pastoral community that was preparing to host the beneficiaries.

During the first meeting, the project, along with details of duration and type of daily commitment required was presented. In the second meeting, the delicate issue of the host community expectations with respect to participation in the project and the future relationship to be established with the beneficiaries was addressed. Finally, the third meeting served to definitively structure the group by dividing the specific tasks among the participants.

For a successful project implementation over twelve months, it is crucial that in the pre-arrival phase the volunteers and mentors understand and accept the most apparent cultural differences, the load of daily commitment, its duration, beneficiaries potential non-correspondence to the project, including also the possibility that the beneficiaries voluntarily leave the project before the end of the twelve months, pursuing their own migration project¹⁷, as much as possible. This preparation reduces the possibility that during the project, volunteers and mentor families withdraw from their commitment or perceive as personal failures any difficulties, withdrawal or refusal of the beneficiaries to the proposals of social and work integration.

In preparation for volunteers and mentor families, it was also proven necessary to structure a clear division of roles between volunteers and mentor families on the one hand and Caritas staff on the other. As summarized by the head of HC at Caritas Vicenza, *"The objectives are unique, the protagonists of the intercultural meeting must be volunteers, the responsibility that this latter aspect functions lies with the team."* It is essential to clarify the division of roles in the pre-arrival phase to avoid confusion and overlap of roles in the personal relationships with beneficiaries, in their understanding of the project and in the management of their expectations. Furthermore, Caritas' experience has shown that this division is all the more necessary in times of difficulty and

17 - This aspect was also described by one of the volunteers involved in one of the receptions in the diocese of Vicenza; which can be found on the HUMANLINES website, <https://www.humanlines.org/la-squadra-di-malo-5.html>

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confrontation with the beneficiaries, in order to be able to manage these moments on different levels but in a coordinated fashion. As reiterated in the interview available on the **HUMANLINES** website, *“the role is not a closed thing but a method for entering into a relationship.”*

Among the many concrete tools used by the teams, mentors and volunteers to coordinate their work, one used in the reception of the diocese of Verona is a practical *“whatsapp group that if there are emergencies, it is reported on that”*, as recalled by one of the volunteers.

Communication of the duration and economic limits of Humanitarian Corridors

It is essential that both volunteers and mentors understand and accept the time and economic limits of the project in order to avoid the creation of a purely assistance-based relationship with the beneficiaries and to mitigate frictions with diocesan and national Caritas at the end of the project due to a lack of additional non-budgeted economic resources.

In those Caritas', that during the preparatory phase, had clarified the impossibility of prolonging disbursement of funds for beneficiaries to the mentors and the volunteers (except for in documented cases of medical problems and other serious frailties) showed fewer problems during the allocation of resources and in the phase of consolidating autonomy over the 12 months of project implementation.

The lack of explanation and / or understanding of the necessary economic limits in the management of the resources available for accompanying the beneficiary families produced a greater risk of dependence. Giving beneficiaries more economic resources than agreed (in the form of generous gifts given from individual and personal funds) caused a lack of incentive to study Italian and to look for a job. As indicated by the responsible of HC at Caritas Teggiano-Policastro, who is also part of a mentor family, *“the aspect in our opinion that needs to be absolutely avoided is to give them all the material goods they want. Everything that is harmful to the achievement of autonomy, since the beneficiaries will think that everything is given to them and no sacrifice must be made to obtain what they want.”*

Even the volunteers of the diocese of Verona who, in the absence of a mentor family, followed the beneficiaries and their families, clarified that *“if the time periods are precisely those of the agreements, within twelve months, autonomy should theoretically begin, oh well that is unthinkable, but immediately you have to think about making them aware of the costs as well, because if not it becomes too assistance-based and it is difficult to remove this culture of handouts. Then they become guilty of our faults, it is not fair to them.... Since work is earnings, then what I earn allows me to buy what I eat because if [not,] M. brings it to me [or] I go with M. to do the shopping and [she/he] pays at the checkout. The step of ‘I pay with my money because I went to work’ is important. This aspect is not obvious. They are good, I don't think they have big problems acquiring this mentality”*. In fact, an insertion that does not take into consideration an educational aspect also with respect to economic independence would have consequences on their autonomy, as expressed by the responsible of HC in the diocese of Brescia: *“[we must] avoid taking full charge of the beneficiaries: their autonomy must be maintained and respected, they must always remain the active engine of the reception project... After a year and a half of reception we found with surprise that the most significant relationship between the hosting family and the group of beneficiaries, developed where a real friendship was born from the supportive relationship. The group of volunteers includes a man, married with children, of the same age as the father of the family received; a sincere, empathic friendship developed between the two,*

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from which a relationship of trust was generated which proved to be very valuable also for the successful implementation of the project; it broke the wall.”

