

# HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS

## in Europe

Update: September 25th 2019



**Dossier:**  
**Humanitarian Corridors in Italy, France, Belgium and Andorra, the Principality of Monaco**

• **Story and figures**  
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SANT'EGIDIO





Photo by Massimo Sestini

# Why Humanitarian Corridors?

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**October 3, 2013:** 368 people, mostly Eritreans, drown in the Mediterranean a few miles from Lampedusa; a hundred are saved by the intervention of some Sicilian fishermen.

**April 18, 2015:** over 900 people, embarked on an Egyptian fishing boat, die in the Sicilian Channel in the most serious shipwreck in the Mediterranean after the Second World War.

The two disasters show the tragedy of indifference and the closure of Europe, frightened by the growing influx of migrants fleeing Syria, but also other wars in the Middle East and Africa.

October 18, 2013 - October 31, 2014: Italy launches and leads the Mare Nostrum operation, an Italian initiative with no involvement by other European countries. The interventions of the Italian Navy saved thousands of people coming from the Libyan coasts. In October 2014, Mare Nostrum was replaced by Triton and Sophia, two humanitarian and military operations that involved 15 EU countries in patrolling the coasts and in combating the trafficking of human beings.

Meanwhile, thousands of people continue to die in the Mediterranean Sea: only for the period from October 2013 to March 2019, 20 thousand victims are estimated, including missing people. But many more are the victims from the beginning of the migratory flows towards Europe: over 38 thousand, according to several observers.

# A gap in the Mediterranean Sea

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**We have not been looking at these deeply unjust deaths, but we have dreamed of forcing the inertia and opening a legal and safe way.**

Working on the legal framework, we found a gap in Article 25 of Regulation (EC) n. 810/2009 of 13 July 2009, which provides for the possibility for EU states to issue humanitarian visas with limited territoriality, that is valid for a single country.

**In cooperation with the Italian Protestant Churches, and in agreement with the Ministries of the Interior and of Foreign Affairs, on 15 December 2015 we signed the protocol for the opening of the first humanitarian corridors: a thousand visas for as many Syrian refugees from the Lebanese camps.**

This agreement was followed by a protocol with **the Italian Bishops' Conference**, signed June 12, 2017, for five hundred refugees from sub-Saharan Africa (Eritreans, Somalis and South Sudanese) from the camps of Ethiopia. Both protocols were subsequently renewed.

