

## EWSI Analysis on Voluntary and Citizens' Initiative: Italy

### 1 INTRODUCTION

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Are considered as citizens' initiatives all activities mobilising large numbers of volunteers (e.g. in workplaces, schools, local communities, etc.) to support immigrants' long-term integration and/or open up the public to integration matters and diversity. **These initiatives most notably involve people-to-people or mutual learning activities** matching migrants with mentors, peers or people volunteering their time or space. These initiatives may concern housing, mentoring, child or university-level education, extracurricular activities for children, lifelong learning, language learning, information provision, assistance with public services, translation, job preparation, awareness-raising/advocacy, etc.

Given EWSI's thematic focus, the emphasis is placed on citizens' initiatives focusing on long-term reception (e.g. during the asylum procedure) and integration (of beneficiaries of international protection and/or other categories of migrants), and not on the **initial front-line humanitarian reception for asylum-seekers** (e.g. food, clothing, shelter before entering the reception phase).

### 2 LONG-ESTABLISHED VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES

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*Description of initiatives that have been running for several years.*

Italy has a peculiar situation because third sector organisations play a crucial role in the provision of social services related to all different phases of migration and in promoting new initiatives. In fact, in many cases these organisations have proven to be in the best position to provide immediate and concrete solutions to the practical problems commonly experienced by immigrants (health counselling, language courses, legal assistance, etc.). In most cities, there is a close cooperation between local government and the NGO sector on integration initiatives. This highlights one of the main characteristics of Italian immigration policy: when there is a lack of intervention from the central government, associations and the NGO sector have risen to the fore. In this way, dealing with increasing numbers of migrants, some needs were met in a timely manner. On the other side, the other aspect of this *modus operandi* is the uncertain nature of these initiatives: they are funded on an annual basis and lack both continuity and final assessments of their efficacy. Italian volunteer organisations are operating within a difficult context: scarce public resources and an increasing request for social services, that are now more complex since old needs are accompanied by new needs following the current economic crisis, social and demographic changes, difficult migrant integration processes, the growing fragility of families and the educational emergency.

For these reasons, it is difficult to describe initiatives specifically carried out by citizens or volunteers not already members of or cooperate with associations. In many cases, initiatives are started by one or several volunteer(s), already members of an association, NGOs, ecclesiastic institution (e.g. Caritas) or local entities. If not, they later join these associations or organisations through networking. Moreover, civil society actors are particularly effective in Italy because they constitute a strong advocacy coalition that has taken part in each phase of the policy-making process related to migration.

It is almost impossible to name and describe all activities carried out by the various associations and organisations working on migrant reception and integration in Italy. In fact, there were 715 institutions and associations working for the social integration of foreigners in 2014 and each carries out several projects. Together, they provide a large number services:

- Italian language courses ([CPIA – Centri Provinciali per l’Istruzione degli Adulti](#), [progetto Petrarca – Corsi di Italiano L2](#), [Asinitas](#), etc.)
- Health services and counselling ([Naga Onlus](#), [Oikos Association](#), etc.)
- Legal assistance ([Associazione Studi Giuridici sull’Immigrazione - ASGI](#))
- Housing ([Project “Refugee in my house” by Caritas Italiana](#), [Foster Families by Progetto Integrazione Accoglienza Migranti-PIAM Asti](#), [“Refugees in family” by Centro Immigrazione Asilo e Cooperazione-CIAC Parma](#), etc.)
- Sport activities ([Association Balon Mundial](#), [Project Sport and Integration](#))
- Etc.

All associations are listed on [registry of associations and organisations](#). It is one of the most complete and up-dated resources in Italy about Italian Immigration Policies. The website is reference for all that work on migration in Italy.

## Examples of initiatives

### 1. [Migrador Museum](#)

This is a virtual museum that gives a face and a voice to those who don't often have the possibility of telling their side of the story. Inspired by Ellis Island, NY, it is the first online museum on immigration in Italy. The museum collects successful stories of migrants in Italy. The editorial staff is made by 6 persons (Italians – also living abroad - and foreigners) and the scientific committee is composed by 13 members working in different fields (research, communication, culture, etc.). Migrador Museum is supported by several volunteers affiliated to the following organisations: namely Associazione Volontari Sangue, NGO CESVI Onlus, Foundation Franco Verga, MCL Movimento Cristiano dei Lavoratori, Association Italia-Oman, SbloccaExport. The website has 500 + likes on [Facebook](#).