On this subject, what emerged in the diocese of Assisi, where volunteers and mentors followed a large number of refugees, is particularly significant. The head of HC at Caritas Assisi in fact states that: *“Doing the ordinary administration of daily life on their behalf makes things appear easy and all, [but] once alone they may find it difficult to manage things. Instead, accompanying them with patience and humility in facing what is a new and totally different life for them, could give them greater security and could also serve to establish a healthy and trusting relationship between beneficiary and volunteer / social worker.”*

Finally, the choice of some diocesan Caritas is to plan an additional economic contribution, with diocesan funds, for a longer period than the twelve months financed by Italian Caritas. This was communicated and shared with mentors and volunteers during the reception preparation. In this way, the people involved in the reception and integration project are aware from the outset of both the durability and economic availability. An example of this is Caritas Modena who, on the recommendation of the Bishop, decided to structure the reception by guaranteeing diocesan funds for a period longer than a year: *“From this point of view, however, our choice is to say: we will no longer invest in other things, but for 5 years we bind ourselves to this family ... One year, for me, is absolutely too little; because, you know, the people who come have major trauma.”*

3.3 THE ROLE OF THE CULTURAL MEDIATOR

Caritas Italy's recommendation of having mediators in the teams of diocesan social workers has been implemented at a local level with different methods and times.

The presence of these figures in the national territory is not homogeneous, since only some of the diocesan Caritas included the mediator in the reception project since the preparatory phase. Some of these Caritas' conducted the preparatory work through cycles of structured training with the welcoming communities. In order to fully train those that were preparing to receive the beneficiaries, the intervention of cultural mediators was aimed at helping the welcoming community to come into contact with and gain knowledge (at least in its essential elements) of the beneficiaries' culture of origin. This level of intercultural formation was well described by one of the volunteers who had started the reception project in the diocese of Verona: *"After several meetings in the [diocesan] pastoral council ... the final phase [was] then when we asked Caritas to give us practical directions. There was a whole process of gaining awareness of the problems related to welcoming: [for example] addressing different cultural points of views from ours ... taking note of our socio-political realities."*

A member of a mentor family, who herself arrived as a migrant in Italy many years ago, stressed the need of a mediator. She explained that *"the intercultural mediator performs a unique part, the added value is precisely that of explaining a little how they behave, what they eat and it is also true since I am a migrant who works in this world Before they arrived we asked for an intercultural mediator, which is a fundamental figure that I do for my community, and so as a welcoming group rather than as a mentor family we have been very busy and still today sometimes it remains a struggle because, despite this figure, there are moments in which misunderstandings persist."*

The receptions in which this support was missing, or was developed only after the arrival of the beneficiaries, showed a greater onset of problems of understanding between the welcoming and voluntary community with respect to lifestyles, cultural elements and rules to be respected. In Caritas Sorrento, where it was not possible to have a consistent cultural mediator neither in the preparatory nor in the project implementation phase, a social worker exemplified this difficulty in intercultural communication in the daily relationship with the beneficiaries: *"The fact of entering into a different idea, in a different mentality, ... you find a girl who says to you 'certain things must be done like this' or that a man [is told] 'you have to wash the ground,' [something] that for me is a silly thing, for them it had a very strong impact so this was a difficulty. But not difficulties because there was a disagreement, but difficulties in entering our culture, also us entering into theirs."*

Similarly, in the reception experience in the diocese of Vercelli, which welcomed people of the Kunama ethnic group, the absence of a mediator in the pre-arrival phase impeded the receiving community from knowing the typical cultural features of this specific ethnic group and their differences compared to the rest of the Eritrean population. As such, not being able to consult a mediator during the reception period proved to be the obstacle that precluded the first and most essential level of planning, verbal communication. According to the director: *"there are very few Kunama in Italy ... I asked myself the question, 'given that we have established this humanitarian corridor, but to bring people into a similar context where they don't speak, that is, they don't speak English, how do you communicate?' It is an enormous effort every day, it is also difficult, do we really help them? Because communication is the most important thing because if you don't have communication then nothing else develops, knowledge, mutual respect, there is the risk of isolation."*

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3.4 PREPARATION FOR PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH CARE

For some receptions, the diocesan Caritas also had to plan health-related aspects, as the beneficiaries had particular medical needs. In this case, the preparatory phase was indispensable for making agreements with hospital structures and sharing information with doctors on the health status of the beneficiaries sent from Ethiopia.