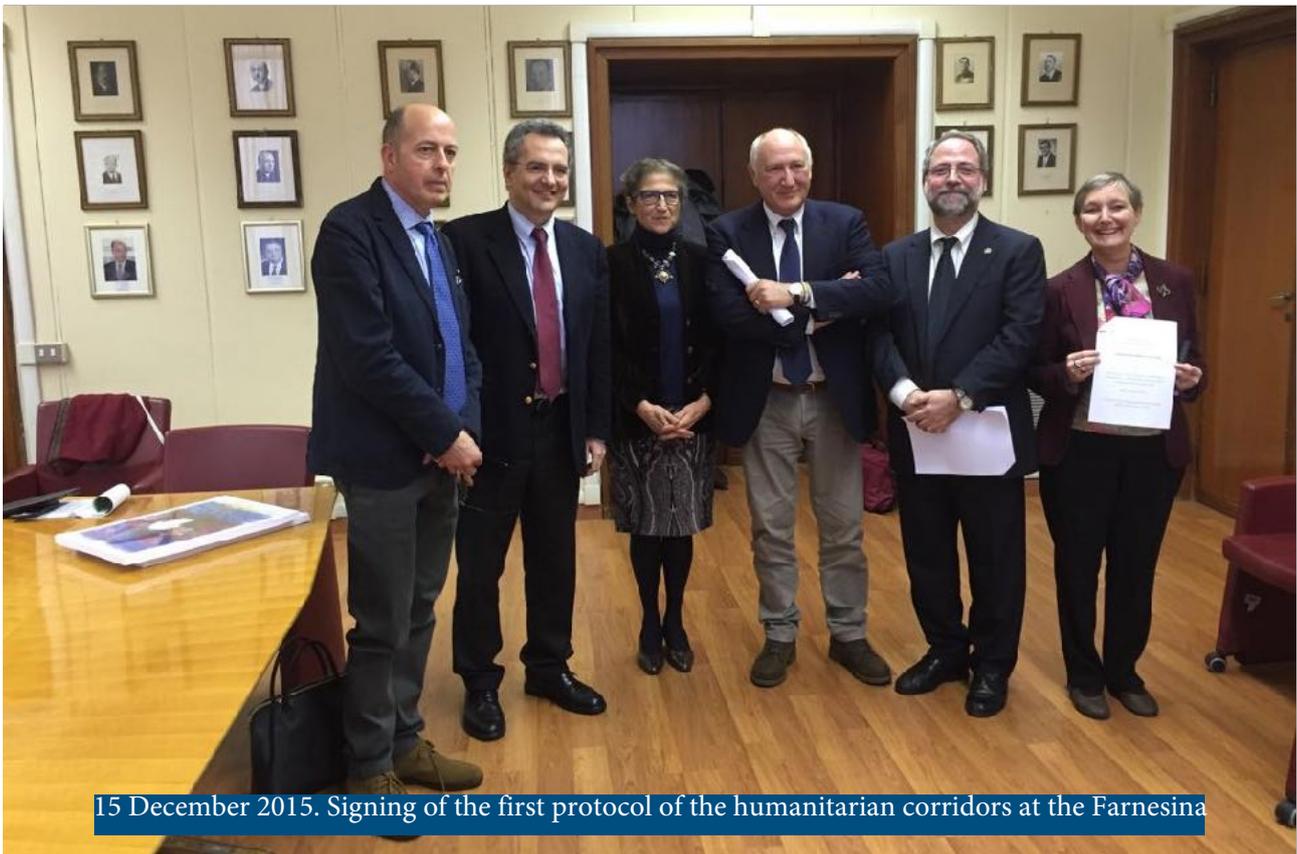
Both protocols were subsequently renewed, the first with the Italian Protestant Churches on 7 November 2017 for a further thousand visas from Lebanon, the second, with the Italian Bishops' Conference, on 3 May 2019 for a further six hundred visas from Ethiopia, Niger and Jordan.

The humanitarian corridors are intended to counter the exploitation by human traffickers and to offer a legal and safe access route for those who arrive and those who receive them. Access to the program is reserved for people in "vulnerable conditions" (for example, in addition to victims of persecution, torture and violence, families with children, the elderly, the sick, people with disabilities).

Once arrived in Italy, the refugees are welcomed at the expense of the member associations in residential complexes or houses. An integration path is provided for them, which includes the teaching of the Italian language, the enrollment of children in school, support for inclusion in the labor market. The whole process is totally self-financed.

The humanitarian corridors have united our country, showing the welcoming face of Italian civil society, which has taken charge of the program through the solidarity of many people. **This happens without any suffering for the state's coffers. The humanitarian corridors represent a good practice in Europe, they have been already replicated in France, Belgium, Andorra and the Principality of Monaco<sup>1</sup>.**

<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup> A Memorandum of Understanding between the Community of Sant'Egidio and the Principality of Monaco in support of the humanitarian corridors, for people welcomed in Italy, was signed on 30 May 2018.



**The humanitarian corridors to Italy are governed by a Memorandum of Understanding signed by:**

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation - General Directorate for Italians Abroad and Migration Policies;
- Ministry of the Interior - Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration;
- Community of Sant'Egidio, Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy and Tavola Valdese (for corridors from Lebanon);
- Community of Sant Egidio and Italian Episcopal Conference (for the corridors from Ethiopia)

The first protocol was signed on December 15, 2015 for 1,000 refugees from Lebanon, mostly Syrians. Once the sustainability of the program was evaluated, on 7 November 2017 another similar protocol was signed for the two-year period 2018/19 for further 1,000 refugees.

