



Comunità di  
**SANT'EGIDIO**



**otto**  
**8 per**  
**mille**  
CHIESA VALDESE  
UNIONE DELLE CHIESE METODISTE E VALDESI

## **How do humanitarian corridors work? An Italian ecumenical project signals hope for Europe**

### **Humanitarian corridors are governed by a Memorandum of Understanding signed on 15 December 2015 by:**

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation – General Directorate for Italians Abroad and Migration Policies;
- Ministry of Interior – Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration;
- Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy; Waldensian Board; Community of Sant'Egidio

### **Humanitarian corridors are the result of an ecumenical collaboration between Catholics and Protestants:**

The Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI), the Waldensian and Methodist Churches, and the Community of Sant'Egidio have decided to join forces for a high-profile humanitarian project. The humanitarian corridors provide for the arrival in our country, over a two-year period, of a thousand refugees from Lebanon (mostly Syrians fleeing from war), Morocco (migrants from Sub-Saharan countries fleeing from civil wars and widespread violence) and Ethiopia (Eritreans, Somalis and Sudanese).

### **This pilot project is the first of its kind in Europe, and aims to:**

- prevent the death of refugees trying to cross the Mediterranean by boat
- combat the deadly business of smugglers and human traffickers
- allow people in “vulnerable conditions” (e.g. victims of persecution, torture and violence, families with children, single women, the elderly, sick, and disabled) to enter Italy legally on a humanitarian visa with the possibility to subsequently apply for asylum;
- allow refugees to enter Italy in a safe way because the issuing of humanitarian visas includes all the necessary controls by the Italian authorities.

### **The organisations that have proposed the project to the Italian Government are committed to providing:**

- legal assistance to beneficiaries of visas in the presentation of applications for international protection;
- hospitality and accommodation for a reasonable period of time;
- economic support for the transfer to Italy;
- support in the integration process in our Country.

**The humanitarian action is for all people in vulnerable conditions, regardless of their religious or ethnic background.**

### **The selection and issuing of “visas for humanitarian purposes” – a model for Europe**

The proposing organisations prepare a list of potential beneficiaries through direct contacts in the countries involved in the project or reports provided by local operators (NGOs, associations, international organisations, churches and ecumenical bodies, etc.). Each report is first verified by the people of the associations and then by the Italian authorities. The lists of potential beneficiaries are transmitted to the Italian consular authorities of the countries involved to allow monitoring by the Italian Interior Ministry. The Italian consulates in the countries concerned finally issue humanitarian visas “with Limited Territorial Validity” in accordance with article 25 of EC Regulation no. 810/2009 of 13 July 2009 which gives a member state the possibility to issue visas on humanitarian grounds, for reasons of national interest or because of international obligations.

For these reasons, **the humanitarian corridors are proposed as a model that can be replicated by the Schengen states** and not just by associations or private individuals.

### **Reception and integration are the responsibility of sponsoring organisations**

Once arrived in Italy, the refugees are welcomed by promoters of the project and, in collaboration with other partners, are hosted in different homes and reception shelters throughout the entire national territory. Here they are offered integration in the Italian social and cultural fabric, through the learning of the Italian language, schooling of minors and other initiatives. In this perspective, they are given a copy of the Italian Constitution translated into their language.

### **The initiative is totally self-funded**

The humanitarian corridor project does not in any way weigh on the State: most of the funds for the project come from the “Otto per Mille” system of the Waldensian Church, as well as other fundraising initiatives, such as the one launched by the Community of Sant’Egidio.

The Community of Sant’Egidio, Federation of Protestant Churches (as part of its *Mediterranean Hope* project) and the Waldensian Board through the Diaconal Commission of the Waldensian Church (CSD), provide the costs for hosting the refugees. Promoters of the project also make use of the collaboration of some other partners and associations. The Republic of San Marino also participates actively in the project by providing hospitality.

### **From Beirut to Rome: the number has reached 500 with the arrival at Fiumicino of another 100 refugees on 1 and 2 December 2016**

With the latest arrivals of 1 and 2 December 2016, the number has now reached 500 refugees, mostly Syrian, both Muslims and Christians. This is half of the thousand envisioned by the Humanitarian Corridor project by the end of 2017. The first family arrived on 4 February 2016, with a regular scheduled flight from the city of Homs. This was followed, on 29 February 2016, by the first substantial humanitarian corridor consisting of one hundred Syrians. A second group arrived on 3 May 2016, which also included an Iraqi family. They are all people in need of protection, including many children. On 16 June 2016, another eighty particularly vulnerable refugees arrived at the airport of Fiumicino, which included 30 children, mostly from Homs, a Syrian city razed to the ground as a result of war, but also areas of Aleppo, Damascus and Hasaka. Another 130 refugees arrived on 24 and 25 October 2016, and **the latest arrival of 1 and 2 December 2016 consisted of a hundred people**. This group

also included Christians and Muslims from the most war-torn countries such as Homs, Aleppo, Hama and Raqqa. The refugees who arrived with the humanitarian corridors from Lebanon have on average lived for three years in makeshift shelters in Beirut and Tripoli or in temporary camps, some just a few kilometres from Syria, such as the camp in Tel Abbas or Valle della Bekaa. The refugees are accommodated in different homes and shelters spread across the entire peninsula according to the “widespread reception” model.

### **Acknowledgements:**

*The creation of humanitarian corridors for migrants and refugees puts Italy at the forefront of solidarity and is a tangible embodiment of the principles of the Italian Constitution.* **Sergio Mattarella**, President of the Italian Republic, 3 March 2016

*Humanitarian corridors are a message to Europe to remind it that building walls is not the solution to resolve the migrant crisis.*

**Paolo Gentiloni**, Minister of Foreign Affairs, on the arrival of the group of refugees in Fiumicino on 29 February 2016

*A good example of what Europe can do to help migrants and to address the current flows of refugees.* **Nils Muižnieks**, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 2 March 2016

*As a concrete sign of commitment to peace and life, I want to mention and express admiration for humanitarian corridors in favour of refugees, launched recently in Italy. This pilot project, which combines solidarity and safety, allows helping people fleeing war and violence, such as the hundred refugees who have already been transferred to Italy, including sick children, the disabled, war widows with children and the elderly. I also welcome this initiative because it is an ecumenical one, supported by the Community of Sant’Egidio, Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, the Waldensian and Methodist Churches.*

**Pope Francis**, Angelus of 6 March 2016

On 28 June 2016, the “humanitarian corridors” project was presented to the European parliament in Brussels. Also at the end of June, the Italian foreign minister Paolo Gentiloni, during the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC), defined the experience of “humanitarian corridors” a “good practice”.

### **Awards**

On 23 June 2016, the “humanitarian corridors” project received the **Golden Dove Peace Prize** – international section – awarded by the Disarmament Archive. For 32 years, the prize has been awarded to journalists and international personalities who have distinguished themselves in promoting themes of peace, nonviolent management of conflicts and international cooperation.

On 5 August 2016, the promoters of the “humanitarian corridors” received the “**Terra e Pace**” award. For 19 years, the “Terra e Pace” Committee has been recognising associations, organisations or institutions that have distinguished themselves for peace activities.

On 23 October 2016, the IX Mediterranean Festival of secularism awarded the “humanitarian corridors” the “**Laici per il Mediterraneo 2016**” award.

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