For example, the diocesan Caritas of Rome was able to involve some doctors from the Bambino Gesù Hospital in the project, since the beneficiary family was welcomed into a “solidarity” apartment building, in which the inhabitants were families of some doctors who were treating one of the beneficiaries. In the preparatory phase, the collaboration between the Roman diocesan Caritas and the hospital was structured, through the fundamental figure of the mentor, who acted as a link, exchanging information and daily updates and conversing between all the actors involved to understand new needs and problems. Based on the medical needs of the most vulnerable beneficiary, the mentor also helped to organize life outside the hospital with other beneficiaries. As the mentor explained: *“[My role] is an accompaniment to integration and I make a little bridge with the various public and private health institutions. Obviously, the mediator collaborates with me, a babysitter collaborates to help the family I had to take and so we all play the same game together ... So my job was to talk to the doctors, to understand the moves to do with the various children.”*

In the experience carried out by the diocesan Caritas of Arezzo, prior knowledge of the psychiatric problems of one of the beneficiaries allowed the team of social workers to start receiving the family in a protected way, accommodating them in a place of Caritas for a few weeks, with the 24 hours presence of social workers. In fact, as explained by the project manager: *“given the different vulnerabilities, we tried to understand better ... by observing them 24 hours a day, where we can support them and walk together. Through a few phone calls, and the consultation with Caritas Italy, we had more or less a picture, but we also needed to understand how to concretely work, for the second part [of the project, i.e.], on the autonomy even inside an apartment.”* They then added that, thanks to this first period, it was possible to identify the best medical treatment to guarantee the necessary care for the beneficiary: *“then it was taken care of by the health service, DSM¹⁸ of Bibbiena, clearly it is a therapy that needs time to start making an impact and this probably also impacts on their improvement within the project.”*

However, when the diocesan Caritas did not have information on specific health problems, including mental health, in the pre-arrival phase, hospital or assistance centers were not informed in advance. This meant that these contacts were built only after the project had already started, when some beneficiaries showed medical, psychological or psychiatric problems. The urgent need to cope with this type of pathology slowed down and complicated the reception project for the diocesan teams and the welcoming communities, which only in some cases had medical or psychological professionals that were capable of understanding the symptoms of discomfort or mental illness at hand.

18 - The Department of mental health (DSM) is the set of structures and services that have the task of taking on the demand related to the care, assistance and protection of mental health within the territory defined by the local health company (ASL).

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3.5 PREPARATION IN SCHOOLS

In the pre-arrival phase, it is also important to involve the nearby schools in order to verify the possibility of enrolling beneficiaries that are minors while respecting the legislative limits concerning the maximum number of students per class, and with respect to starting a school year that was already in progress. In fact, the arrival dates of beneficiaries could not be organized around the regulations that govern the details of school life.

Where it was possible to obtain this involvement of school structures, the inclusion of minors and the start of the integration phase were then facilitated.

The diocese of Verona organized this level of preparation in schools in a particularly effective way. This was because the social worker in charge of HC was activated as soon as they were informed of the presence of minors in the arriving family, and because of the availability of the director of the local school, who in his interview made it clear that this availability had been incentivized by the uniqueness of HC, as he immediately had a contact person among the Caritas social workers with whom to plan the reception and school integration: *“at the beginning when the social worker called me I thought that it was part of the SPRAR¹⁹ and instead they are a type of arrival that is completely different to what I thought, from what we [usually] see, it works really well, because there is also the advantage of having a reference person there, an accompaniment of a group ... We wanted them to be ok also from a health point of view, with vaccinations, in a way that they could go to school with their heads high without any problem, so we preferred to extend the time a bit, but that they could be put into school without any prejudice about it ... The work we did as a school was simply to prepare the classes for the new arrival, to create a context that could be the best for them. Where there was the possibility to choose between one class and another, the one that could be the least problematic class ... Therefore, a relational preparation, precisely in collaboration with teachers, shared with teachers; the teachers prepared the classes and we took care that there was the flow of information as much as possible both in one direction and the other, as we do a bit with families.”*

The work shared with the school in the pre-arrival phase made a modality of placement adapted to the pupil's personal abilities possible once they arrived, instead of only simply following the current legislation. As stated by the school director: *“If we had used the bureaucratic method, they would have been [put] in classes in which [the placement] would have been completely out of place from a relational, communicative, and language point of view... then we said, do we follow the bureaucrats or do we think about their wellbeing?”*

