

## Annual Report 2024

### A few highlights

As the Centro Astalli's annual report is released, the world is going through a very severe international crisis that calls into question the vision of the future. The year 2023 was characterised by unprecedented global challenges: geopolitical tensions, conflicts that shook various regions around the world, while restrictive, closed - if not discriminatory - migration policies exacerbate the precariousness, exclusion, and marginalisation of migrants. High is the price that refugees are paying even in Italy for the lack of investment in protection, reception and inclusion: increased physical, health and psychological vulnerabilities as a result of the longer and more difficult journeys, in the hands of traffickers, with no alternative legal routes of entry; bureaucratic obstacles to accessing protection applications; a reduced number of shelter places; cuts in the costs of inclusion services; lack of autonomous housing opportunities and consequent impossibility to imagine a future; marginalisation: these are just some of the critical issues that emerge from the 2024 Annual Report of Centro Astalli.

### **Marginality and inequality increase: the precariousness of refugees is the real emergency**

In all of Centro Astalli's services, the effects of inflation and emergency decrees issued by the government on immigration issues were strongly felt, causing the numbers of requests for help to rise exponentially throughout the past year. More and more refugees and asylum seekers are living on the streets, have precarious accommodation in Rome (and elsewhere), and need structured accompaniment. Individuals and single parent households also experienced numerous difficulties in coping with rising commodity prices. Actions to combat situations of marginality are particularly urgent in the case of single women with children (up by 40%), where the mother has sole responsibility for care and maintenance. For them it was necessary, as part of the social guidance and accompaniment service, to implement specific activities aimed at activating the institutional network of reference, with the social and health services, and educational institutions.

Access to first assistance services (canteens, showers, clothing distribution, clinics) is high in all territories. More than 2,600 users have used the canteen in Rome, which has distributed over 67,000 meals (there were just over 46,000 in 2022: an increase of 45%): among them, 28% (1 person in 3) are asylum seekers. The amount of migrant women

has increased, due to the large number of Ukrainian women, holders of temporary protection, who since the beginning of the conflict and for a long time afterwards did not need to turn to low-threshold services - probably thanks to the media campaign in support of them -, but also of Peruvian, Colombian and Venezuelan citizens, fleeing their countries because of situations of generalised violence and social insecurity. In Palermo, volunteers noted an increase in absolute poverty: the number of people accessing the first shelter services offered by the Association doubled. In Trento, the night dormitory service has been expanded to accommodate 177 homeless asylum seekers.

Marginalities and inequalities increase, but so do the complexities of the situations that migrant people face.

→ Cf. *Caring (data: Acceptance, Canteen, Clinic, SaMiFo, Legal Guidance Service), Social inclusion (data: Social Guidance and Accompaniment Service), Projects implemented in 2023 (Sharing a meal, Resilient communities, Dot2Dot, Building the future city with refugees), Centro Astalli Palermo, Centro Astalli Trento.*

### **Vulnerated and forgotten: the borders of reception you don't want to talk about**

The processes of simplification underway in an attempt to contain migration are not only doomed to failure over time, but make migrants' movements and journeys even more deadly and difficult.

**8,541 people lost their lives along migration routes around the world during 2023**, the year in which the most deaths were recorded: 3,105 people died and went missing in the Mediterranean Sea, more than 29,000 victims in total since 2014 (IOM data). The political responses to these tragedies have seen the escalation of the contrast to the activities of humanitarian ships; the implementation of economic agreements to deter arrivals, increase returns and cooperate with undemocratic regimes; the enactment of stricter access rules for asylum seekers in Europe, including minors, placing a serious mortgage on the respect of the rights of people already severely tested by situations characterised by persecution and violence suffered in countries of origin and transit. The onerous strategy of externalising borders, coupled with the practice of rejections and illegal expulsions, using brutal and coercive methods along European routes, results in hundreds of thousands of people being imprisoned in middle-lands, and increased burdens of trauma to which they are subjected.