### 2. [Collettivo Alma](#)

“Alzo La Mano Adesso” (Collettivo A.L.M.A. : "Now I raise my Hand") is a collective created in 2011 which consists of 28 writers, journalists and bloggers of various origins, residing in Italy. They tries to document national debates through their respective individual blogs with the shared strategy to address important issues and "hot topics", particularly about migration and integration in Italy.

### 3. [Comitato di solidarietà rifugiati e migranti delle occupazioni ExMoi e La Salette Torino](#) (Refugees and Migrants Solidarity Committee)

Between 2011 and 2013 many of the asylum seekers who arrived in Italy could benefit of the ENA (North Africa Emergency Plan), a comprehensive integration project of the Italian government to tackle the humanitarian crisis following the turmoil in North Africa and the war in Libya. This program reinforced the SPRAR project (Services for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees), enhancing actions and funds to support refugees' job insertion and training placements, as well as providing access to public healthcare and dignified shelters. These projects were mostly useless in many ways: lacked to teach Italian, many were set in faraway locations, social integration, job trainings or admin assistance were not provided. Some were simply hotels other facilities where the refugees were forced to stay with nothing to do. The ENA ended abruptly in March 2013 and many refugees ended up in the streets.

6 years after the Turin Winter Olympic Games, the former Olympic Village (locally known as "Ex-MOI") was occupied on 30 March 2013 to tackle the refugee housing emergency in the city of Turin. There are currently around 600 people of over 25 different nationalities living at the Ex-MOI. This is the largest, most stable occupation for refugees that has ever taken place in Italy. It was carried out by the "Refugees and Migrants Solidarity Committee", a group of volunteers including students, migrants, committed citizens and social activists supported by various local associations. Since the occupation, the Committee has supported refugees with medical, linguistic and legal care, created a school within the premises and coordinated the distribution of food, furniture and other basic supplies.

In addition, the Committee initiated public awareness activities (demonstrations and temporary blocking public offices) and a legal procedure to get a Residenza status which grant its inhabitants the access to all social and health services, education, labour market and renewal of residence permit. The Municipality finally granted the refugees in the whole city a Residenza (residence status).

following the overcrowding of the Ex-MOI, the committee orchestrated the occupation of the five-story building which hosted around 60 people at the end of 2015. There is a bathroom every two rooms and a basic cooking area on every floor. The internal yard has been converted to a vegetable garden run by the inhabitants. The repair office is also self-managed. However, the ownership remains of the Church, who also takes care of the electricity and other utilities bills.

## 3 NEW VOLUNTEERS/CITIZENS' INITIATIVES:

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*Description of major initiatives started only recently, particularly since the large numbers of refugee arrivals in 2015.*

### 1. [Refugee welcome Italia](#)

Refugees Welcome Italy is a non-profit social association (NPO), part of the international network Refugees Welcome, born in Berlin and now spread across Europe. The Italian branch is active since July 2015, thanks to the work of voluntary and self-financed group of people (co-founders) who coordinate the offer of families to host families and the demand of refugees. They are from diverse background and highly qualified professionals active in social innovation, migration and inclusion policies, public policies, communication, business.

They work in partnership regional networks, relevant government institutions and associations already working in the field throughout Italy. After the [appeal of Pope Francis asking each parish to host a family of refugees](#), many were the single families who offered to host refugees in their houses. The reception in family during the first phase, however, presents critical issues. The project has almost 10.000 on [Facebook](#).

## 2. [Marcia delle donne e degli uomini scalzi](#) (March of barefoot women and men)

The March was held on Friday 11 September throughout Italy, in solidarity with asylum seekers. The initiative was launched at the Venice International Film Festival by a group of artists and activists, associations, trade unions, cultural centres, the film industry and some journalists. In just a few hours the initiative became a true [national event](#): 35 the cities joined. This initiative was also an opportunity of networking and collaboration among different organisations working with refugees.

## 3. [Coro Moro](#)

CoroMoro is a choir made of young asylum seekers (7) and refugees (1) living in the Valley of Lanzo, Piedmont Region. The CoroMoro was spontaneously formed in November 2014. It is composed of 10 amateur singers (2 Italians and 8 Africans) aged 20 and 30. The CoroMoro expresses a strong message of anti-racism and possible integration: boys sing and plays both popular local songs, mainly in the local dialect and African songs. The choir has 3.000+ likes on Facebook and is now famous at national level.