19 - SPRAR - “the protection system for asylum seekers and refugees”, is a service provided by the Ministry of Interior which manages the reception, assistance and integration projects of asylum seekers in structures throughout the national territory. For further information on SPRAR, see: <https://www.humanlines.org/index.php?pg=dictionary&ab=S>

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In other diocesan experiences, however, in the preparatory phase it was not possible to have any collaboration with the school structure, which complicated the start of the reception and integration project. Caritas Terni was exemplary in that it accomplished the enrollment of minors in a school in the city where the family was hosted, despite the fact that at the start of the project the school management had tried to prevent the enrollment of the minors which required police intervention. Nevertheless, the experience of this Caritas underlines the two levels that are present when organizing a reception in the school environment: there is the level of management, which predominantly influences all the activities to be started before the arrival of the minors in the classroom, and there is the level of the teachers, who begin their work when the minors enter the classroom. The implementation of this very reception in this particular Caritas highlights that, even in the presence of difficulties faced with the school management, the teachers then created a positive bond with the pupils, encouraging the inclusion of the beneficiaries with the other children in the classroom. As specified by the social worker in charge of HC at Caritas Terni, a teacher who had welcomed one of the minors said to the class *“we always take it very much for granted that writing and speaking our language is simple, that it is the others that must adapt to us, that it is the others who must learn the way we write, we never think about the difficulty that a person can have in joining a group of people who do not speak the same language as them, who write in a totally different way. And so we will teach him to write and speak in Italian and he will teach us to write and speak in Tigrinya. And so there will be a continuous exchange and I want to be a bridge between these two cultures and get you to a certain point where you can both communicate without problems.”*

3.6 RAISING AWARENESS IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY

In many diocesan experiences the pre-arrival preparation also involved raising awareness in the area and neighborhood of the beneficiaries' final destinations. For this purpose, among the volunteers, Caritas Lecco involved an individual who had previously lived in the apartment given to the beneficiaries. This proved to be particularly useful, in the opinion of one of the social workers, since *"he already had relationships with the neighbors and he knew well the context and the parish community."*

Before the arrival of the beneficiaries, some diocesan Caritas organized one or more public meetings with the participation of the social workers of Caritas Italy and diocesan Caritas. These meetings were open both to those wishing to get involved as a volunteer and to those wanting to have information on the program itself. In Siena for example, a public meeting was organized in December 2018, about two months before the arrival of a beneficiary. Furthermore, in the diocese of Modena, it was also possible to create a collaboration with a citizens' committee, called *Anni in Fuga*, outside the world of Catholic associations. This allowed to create a vast network of contacts and to make this project *"shared by a plurality of actors"*, an objective that the MOU, drawn up by Caritas Italy, indicated as essential and priority.²⁰

In this sense, even before that of the migrants, the first level of inclusion was within the city itself. As described by the head of the immigration office of Caritas Modena, in fact, *"within the Committee, in 2015, there was already talk of trying to live the experience of hospitality. In summer 2017, the diocesan Caritas presented the Humanitarian Corridors project to the committee and the parish. This led to the consideration that a significant path of knowledge and rapprochement had already been made and the contribution of Italian Caritas could favor the start of the reception. A series of situations postponed the arrival of people through the project to the end of January 2019. This delay further favored the increased number of people involved who, although many of these did not join the Committee, lent themselves in very different ways to prepare the reception and the months following the arrival."*

On the other hand, where the project did not involve the communities or there was limited awareness given only to the more directly ecclesial environment, in the long term there were episodes of closure towards migrants or poor interaction with the local population, which resulted in the departure of beneficiaries or caused misunderstandings and made the work of the social workers more difficult. As stated by the group of volunteers responsible for the reception in the diocese of Turin, the difficulties encountered in including the wider community within the preparatory phase of the project meant that all the weight of the reception fell upon the group, who also had to deal with other realities of social and economic fragility. In an interview with the volunteers, one of them explained: *"We tried instead to involve the Pastoral Unit and the Pastoral Unit said no, some parish priests had a negative experience with a welcoming project and had had enough, others just didn't feel it... sometimes there are negative reception experiences. We try to give things to the Eritreans a little under the table, without showing that maybe we give them an extra kilo of sugar, an extra liter of milk because if not done silently, we really start a war between everyone because negative sentiments already exist in the community, that is, because you have three zucchini instead I've got four..."* The experiences told by two volunteers in the diocesan Caritas of Vittorio Veneto is equally exemplary of a similar dynamic. In their interview they said: *"We were a little smart, I say, because we tried to do everything without making a lot of noise. Because when someone in the community says 'ah, what are you doing? Make sure the*

| 20 Caritas Italy, Handbook for Reception, 2017, pg. 1.