The overall state of fragility is reflected in the almost 10,000 general and specialist medical examinations carried out at SaMiFo (+15% against a user base that increased by only 1.6%). In addition to the obvious vulnerability for people with objective conditions (the elderly, minors, pregnant women, etc.) or already known diagnoses, there is a more hidden vulnerability in the world of refugees, often linked to traumas experienced and not yet processed, which needs time, attention and reception in suitable places to emerge and begin treatment. Thinking of reserving reception (both in terms of

accommodation and documents) only for vulnerable people means choosing to contribute to increasing the number of vulnerable people.

→ See *Taking care (data Ambulatory, SaMiFo, Legal guidance service), Reception, Social inclusion, Projects implemented in 2023 (Resilient communities, Re-Build, Lighthouses 2)*

### **Failed reception: a blow to forced migrants' integration paths**

From 2017 to 2022, in parallel with the decrease in the number of landings, the reception system for holders of international protection (see SAI) was progressively contracted, disrupted and debased, leaving asylum seekers out of its purview. Over the years, the role of Extraordinary Reception Centres (SAC) has been strengthened, and here too, at the political level, there have been repeated calls for a wide distribution of guests in small facilities, only to favour large concentrations of people and the cutting of many inclusion services. All this has made the emergence and timely treatment of vulnerabilities more difficult, and it is no coincidence that in the centres managed by Centro Astalli in agreement with SAI, but also in the semi-autonomous accommodation made available by religious congregations, there is a high number of increasingly vulnerable people. Out of a total of 235 people received by Centro Astalli in Rome, 1 person in 6 has been a victim of torture and violence, and 1 person in 5 has a health vulnerability. Reception, from being a right, is becoming a concession, and often understood as a place of confinement rather than an opportunity to start a new existence project. A public reception system that fragments and postpones opportunities for inclusion to a 'second phase' accessible to a few is detrimental to paths of acceptance and integration. If we look at the overall picture of 2023 from the global to the local, the migration issue is certainly not approached from the perspective of the people who set out on the journey. The transformation of the reception system in Italy has dealt a severe blow to the widespread reception that has characterised the efforts of many realities in recent years to serve forced migrants. The realities of Centro Astalli's territorial network in 2023 welcomed a total of 1,177 people, according to an intervention model that focuses on promoting the person and building integration from day one. Widespread reception, which brings with it daily interaction between citizens and refugees, points the way to building a different Italy, more prepared to seize the opportunities of the encounter. This is why Centro Astalli has continued to invest in forms of co-housing between university refugee students and Italians. Two of the students hosted, from South Sudan and Burundi, arrived in Rome thanks to the University Corridors for Refugees (UNICORE) programme promoted by UNHCR.

→ See *Taking care (SaMiFo data), Hosting, Co-housing, Projects implemented in 2023 (Article 34, Studying and living together, Re-Build, UNICORE), Territorial network.*

### **The decline of the right to asylum: if bureaucracy becomes a weapon of discrimination**

Over the years, the bureaucratic process that forced migrants face in order to obtain residence permits is becoming increasingly long and cumbersome. Unstable lives collide with changing regulations and practices of individual offices, making every bureaucratic issue a potential maze with no exit. Long waits of up to twelve months for the issuance of a temporary document, e.g. for accessing public services and job-seeking, are compounded by the resulting administrative hurdles, such as the impossibility of obtaining SPID (the Digital Identity card), opening bank accounts, and activating internships and work contracts. In 2023, Centro Astalli, thanks to the support of the Vatican's Elemosineria, provided contributions to pay the taxes necessary to issue residence permits and travel documents for 463 refugees, mostly families from Afghanistan. At the moment when the people start, with difficulty, their journey to Italy, they are asked to pay a not insignificant fee.

More lonely, invisible, marginalised, bewildered, many foreign citizens turned to the legal service counters with expiring residence permits for special protection.

If we think that in the past this form of protection was granted by the Territorial Commissions in order to 'remedy' different types of situations, we can easily realise the negative consequences that the political decisions taken will have on many people.