## 4. [Centro Baobab](#)

In Rome, near the Tiburtina station, a group of citizens, volunteers, provided help and assistance to about 35,000 migrants, passing through Italy to Northern Europe during the summer of 2015, with the support of the associations for health and legal issues. The [center Baobab was closed on December 6, 2015](#) for administrative reasons but the volunteers managed to set up a table of discussion with the special commissioner for Roma and to create an information and assistance point for migrants passing through Rome. [The Baobab was, throughout the summer of 2015, a landmark for refugees](#) passing through the capital that wanted to reach other European countries. Before Rome, Milan, during 2014, were an example where the citizens worked as volunteers, spontaneously, to welcome many [refugees passing through Milan central station](#). The experience continued, strengthened, also in 2015. This time, however, [with the help of the City of Milan](#) who coordinated the work of volunteers together to associations and social cooperatives.

## 5. [Bolzano, Binario 1](#)

In the summer of 2015, about 150 people volunteers (also from Innsbruck in Austria or Val Venosta) joined the citizens of Bolzano in receiving and helping asylum-seekers who arrived at the station of Bolzano. Every day, they brought food, clothes and shoes. were involved. They also provided refugees with some information about their current location and transport possibilities for the rest of their journey. Once the number of arrivals decreased, Binario 1 also started to arrange German and Italian language courses.

## 6. [Presidio permanente no borders Ventimiglia](#) (No borders camp Ventimiglia)

From Lampedusa to Calais passing through Ventimiglia, migrants are not free to move around Europe. The No Border Camp of Ventimiglia tried to resist police evictions of migrants while [activists helped about one hundred of refugees to meet their daily need of food, water, clothing, etc.](#) Each day a meeting was held involving activists and refugees to discuss the needs of the camp and decide what to do. Courses of Italian and French were organised for Refugees, which in return taught Arabic to Italians.

In addition, activists explain to migrants their legal situation in Europe and asylum procedure in countries they were aiming to live in. No Borders are neither an organisation nor an association, it is a trans-national network of groups and individuals who oppose to borders and claim for freedom of movement for every human being.

Many other initiatives were limited to first hand humanitarian help:

1. [#comenonletto](#) [#bookforfood](#).

The project was initiated in Milan by Caritas and journalist of the national catholic newspaper Avvenire, Alessandro Zaccuri, and hosted by a Parish. Every night, for 3 weeks, books were read to the population and in return, participants have brought food and/or clothing for the refugees. #bookforfood was the hashtag of the initiative.

2. Adequate reception, Bologna

100+ volunteers have participated in the project. Thanks to donations and fundraising carried out, a [self-managed dormitory](#) and a welcoming service "Refugees welcome point", where migrants transiting through the city could find comfort, stay for few days, use health services and receive a hot meal were put in the disposal of refugees. Since 2012, NGO Labas organises, in the same location, carpentry workshops and manages an after-school space as well as "The biopizza", where natural local food is produced with the aim to help people to get out of poverty, find a job and to know the services offered by the city.

## 4 PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

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*Description and comparison of the profile of volunteers active in old versus new initiatives.*

Italy has a long tradition of hospitality and especially a very active third sector as described above. The difference with the emergency of the last months was not so much in the number of volunteers involved, but in the fact that, since the refugees were sent throughout Italy and not only in major cities, members of voluntary associations and individual citizens started working in smaller villages with the newcomers. Initiatives already in place have simply changed or expanded their target.

As for immigrants or people of migrant background, they are not under-represented and have been active both within associations structured and guided by a religious motivation (Islamic Relief for example) and independent structures. They have been involved in all kinds of activities from the collection of food, clothes, blankets to the provision of translation and counselling.

## 5 INNOVATION ASPECT

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*Description and comparison of innovative or entrepreneurial aspects of the old versus new initiatives.*

The main difference between the old and the new initiatives is in the use of media to communicate and amplify their impact. The use of social media like Facebook or Twitter gives the initiatives a bigger platform and more potential to spread quickly.

This was for example the case for the March of barefoot women and men.

## 6 ADDED VALUE

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*Description of the added value of such initiatives (both long-established and new), including the uniqueness of their activities compared to the existing practices of the (1) state and (2) NGOs.*

There is a big difference between the initiatives developed online and those offline: the first ones contribute to a greater spread of information and assistance for those who have specific requests and they are relatively easy to maintain. The initiatives developed offline can become difficult to maintain in the long run.

## 7 IMPACT

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*Description and comparison of the impact of old versus new initiatives.*

Spontaneous initiatives are most likely to act as stopgaps, by relieving the responsibility of the state. In most cases, these initiatives become more structured associations competing for EU, national or local funds or linked to existing associations.