

In 2015, war and persecution led to a significant increase in forced migrations in the world, which reached levels not seen previously and involved immense human suffering. This is what emerges from the annual report released today by UNHCR, the UN refugee agency. The annual report "Global Trends" by UNHCR, reported approximately 65.3 million people forced to flee in 2015, compared with 59.5 million a year earlier. For the first time the thresholds exceeded 60 million people.

In many regions of the world forced migrations have been increasing since the mid-nineties. The main reasons are three: the crises, that cause large flows of refugees, last longer (for example, the conflicts in Somalia or Afghanistan are now entering respectively their third and fourth decade); dramatic situations are more frequent than in the past or crisis already in progress start again (the worst is now Syria, but in the last five years also South Sudan, Yemen, Burundi, Ukraine, Central African Republic, etc.); promptness and capability to find solutions for refugees have decreased since the end of the Cold War.

"More and more people are forced to flee because of war and persecution. This is in itself worrying, but also the degree of danger for the refugees are multiplying. A huge number of refugees and migrants drown in the sea every year; on the mainland, people fleeing war find their way blocked by closed borders.

Refugee Policy in Italy: from welcoming to integration. Impossible Mission ?

The system of reception of migrants in Italy is divided between the first and second reception facilities. The first reception is run by the local prefectures which are directed by Home Office. They are the hotspots and the regional hubs. The second reception facility is the SPRAR (Asylum Seekers and Refugees Protection System).

The reception system in Italy

First reception- The migrants who arrive by sea, as Home Office road map of September 2015 states, must go to a hotspot, where each person is identified. In theory, the migrants rescued at sea, who apply for international protection within the hotspot, are relocated in regional hubs. They are both those who fall within the relocation program (Syrians, Iraqis, Eritreans, who should go to EU countries according to a number of shares) and all the others. Those who do not want to apply for asylum should finish in the CIE (Identification and Expulsion Centres) and receive an expulsion order. In the hubs asylum seekers should stay between 7 and 30 days. At the end of this period the migrants should be included in SPRAR (Protection System for asylum seekers and refugees) which are second reception facilities.

Second reception - The second structure of reception, that is the SPRAR, is managed by the associations that present a project in conjunction with the municipality in which the structure will set up. So an association that wants to open a SPRAR in Taranto, for example, has to submit the project together with the municipality of Taranto: there is a ranking, the first of the ranking wins and opens the structure. Here only applicants for international protection enter and wait for the competent territorial commission to evaluate their application and to decide whether to accept it or not. In 2015 the seats in SPRAR were 22 thousand, in 2017 according to the Home Office plan they are expected to be 40 thousand. The SPRAR, unlike the regional hub, should ensure individual paths of integration. Therefore it is expected to provide Italian language courses and other projects that favour some vocational training. According to the roadmap of the Home Office, the regional commission should decide the destiny of asylum seekers within 180 days from their request (usually the associations take charge of appeals, in case of refusal). Actually the times are much longer and there are applicants for international protection who wait more than a year before receiving the response from the relevant Territorial Commission.

Problems - Because of the intensification of migration flows in 2015, the entire system is overflowing. The SPRAR centres are full and the international protection seekers remain in this second reception system for longer than it is expected, due to the slowness of the territorial commissions. When the SPRAR centres are full, the system blocks the transfer of migrants from the first to the second reception. For this reason the CAS (extraordinary reception centers) were opened. The CAS are managed by associations and cooperatives.

The Calabrese reception network. Despite the high number of asylum seekers in Calabria, the traces of their presence in the region are few. The region is, mainly, a transit land. The majority of applicants remain in the reception center of St. Anna, just the time needed for the identification and the handling of the paperwork for asylum. The waiting time, is of 20 days on average which may become 30 or 45 in case of missing documents or recorded irregularities. According to what has emerged from the interviews, access to information on the rights enjoyed by asylum seekers, is lacking over all the days spent in the field. The lack of information on rights and on external reality helps to create, -the applicants say-, a strong sense of alienation that is overcome only thanks to the bonds inside the camp and to the phone contacts with family or friends who can advise and help when they leave the camp.