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municipality does not know that! Because those who govern now are probably hostile towards migrants .”

In some diocesan Caritas, on the other hand, raising awareness in the neighborhood and the community as a whole has contributed to a change in the Italian population’s view towards the immigration in general. For instance, what was reported by the director of Caritas of Teggiano-Policastro, who before welcoming the beneficiaries of HC had hosted a group of unaccompanied minors who had arrived via boats to Italy, is significant. In his experience, *“in relation to the corridors [HC] ... maybe even some types of patterns that had developed in the population and some distorted ideas that have come through the media were broken.”* While from the previous reception experience he said that: *“I had some problems two and a half years ago when the unaccompanied foreign minors arrived in this structure where we renovated and reopened a former parish kindergarten with the funds of otto per mille²¹ ... People came here to protest on the evening of the inauguration when the bishop was also here to give the blessing. They personally attacked me, as director of Caritas and as parish priest, saying that I was squandering the otto per mille fund money.”*

Another experience of change emerged from the HC manager of the diocese of Saluzzo, who had already been at the forefront of managing the problem of labor exploitation of irregular migrants arriving by sea. According to the social worker, involving future neighbors through the Caritas volunteer network was fundamental because: *“we who live this great problem of managing migration flows want to show a way to manage the migration flows that works, it works because the trip is organized, because the trip is from the country in which they are refugees, and it is not an illegal trip that exposes them to a thousand dangers, because the territory and the community is prepared for their arrival and because there is a management that is not only professional, but is a management that sees a mix of professionalism and volunteers who already belong to the area, therefore accepting the challenge was a great sign for us.”*

Also in the experience of the diocese of Modena, the social worker responsible for HC described the involvement of citizens as an element that allowed for a more general discussion of ideas, stereotypes and widespread beliefs on immigration issues. In fact, he described these moments as *“an opportunity to reduce the distances between us and them, to move from a good project to a process that continues, with its own context specificity in the various territories, to reflect, to question one’s own way of thinking, to initiate a change within oneself that also comes through hospitality. Maybe the project works well and the hosted people quickly integrate and become autonomous but, if this [consciousness] does not evolve in the host community, the proposal will have, at least in part, failed.”*

In Volterra, this activity allowed for the involvement of new people in the project that had already started, which gave rise to some job opportunities for the beneficiaries. One of these resulted in a job with a regular contract with benefits at a local company that got to know the beneficiary through the mentor.

The experience of the diocesan Caritas of Asti also clearly demonstrates how raising awareness in the area brings positive consequences that already reach small numbers of people. In fact, in the pre-arrival phase, Caritas volunteers found the availability of two teachers from the institutes

21 - Otto per mille, meaning eight per thousand, is an Italian fiscal system under which Italian taxpayers devolve a compulsory 0.8% from their annual income tax return to a social assistance scheme run by the State or to a recognized organized religion such as the Catholic Church.

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in which Caritas was considering to enroll minor beneficiaries. The willingness of the two teachers to follow the children resulted in their desire to be part of the reception project in general, collaborating with the other volunteers. As pointed out by one of the teachers themselves: *“I am not part of Caritas. I am taking part in this project ... I am G.’s teacher, one of the two boys. In reality, however, being responsible for the whole complex, I also dealt with the placement of K.”* The other teacher added that, after the initial involvement in the school environment, they shared this experience with loved ones: *“We talked about it with close relatives, with friends like that, because we really liked to tell of this experience. They looked at us like we are crazy people [laughter].”* Just as a third volunteer, involved in the second reception organized by the diocesan Caritas of Asti, explained: *“I have never been involved in such an experience, it is the first time and I am happy and when you do things for the first time sometimes you are afraid and for us it was a new thing If you don’t know you can’t say I’m afraid or I’m not afraid.”*

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The following is a summary outlining essential aspects of the pre-arrival phase at the diocesan level:

Pre-arrival essentials

Official identification of the welcoming community

Preparation of volunteers and mentor families with respect to the functioning of the project

Identification and communication of roles and tasks between volunteers and diocesan team/mentor families

Presence of the cultural mediator to understand the culture / history / religion of the people hosted

Preparation of territory on a medical level, if in the presence of cases of particular vulnerability