Meanwhile, by virtue of an agreement between the Italian Episcopal Conference and the Community of Sant Egidio, another humanitarian corridor was opened from Ethiopia for 500 African refugees (Eritreans, Somalis, South Sudanese). This agreement was renewed last May 3, foreseeing the arrival of 600 refugees from Africa (Ethiopia and Niger).

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- provide for vulnerable persons (eg victims of persecution, torture and violence, families with children, single women, the elderly, the sick, people with disabilities) a legal entry into Italy through a humanitarian visa and the subsequent submission of the asylum application;
- allow people to enter Italy in a safe way for everyone, even for people in the receiving country, because the release of humanitarian visas requires different levels of control by the Italian authorities.

**The organizations that proposed the program to the Italian State are committed to:**

- identify and select the beneficiaries of the program;
- provide legal assistance to visa beneficiaries in the presentation of the application for international protection;
- guarantee welcome and hospitality for a reasonable period of time;
- to ensure financial support for the transfer to Italy;
- offer support in the process of integration in our country.

### **The identification of the beneficiaries and the issue of "visas for humanitarian reasons"**

The proposing associations, through direct contacts in the countries involved in the program or reports provided by local actors (NGOs, associations, international organizations, churches and ecumenical bodies, etc.) prepare a list of potential beneficiaries.

Each report is verified first by the heads of the associations, then by the Italian authorities. Humanitarian action is aimed at all people regardless of their religious or ethnic background. The lists of potential beneficiaries are sent to the Italian consular authorities in the countries involved for their control.

Finally, Italian consulates in the countries concerned issue "visas with limited territorial validity", pursuant to art. 25 of the European Visa Regulation, which provides for the possibility for a Member State to issue visas for humanitarian reasons or reasons of national interest or due to international obligations.

For the aforementioned reasons the humanitarian corridors are proposed as a replicable model in the Schengen area, implementing a virtuous synergy between institutions and civil society.

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

Once arrived in Italy, the refugees are welcomed by the promoters of the program and, in collaboration with other partners, they are hosted in different houses and structures scattered throughout the national territory, according to the model of "widespread reception". Social and cultural integration in Italy is offered to them through the learning of the Italian language, the education of children and other initiatives.

### The initiative is totally self-financed

The humanitarian corridors in no way weigh on the state budget: the funds for the implementation of the program come entirely from the promoting associations.

As for the corridors from Lebanon, the funds come from the "Eight per thousand" of the Union of Methodist and Waldensian churches; as regards the corridors from Ethiopia, from the "Eight per thousand" of the Italian Catholic Church, accompanied in both cases by a fundraising campaign promoted by the Community of Sant'Egidio, which also deals with supporting projects started in France, Belgium, Andorra and the Principality of Monaco (the latter in support of the people welcomed in Italy).

The Community of Sant'Egidio, the Synodal Commission for Diaconia (CSD) and the Italian Caritas provide the costs for the hospitality of the refugees. Furthermore, the program promoters collaborate with some partners and third-party associations.



# Humanitarian corridors in figures

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## Italy

**Lebanon:** 1,717 refugees + 24 Syrians from Lesbos have arrived in Italy to date    TOT. 1.741

90% are family units, 689 are minors and 39.6% of all arrived refugees.

**Ethiopia:** 476 refugees + 22 from Turkey and Jordan have arrived in Italy to date    TOT. 498

90% are family units, the minors are 208; they represent 41.8% of all refugees arrived so far

**Table<sup>2</sup>.** Refugees arrived in Europe through humanitarian corridors

ITALY	2,239
ANDORRA	7
BELGIUM	150
FRANCE	364
<b>EUROPE</b>	<b>2,760</b>

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<sup>2</sup> Data update. Italy (September 25, 2019), Andorra (October 2018), Belgium (December 2018), France (June 27, 2019)

# Integration in figures

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The reception involved **145 different actors** (associations, groups of friends, parishes, religious, families, etc.) and **more than 3,000 volunteers** actively contributed to the different phases of the integration process.

