REPORT
ON THE PASTORAL CARE
OF MIGRANTS
IN EUROPE IN 2025

NEIGHBOURS ON THE ROAD

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This volume illustrates the results of the Yearly Report on the Pastoral Care of Migrants in Europe, realised by the Catholic University of Milan (WWELL Research Centre) on behalf of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.[1]

Following the previous editions of the study,[2] the present Report offers a collection of twenty Good Practices, selected among a wide range of initiatives developed by Catholic organisations across Europe.

In this edition, the practices are illustrated and analysed along the stages of the migrant journey: from the borders and transit routes, through the houses of first welcome, the defence of rights and the protection of the most vulnerable, to the long work of building autonomy and belonging. It emerges how, thanks to the sensitivity and creativity of the many faces of the Catholic Church, welcome, accompaniment and integration become a lever for the empowerment of migrants, especially when they find themselves facing particularly challenging situations.

Disclosing the commitment of the Catholic world, throughout Europe, the report demonstrates how precious it is both in supporting the integration of migrants and in promoting a harmonious development of social coexistence.

July 2026

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1 The interviews and the analysis were performed by Samuele Casartelli, supervised by the Scientific Director of the research, Prof. Laura Zanfrini, and by Prof. Giovanni Giulio Valtolina.

2 Report on the Pastoral Care of Migrants in 2017; Migrant Ministry in Europe Report 2019; Migrants Ministry Report in Europe during the pandemic crisis 2020-2021; Migrant Ministry Report: Building the future with migrants and refugees: Best Practices 2023; Migrant Ministry Report in Europe: Free to Choose Whether to Migrate or Stay; Report on the Pastoral Care of Migrants in Europe in 2024: God walks with his People, are all available at: https://migrants-refugees.va/resource-center/documents/

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AIM OF THE REPORT

The aim of the Report is to provide the results of the Yearly research on the Pastoral Care of Migrants in Europe, realised by the Catholic University of Milan (WWELL Research Centre) on behalf of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. The Report presents a set of twenty Good Practices selected among a heterogeneous number of initiatives implemented, developed or supported by European Catholic organisations.

The thread that runs through this edition is the journey. The practices collected here are ordered along the path travelled by migrants and refugees themselves: from the borders and transit routes where the journey is at its most fragile, through the houses of first welcome, the defence of rights, the protection of the most vulnerable, up to the slow and patient work of building autonomy and belonging. At every stage of this path, the Report documents a Church that chooses to be present: not above the journey, but within it.

METHODOLOGY

The identification of the twenty Good Practices began with an extensive desk investigation conducted by the research team. Relevant initiatives were identified through open sources, organisational reports, diocesan and parish websites, and local-language materials, which often proved essential to grasp the concrete reality of practices in non-English-speaking countries. Each candidate initiative was verified in its Catholic identity, in the concreteness of its action, and in its consistency with the scope of the Report; particular care was taken to avoid overlaps with the practices already documented in the previous editions, and to ensure a wide geographical coverage together with a plurality of ecclesial forms: parishes, dioceses, religious congregations, missionary institutes, lay associations, foundations and Catholic NGOs.

The organisations were then contacted directly. As in the previous editions, institutional communication alone yielded limited results; personal and persistent contact, through email exchanges and phone calls

proved to be the most reliable way to establish trust and encourage participation, especially with small organisations run also by volunteers, whose generosity in the field is often matched by very little time for correspondence.

In total, more than sixty experiences were examined. Some were excluded because their Catholic identity could not be verified; others because their action, though valuable, was too broad in scale to be described as a concrete practice; others still did not respond despite repeated contacts. For the practices finally selected, an individual online interview was conducted with those responsible for the initiative: project managers, religious, operators and volunteers. In the first part of the interview, the interviewee presented the history and mission of the organisation, the origin of the practice and the needs it responds to; the second part focused on the seven parameters proposed by the Dicastery to evaluate Good Practices: Positive Impact, Sustainability, Innovation, Effectiveness, Participatory Approach, Collaborative Approach and Replicability. The interviews were then transcribed and turned into structured narratives, each of which was verified with the organisation itself, so that the Report contains only information confirmed by those who live these practices daily.