→ See *Taking Care (data Acceptance, Legal Orientation Service)*, *Social Inclusion (data Orientation and Social Accompaniment Service, Job Search and Orientation Desk)*, *Projects implemented in 2023 (Building the Future City with Refugees, AIDR)*, *Territorial Network*

### **Social inclusion of refugees is an opportunity for the whole of society to grow**

Promoting the integration of refugees means assuming co-responsibility, working alongside migrants, embracing and enhancing their needs and aspirations. The projects implemented have largely focused on reinforcing services and activities aimed at this objective. In many cases, contributions made available through projects financed by public and private entities have been useful in responding to key support needs, such as food poverty, housing security and access to medical care.

Language is an indispensable element because it guarantees access to education, vocational training, work and sociality, which are essential in building the pathway to autonomy and a concrete dimension of citizenship. In all the territories of the Network, the Italian language school service has been strengthened, with a special focus on the youngest children for whom numerous after-school activities have been activated.

Education has always been a priority that characterises Jesuit action in favour of refugees all over the world. Guaranteeing them access and the right to education means offering a different future to many young people who have often known only war, violence and destruction in their lives, to enable them to invest creatively in their future.

During the year, the accompaniment to autonomy service in Rome supported 659 people. There were several job placement opportunities, particularly for young people between 18 and 29 years old, but often with short-term contracts, a phenomenon that negatively affected migrants' ability to emancipate themselves from progressive precarisation.

Promoting the autonomy of refugee persons means breaking down the barriers to their full and autonomous integration, which is why during the year activities were also implemented to promote their financial inclusion and work continued to counter the digital divide with the aim of guaranteeing refugees and asylum seekers access to public administration services.

→ See *Social inclusion (data. Orientation and social accompaniment service, Work desk and accompaniment to autonomy), Projects implemented in 2023 (Dot2Dot, Interculturation, Stand together, Resilient communities, Interconnections), Territorial network.*

### **Beyond reception: migrants and the right to housing**

The right to housing still remains a chimera for many forced migrants. The housing paths of those who leave the reception system are increasingly difficult, often aggravated by the absence of solid community networks on the territory and the criminalising stigma that accompanies them in public discourse. In this context, short-term renting for tourism purposes, especially in large cities, has in recent years represented a potential element in aggravating the housing hardship of the weaker sections of the population. The lack of access to the housing market, together with the evident insufficiency of accompanying paths out of reception, therefore ends up forcing people into situations of extreme housing hardship, such as forced cohabitation or living on the streets. In 2023, Centro Astalli's territorial network faced the challenges arising from inflation and the consequent economic and social marginality that affects asylum seekers and refugees by trying to facilitate their work and housing stability and in general the tools (not only economic) to orient themselves in the housing market.

→ See *Reception, Social inclusion (data: Social guidance and accompaniment service), Projects implemented in 2023 (Home Sweet Home), Territorial network*

### **We invest in the social heritage of our communities**

Italian society is a multicultural society in which, however, today we do not see the multiplication of processes of cohesion, exchange and encounter. We believe it is important to invest in the social heritage of our communities, enhancing the diversities that can make them richer and stronger. In all the realities of the Centro Astalli territorial

network, spaces for citizenship and justice are built every day, seeking solutions that meet the needs of refugees and of the society that receives them.

A total of 31,441 students were involved in awareness-raising projects on the right to asylum and interreligious dialogue in more than 200 schools in 19 Italian cities. A figure that encourages and motivates in building communities in which young Italians and migrants are together protagonists.

We are supported in this commitment by the convinced and indispensable collaboration of 737 volunteers: Italians, foreigners, or second and third generations of migrants in Italy and also refugees, who wish to commit themselves to a more open and fairer society.

→ See *Cultural activities, Campaigns and advocacy, Projects implemented in 2023 (New history, One class, one world, Pathways) Projects for schools, Volunteering, Media relations, International relations, Territorial network.*

**Centro Astalli in figures**

Users 2023: **22,000**, of which **11,000** in Rome

Volunteers: **737**

Centro Astalli Territorial Network Bodies: **8**

Meals distributed at the canteen in Via degli Astalli: **67,231**

People hosted in reception structures: **1,177**

Students met within the Windows and Meetings projects: **31,441**