Welcome to Riace, where migrants have improved the economy

In Riace, in the heart of Locri, in Calabria, there are still empty houses. Mimmo Lucano the mayor, who has put the reception of migrants at the top of the programs of his administration. since 2004, says: "We expect new guests," "Here they would find shelter and even a job," In recent months the mayor has been included by "Fortune" magazine among the 50 most influential people on the planet. Most of the 500 hosted migrants is engaged in community service as garbage collection, cleaning of beaches, craftworks. A little further north, at Acquaformosa, on the slope of the Pollino mountain, 90 hosted refugees managed to bring to life a center that the depopulation of the nineties had made almost invisible. Recently, four of them have started to work for the Town Hall: two of them work in public parks and street cleaning, another is employed in the immigration center and a girl works as a cultural mediator.

When Bahram Acar landed at Riace at four in a summer morning in 1998, he would have never thought to spend the rest of his life in that place. Arrived with a group of about two hundred Kurds in a boat of 35 meters left from Istanbul, he is now the only of that large group of migrants who has still lived in the town. "The others have left for different destinations and especially for Northern Europe, where the conditions for political refugees are simpler than in Italy. "But I wanted to work ... " Bahram says ". and in Riace I found a familiar place. These mountains reminded me of Kurdistan and I decided to stay. I've worked as a carpenter, a blacksmith and a bricklayer. People in Riace have helped me a lot, especially the mayor Domenico Lucano, who has always been interested in Kurds history "

According to Domenico Lucano, mayor for three terms, the landing of 1998 had a profound meaning for the Calabrian village, located in the southern part of the Ionian coast. Until then Riace had known only migratory outflows, with the peasants who abandoned their role as laborers to go to work in the industrial north. " In 1998 that boat met a doomed community," the mayor. says "The houses were empty and the local economy was paralyzed. With a group of friends, companions of many political and social activities, we founded the association 'Future City' to transform Riace in a host town. We wanted to create a town based on the same values of the local culture, untouched by capitalism and consumerism. A culture of hospitality that always finds a way to accommodate the foreigners "

Initiatives of the Ministry of Education in Italy Among the important initiatives of the Ministry of Education in Italy it is worth mentioning the agreement with the UNHCR to promote integration, reception and international solidarity in schools in a highly critical moment on immigration issue. Schools must aim to promote values as important as the social integration of refugees, therefore the Minister of Education, Stefania Giannini and the UNHCR Representative, through the agreement, have given way to a series of projects to inform young people about certain values.

One of these projects is the "www.viaggidaimparare.it" online platform where there are some interactive tools very useful to I and II grade secondary school teachers to help students understand the phenomenon of immigration and refugee crisis. Also this platform was built with the help of the 3rd October Committee, the organization which established on the 3rd October (October 3, 2013 in Lampedusa during a shipwreck 368 people died) the memory and welcoming Day.

In addition to boost the information on the phenomenon, a training plan was launched to 1,000 school principals, 10,000 teachers and 2,000 units of school staff in high schools with a high percentage of foreign students. Through the fund "Fami" (Asylum, Migration and Integration), in collaboration with the Home Office, and with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, 13 million euro were allocated for the projects proposed by the schools, aiming to increase the social inclusion of children and young foreigners ". Another important project is "Europe begins in Lampedusa", which provides for the Italians and European students a week (from September 30 to October 4) in Lampedusa to approach the phenomenon and raise awareness of the refugee issue.

"The recent crisis of refugees in Europe has highlighted a reality that was unknown. Today, we can no longer ignore what is going on in Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan and Somalia,. Because of war and persecution refugees have exceeded the figure of 60 million people - Stephane Jaquet, the UNHCR representative said. As humans our first duty towards refugees is to know them, to ask where they come from, why they left everything, because they risk their lives to escape. What happens to them when they arrive in Italy or in other European countries - he added - the desire to know and understand is the first real act of solidarity and acceptance of others. "