The focus of this yearly Report is the concrete, territory-level accompaniment of migrants and refugees along their journey. Rather than large institutional programmes, the Report privileges practices rooted in a specific place: a house, a parish, a neighbourhood, a border town. It is at this scale that accompaniment ceases to be a category and becomes a gesture: a warm meal offered to people in transit at a border, a bed prepared for a woman who has survived exploitation, a lawyer sitting beside an asylum seeker whose application has been rejected, a language café where a newcomer pronounces her first sentences in a new language. What emerges is a Church that accompanies not from above but from within, sharing a stretch of the road with the people it serves.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT – A THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

This assessment offers a transversal reflection rooted in the theological, anthropological and ethical foundations that support the good practices described in this Report. It complements the methodological and descriptive sections by highlighting the deeper motivations behind the actions of the different Catholic organisations across Europe.

The people at the centre of this Report, migrants, refugees, displaced persons and victims of human trafficking, arrive on the European continent from all over the world, many of them escaping war, injustice or persecution, in search of work, but above all in search of safety, freedom and a future. Their journey does not end when they cross a border: it continues through reception systems, legal procedures, unfamiliar languages, and the slow work of rebuilding a life. What they often find, at each of these stages, is a wall: of language, of bureaucracy, of suspicion. The practices collected here exist precisely at those walls, and they exist to open doors in them.

The image of the journey is not only descriptive; it is profoundly biblical. The people of God is a people on the move, from Abraham who leaves his land, to Israel in the desert, to the Holy Family fleeing to Egypt, to the disciples of Emmaus who recognise the Lord in a stranger who walks beside them. The organisations documented in this Report place themselves, consciously, within this tradition: they do not wait for the journey to end before offering care, but walk alongside people wherever the road has taken them, at a border fence, in a legal limbo, in the long years of integration.

The image of the journey found a powerful confirmation, during the drafting of this Report, in the words of Pope Leo XIV during his pastoral visit to Lampedusa on 4 July 2026, thirteen years after the historic journey of Pope Francis. Rereading the parable of the Good Samaritan, the Holy Father observed that Lampedusa and Linosa lie today along a road as dangerous as the one that led down from Jerusalem to Jericho, travelled by thousands of human beings stripped of everything. His conclusion condenses the spirit of all the practices collected in this Report: "we become neighbors by acting as neighbors" (Homily of Pope Leo XIV, Pastoral Visit to Lampedusa, 4 July 2026).

The Catholic organisations documented here act out of faith in the ontological dignity of every human being. Even when they do not share a common language, culture or religion with those they serve, they recognise in every person the image and likeness of God. On this foundation rests their commitment to the weakest and most vulnerable: the woman rescued from exploitation, the family displaced by war, the asylum seeker left without status and therefore without rights, the unaccompanied minor who has crossed a continent alone. Their dignity is untouchable; it is inherent; and where laws, procedures or public opinion fail to protect it, these communities step in to defend it.

A distinctive trait of this edition is the ordinariness of the protagonists. Alongside religious congregations and diocesan structures, the Report

gives ample space to parishes, small associations and groups of lay volunteers. Their practices are rarely spectacular: a shared meal, an accompanied visit to a public office, a room made available, a weekly conversation. Yet it is precisely in this ordinariness that their theological depth lies: hospitality offered along the road, in the style of Emmaus, where the guest reveals himself to be a gift.

Another trait that crosses the whole collection is the capacity to remain present where others withdraw. Several practices operate in places marked by rejection: border areas where people in transit are pushed back, reception facilities at the edge of cities, the streets. Others accompany those whom the system itself has set aside, such as asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected and who survive without status. The choice to remain beside these people, without conditions and without calculating the probability of success, is perhaps the clearest ethical signature of the Catholic commitment documented here: a fidelity to the person that does not depend on their status, and that lasts as long as the journey lasts.