Collaboration with school managers in the presence of minor beneficiaries for personalized placements in the school system

Awareness in the neighborhood / host territory

Identification and communication of the time and economic limits of the reception

Consequences of the absence of these essential elements

Without a welcoming community, the social workers remain alone to manage the project

Personal and uncoordinated decisions between welcoming subjects damage or compromise the reception project

Unclear to beneficiaries about managers and reference points, especially in case of problems

Inability or difficulty to understand, manage and overcome cultural and religious differences between welcoming communities and beneficiaries

Understanding of medical, psychological or psychiatric vulnerabilities only after initiation, sometimes too late

Delayed, prevented and non-personalized school placement

Loneliness of volunteers and mentor families

Distortion of the reception project towards forms of handouts instead of autonomy

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4. PRE-ARRIVAL PHASE IN PRIVATE / COMMUNITY SPONSORSHIP PROGRAMS VS. HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS PROGRAM

It is possible to identify some elements that unite HC in the pre-arrival phase with the private and community sponsorship programs, carried out by several member countries of the European Union, especially since 2015. According to the European Resettlement Network, a private sponsorship can be defined as a project that combines “legal entry and protection with resettlement support, using private means.”²²

The first characteristic of these projects is, therefore, that private individuals who decide to host one or more asylum seeker bear the related costs: from those of travel to those of accommodation, food, education, personal care, medical expenses and, in general, for all expenses connected to the integration process that the beneficiaries of the project must undertake once they arrive in the new destination. The definition of “private” is the most diverse not only among the states that have started these projects but also within the same country: they can be religious groups (churches or communities of other faiths) but also families previously immigrated to the country that choose to support the costs of this project for family members who remained in the country of origin, or ethnically homogeneous groups, or associations of those who have already immigrated who agree to finance the migratory project of fellow migrants, or NGOs and associations of private citizens, who choose these projects for political or ideological reasons.

Since the funds are exclusively private, private sponsorships have a predetermined duration: in most cases 12 months. At the end of the program, the beneficiaries can request assistance from the welfare system of the state in which they live. The sponsorship is first and foremost aimed for those whose life is in danger in their country of origin, but they must also have characteristics that enable them to integrate into the scholastic and working environment in their new country. For this reason, the authorities of some countries, such as Canada and Germany, allow only private groups that intend to uphold certain economic standards as sponsors. In particular, it is often required that, in order to become a sponsor, the candidate group must have sufficient documented economic availability to cover the costs for board, lodging and all expenses related to education, medical care and job placement for the number of people for whom they intend to sponsor. These costs are calculated based on the cost of living in the country and, in the case of Germany, also in the community where asylum seekers will have to live. In this way, state authorities try to limit failures of these projects resulting from a lack of funds and to prevent sponsors from withdrawing their financial support during the project. In fact, there are no forms of institutional cooperation with state figures operating in the field of hosting migrants.

22 - The European Resettlement Network (ERN+), Expanding Complementary Pathways Of Admission To Europe, April 2018, pg. 11, available on: www.resettlement.eu/page/ern-publications

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In addition to the economic guarantees, however, the state authorities do not require obligations regarding the structure of the hosting groups, nor the presence of qualified social workers, nor guarantees of previous cultural, linguistic and religious preparation for the reception of the beneficiaries. This is directly linked to the fact that these sponsorship programs have been activated mainly as channels to allow the legal and safe arrival of people interested in family reunification or in any case linked by religious, ethnic or citizenship ties with the sponsors.

In most private sponsorship programs, individuals are granted the right to choose the beneficiaries directly: the state authorities then insert the beneficiaries of these programs into the national system that governs the recognition of international protection statuses. However, there are exceptions. Canada, Germany and Ireland have activated changes to this method of reception, imposing either a decisive role of the UNHCR in defining lists of people who can access private sponsorship programs or imposing a co-sponsorship between people who already emigrated who intend to become sponsors for family reunification, and national organizations that can guarantee greater and wider economic support. Britain, on the other hand, only allows for the UNHCR to draw up lists of people who can benefit from private sponsorships. These exceptions in the beneficiary selection models differentiate these private sponsorship programs from the Humanitarian Corridor program.

There is also a second difference between these two programs: HC is structured on the basis of collaboration between the team of social workers and the mentor families / volunteers from the pre-arrival phase to the implementation of the project until its conclusion. In private sponsorship programs, on the other hand, the only actors in the preparation and implementation of the reception and integration project are voluntary sponsors with less private organization involvement.