83% of adult refugees have attended Italian language and culture courses for at least 6 months.

The minors were placed in public schools, generally in the classes corresponding to the registry age with positive results, also considering that most children could not attend school in refugee camps in Lebanon and Ethiopia.

Compared to the 1,000 refugees welcomed according to the first protocol:

- 104 have a job
- 24 attended vocational training courses
- 36 hanno svolto o stanno svolgendo tirocinio nelle aziende
- 26 are enrolled in university courses, continuing or converting the courses of study interrupted due to the war

Given that children are around 40%, this is an excellent result in terms of family autonomy.

After two years, 151 people have reached full autonomy and 304 have reached semi-autonomy, ie they depend on associations only for housing.

# Three stories to understand



"My name is Admon, I am 20 years old and I come from Al-Qaryatayn, in the province of Homs. A small, lost town, in a desert area of central Syria. Christians and Muslims, we lived in peace, we were simply Syrians. Then came the war, which is a demon, it changed everything. My city no longer exists: ISIS entered August 5, 2015 and destroyed everything, houses and churches, the monastery of Sant'Elia. I remember his party in September, thousands of pilgrims arrived ...

I fled with my family to Homs, but my mother was not quiet because my brother and I could be called back to the army, so we took refuge in Lebanon. Here we met

the Community of Sant Egidio and, therefore, we arrived in Italy with humanitarian corridors. It was December 2nd 2016. I still remember that day: a new life was opening, I could start dreaming again.

First of all I learned Italian, then I went back to night school because I would like to become a math teacher: I always liked math! And then, with Sant'Egidio's friends, I started visiting the elderly in a retirement home. I want to do something for others.

I have been living at Gianni and Marina's (the Italian couple who welcomed me) for two months and I feel great. I don't want to go back."

# Admon



Abudi arrived in Italy on 29 February 2016, with the first flight of humanitarian corridors. In Tel Abbas camp, in Lebanon, his family met the Community of Sant'Egidio and the possibility of safely arrive in Italy, without risking their lives. Abudi is 10 years old and has the "spina bifida", but also a great desire to live.

He immediately learns to ask everyone in Italian: "What's your name?" As soon as he arrived in Italy, he was admitted to the Gaslini hospital in Genoa and urgently operated. The doctors explain that they arrived just in time, before the state of health became irrecoverable.

On leaving the hospital, Abudi finds a new home and a little brother on the way. He begins to attend school in the third grade. Abudi takes part in any class activity, including school trips and go out with friends known at the School of Peace of the Community of Sant'Egidio.

And so June 2019 has come ... a few days ago Abudi ended the fifth grade. By now he is deftly handling the wheelchair to which his movements are entrusted, he will soon go on vacation again with his friends. It is very popular with neighbors who who have learned to know and love this perfectly integrated family.

# Abudi



Yonas has been living in Rome with his mother for just over a year. He was born in Eritrea and, when he arrived in Italy, he was one and a half years old, one of the youngest refugees who came to Italy with the humanitarian corridors from Ethiopia. He is a cheerful and lively child who attended kindergarten this year and made his first friendships. A peaceful life that he had certainly never experienced before.

Shortly after the birth of Yonas, in December 2015, his mother Senait decided to leave Eritrea and embark on a "journey of hope" to Europe. He had sold the gold of marriage, that is all he had, to pay for the ticket. But the journey was interrupted almost immediately in a refugee camp in Ethiopia. Here he met some people of the Community of Sant'Egidio and their journey continued: the arrival in Italy, the Italian language course for her, the kindergarten for his son, the search for a job.

Senait works as a domestic worker in a Roman family that has become very fond of her and her son. The integration has the smile of Yonas!

# Yonas



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