It is with this belief that this collection of good practices implemented by Catholic organisations across Europe, working in the best interests of migrants and refugees, has been developed.

DEVELOPED ACTIONS

From more than fifty experiences of generous service to others, we have selected twenty Good Practices, grouped into six themes that follow the stages of the journey:

I. **On the Move: Presence at Borders and in Transit**

II. **Houses of First Welcome**

III. **Defending Rights and Legal Dignity**

IV. **Protecting the Most Vulnerable**

V. **Pathways to Autonomy: Work, Housing, and Long-Term Integration**

VI. **Communities that Welcome: Parishes and Local Networks**

In *On the Move: Presence at Borders and in Transit*, three Good Practices stand where the journey is at its hardest: at the borders of Europe and along its transit routes. Here the Church does not ask people where they are going or whether they will be allowed to stay; it offers rest, warmth, a meal, a listening presence to those who are exhausted and often invisible. It is a ministry of the road in the most literal sense: humanitarian transports that cross into a country at war, and a humanising pause offered to people on the move, so that no one, not even in transit, is treated as merely passing through.

In *Houses of First Welcome*, three experiences show hospitality in its most concrete form: a roof, a bed, a table, a name remembered. These are houses where migrant women, families, and newcomers are welcomed not into a facility but into a home, where daily life is shared and each guest is known personally. First welcome, in these practices, is never mere shelter: it is the restoration of the elementary experience of being expected by someone.

In *Defending Rights and Legal Dignity*, three practices stand beside those for whom the law has become a labyrinth. Legal counselling services make the asylum system intelligible and accessible to those who would otherwise face it alone; and where the system has already said no, social workers continue to accompany rejected asylum seekers who survive in a legal limbo, refusing to let a negative decision define the worth of a human being. In these practices, competence itself becomes a form of charity.

In *Protecting the Most Vulnerable*, three Good Practices enter worlds of deep suffering: that of women marked by exploitation and prostitution, and that of unaccompanied minor refugees who have crossed a continent alone. Both require a particular delicacy: discretion, patience, respect for each person's story and each person's time. Here accompaniment is measured not in numbers but in trust slowly rebuilt, and in the quiet recovery of a dignity that was never lost, only wounded.

In *Pathways to Autonomy: Work, Housing, and Long-Term Integration*, four experiences accompany the longest stretch of the journey: the years in which a refugee becomes, simply, a neighbour. Vocational training, socio-professional insertion, housing support, and structured integration programmes make migrants protagonists of their own future rather than recipients of assistance. The organisations involved measure their success by their own progressive uselessness, as each person accompanied gradually ceases to need them.

Finally, in *Communities that Welcome: Parishes and Local Networks*, four practices show what happens when welcome becomes the identity of an entire community. Parishes that have made hospitality their ordinary way of being Church, conversation cafés where newcomers and locals meet as equals, networks of volunteers and advocacy initiatives that transform the way a city looks at migration. Integration, in these pages, is never assimilation: it is the mutual enrichment of those who welcome and those who arrive, and the discovery that a community that opens itself does not lose its identity but deepens it.

We end this journey among generous people who restore hope in humanity: women and men, religious and lay, who in dozens of European cities and villages have chosen not to look away. Their practices, different in scale, context and method, all say the same simple thing to those who arrive: you are not alone on this road.

SELECTED BEST PRACTICES

I. ON THE MOVE: PRESENCE AT BORDERS AND IN TRANSIT

MAISON EFFATÀ – BORDERS PROJECT, SCALABRINIAN MISSIONARIES (CS) AND ASCS, CALAIS, FRANCE

Country and Place: France, Calais (the former rectory of the Notre-Dame cathedral, Rue de Croy 1B, in the centre of Calais; Diocese of Arras).

Initiative: Maison Effatà, a house of welcome for men in transit, opened in January 2024.

Beneficiaries: Single men in transit, most of whom hope to cross the Channel to the United Kingdom; priority is given to those with fragilities: convalescents after injuries, persons with pre-existing conditions, or those particularly worn down by life in the informal camps and by the journey. Guests are referred mainly by Secours Catholique (Caritas) and the other organisations active in Calais.

