



Humanitarian corridors are open From Italy a signal of hope for Europe

Humanitarian corridors are the result of a Memorandum of Understanding signed 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;
- Community of Sant'Egidio; Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy; Tavola Valdese.

It is a pilot project, the first of its kind in Europe, and has as main objectives:

- avoid trips with the boats in the Mediterranean, which have already caused a high number of deaths, including many children;
- prevent the exploitation of human traffickers who do business with those who flee from wars;
- grant to people in "vulnerable conditions" (victims of persecution, torture and violence, as well as families with children, elderly people, sick people, persons with disabilities) legal entry on Italian territory with humanitarian visa, with the possibility to apply for asylum;
- permission to enter Italy in a safe way both for themselves and for all considering that the issuing of humanitarian visas foresees all the necessary controls by the Italian authorities.

Humanitarian corridors are the result of an ecumenical collaboration between Catholics and Protestants: the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Federation of Evangelical Churches, the Waldensian and Methodist Churches have decided to join forces for a high-profile humanitarian project.

The humanitarian corridors envisage the arrival in our country, over two years, of a thousand refugees from Lebanon (mostly Syrians who fled the war), Morocco (where land most of those coming from sub-Saharan countries affected by civil wars and widespread violence) and Ethiopia (Eritreans, Somalis and Sudanese). The initiative is totally self-funded by organizations that have promoted it through eight per a thousand of the Waldensian Church and other fundraising. It does not therefore weigh in any way on the State. The same Community of Sant'Egidio, the Federation of Evangelical Churches in the framework of the project Mediterranean Hope and the Tavola Valdese through the Synodal Commission for the diaconate (CSD), provide the costs for hosting refugees. Some associations, such as the Pope John XXIII Community, present for months in Lebanon in Tel Abbas, have facilitated, with their generous commitment, the realization of the project.

The refugees, once in Italy are not only welcomed, but 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.

For all these reasons the humanitarian corridors are proposed as a replicable model by Member the Schengen area, and not only by associations or individuals.

The selection and the issuing of humanitarian visas takes place on the following basis:

- Humanitarian action is aimed at all people in vulnerable situations, regardless of their religious or ethnic background;
- The proposing organizations through direct contacts in the countries affected by the project or by reports provided by local actors (local NGOs, associations, international organizations, churches and ecumenical organizations etc.) prepare a list of potential beneficiaries. Situation is verified first by the people of the associations, 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 Interior Ministry;
- The Italian consulates in the countries concerned, finally issue Visas with Territorial Validity Limited, pursuant to art. 25 of the Visa Regulation (EC), which provides for a Member State the possibility of issuing visas for humanitarian reasons or national interest or because of international obligations.

The organizations that have proposed the project to the Italian State are committed to providing:

- legal assistance to beneficiaries of visas in the submission of the application for international ;
- 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 countries involved in the project are, in the first phase, Lebanon (about 600 refugees) and Morocco (150), Ethiopia in the second (250).

We expect the arrival of a thousand people in 24 months. After the evaluation of the results by a monitoring commission, we will consider the possibility of continuing.

From Beirut to Rome, Monday, February 29

After the arrival of one family for health reasons, the first group to use the humanitarian corridors are 93 refugees, including 41 minors. Originating in different Syrian cities including Homs, Aleppo, Hama, Damascus and Tartous. Mostly Muslim, and also Christians, have lived, on average, for three years in Lebanon, in small spontaneous camps like Tel Abbas, in the north of the country, not far from Syria, or in other makeshift accommodation. In Italy will be hosted in different homes and shelters in Rome and Lazio, Emilia Romagna, Trentino and Piemonte.