Theme: Short-term reception (usually up to five weeks); health and bureaucratic accompaniment and orientation; community life and shared meals; creative and recreational activities (small workshops, basic English classes, outings in and around the city).

Project Duration: Opened in January 2024, ongoing.

Funding Source: Donations: on the Italian side through ASCS (Agenzia Scalabriniana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo); on the French side through a parish-based association (Béthanie) and local fundraising.

Website: ascs.it

Catholic Organization: Parish of Calais, entrusted to the Missionaries of St. Charles (Scalabrinians); the building is owned by the Diocese of Arras; the house's activities are run by ASCS.

Description

Maison Effatà was born at the beginning of 2024 from the local Catholic parish of Calais, which had been entrusted some years earlier to the

Missionaries of St. Charles, the Scalabrinians, a congregation founded in 1887 by St. John Baptist Scalabrini and dedicated to migrants, present today in some thirty-four countries. It occupies a building owned by the Diocese of Arras, the former home of a priest long active with migrants in Calais who had informally welcomed people there; when he moved away, the Scalabrinians, with the support of ASCS (an Italian third-sector body of the Scalabrinian congregation, where lay people such as M.A. work), turned that experience into a more structured, longer-term project. M.A. was asked to come from ASCS in Rome to give continuity to the house, around the volunteers who pass through for relatively short periods. After a logistical and bureaucratic pause in the latter part of 2024, the activity resumed and continued without interruption through 2025.

For more than twenty years Calais, the European port closest to the British coast, has seen a constant, high flow of migrants in transit attempting to reach England; they come mainly from the Horn of Africa, especially Sudan, and from the Middle East and Central Asia. Maison Effatà welcomes single men, a choice made in dialogue with the other organisations already active in Calais, where the unmet need was hospitality for lone men. Guests are referred above all by Secours Catholique (Caritas) and are hosted for a limited period, usually up to five weeks (extendable in more delicate cases). They are accompanied in their medical care and in bureaucratic matters, and they share in the running of the house, helping with cleaning and preparing meals together with the staff, each according to their condition. Alongside this, the house offers creative and recreational activities: small workshops, basic English classes and outings that let guests experience the city and its life as any ordinary resident would, something particularly valued by people who otherwise live at the margins of the city. The aim, M.A. explains, is for the house to be *"not simply a guesthouse, but a community experience, a place where relationships are created"*[1]: guests use the kitchen and the house freely during the day and, in the evening, *"we try to have dinner all together."* The house can currently host eleven people (twelve soon); ASCS records report more than 150 guests since its opening in January 2024, including occasional hospitality for relatives of shipwreck victims.

The wider context has become increasingly securitarian: police controls and operations aimed at discouraging the presence of migrants and at preventing departures towards the United Kingdom have intensified, while institutional action remains repressive rather than humanitarian.

1 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

One effect is that people now remain on the territory for longer, which prompted the house to weigh whether to extend its five-week stays; it chose to keep them, since the shorter cycle allows it to welcome more people in a context with very few reception places. In 2025 nineteen volunteers served in the house, the large majority Italian and the large majority women; significantly, Maison Effatà hosted its first French volunteers, an important development for anchoring the project in the local territory.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

By late October 2025 the house had welcomed seventy-four men in longer-term hospitality (the five-week stays), together with fifteen people in short-term stays, some of them relatives of shipwreck victims; by the end of the year, it will have hosted more than one hundred people, and it is almost constantly full. Guests came overwhelmingly from Sudan (fifty-two of the seventy-four long-term guests), with smaller numbers from Syria, Tunisia, Eritrea and other countries, and were for the most part young men aged between eighteen and thirty. What brought them to the house was above all exhaustion and stress (thirty-five cases) and injuries sustained in crossing attempts (twenty-three); of the long-term stays that ended, thirty concluded at the agreed term and seventeen with the guest reaching the United Kingdom. A telling sign of impact, for M.A., is that former guests keep in touch even after crossing to the UK: they have recognised the house as *"something at least a little like a home."*

SUSTAINABILITY

Because in France a parish cannot directly manage such a project, the house is run, for utilities and practical matters, by a parish-based association (Béthanie), whose members are drawn from citizens active in parish life and sensitive to migration, and who serve as a valuable link between Maison Effatà and the people of Calais. Funds come from donations: mainly the Italian side through ASCS, whose relationships are more consolidated, and a smaller but growing French and local contribution. The young association and the difficult local fundraising

environment make sustainability a live concern; the arrival of the first French volunteers is, in this respect, an encouraging sign for the future rooting of the project.

INNOVATION

The distinctive feature is the attempt to offer, within the very short windows available, not just shelter but a genuine experience of community, through shared meals, creative activities, language classes and relationships, in a context (Calais) where most provision is necessarily emergency-based. The deliberate decision to keep the five-week model, rather than lengthen stays as conditions might suggest, is itself a considered choice: it maximises the number of people the house can reach where reception places are scarce.

EFFECTIVENESS

The project does not yet use structured evaluation tools or formal objectives; M.A. is candid that *"this need has not emerged so far."* Effectiveness is read qualitatively, through the near-constant occupancy, the pattern of stays that end in an orderly way (at the agreed term or with a successful crossing), and the continuing relationships with former guests.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Guests share in the running of the house (cooking, cleaning). Beyond this, the team gradually identifies individuals who move from being guests to a role between volunteer and team member. One such person has been part of the team: he had entered like any other guest but, having decided to try to remain in France, had fallen into a difficult phase, unable to act to stabilise his situation; referred to the house, he was offered this role, which he gladly accepted. He is valuable both for language, since many guests speak only Arabic, which few volunteers know, and as a way of helping someone build a more structured plan for the future. Some paid operators in the wider network share the same migratory background.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The most striking feature of Calais, M.A. stresses, is a wide, heterogeneous and very cohesive network of organisations that work closely

together, partly in response to the near-total absence of dialogue with local and central institutions, which tolerate but do not assist the humanitarian organisations. Maison Effatà is an active and recognised part of this network and, together with the other reception houses in the city, belongs to the national Toile network of welcome experiences across France; notably, it is the only member of that network whose activities are run, thanks to ASCS, by a non-French organisation. The Diocese of Arras owns and provides several spaces that serve as reference points for the various organisations, including Maison Effatà itself, and the bishop visits periodically. The project is, in M.A.'s words, *"a creature of the local parish."*

REPLICABILITY

The exportable element is precisely the capacity and willingness to network, to set aside ego and differences of inspiration (confessional, political, secular) to build something that is *"the sum of all the actors, and something more."* Calais is, M.A. suggests, an interesting case study for exporting this model of collaboration, set against a stark imbalance: only some forty to forty-five reception beds across three houses for an estimated population of many thousands present in the Calais and Boulogne-sur-Mer area. Full residential reception of the kind Maison Effatà offers requires means that not every organisation has; but the network also offers more accessible services that could be replicated elsewhere, such as the distribution of goods and food, laundry, and legal, bureaucratic and medical orientation.







JRS KOSOVO, JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE, KOSOVO

Country and Place: Kosovo, Pristina (JRS Kosovo Country Office), with daily presence in the State-run centres for migrants and asylum seekers managed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Initiative: Accompaniment of asylum seekers, migrants and beneficiaries of international protection in Kosovo's asylum-seeker, temporary-reception and detention centres, and integration support for those who obtain protection.

Beneficiaries: Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants (including detained and undocumented persons and, increasingly, working migrants) and beneficiaries of international protection; in 2025, predominantly men.

Theme: Medical assistance; mental-health and psychosocial support; legal orientation; Albanian-language and accredited integration courses; vocational training and employment mediation; social activities; advocacy and capacity-building with the authorities.

Project Duration: JRS founded in 1980 by Fr. Pedro Arrupe SJ; JRS active in Kosovo since 2001 (initially with landmine victims); collaboration with the first asylum-seeker centre since 2010 – ongoing.

Funding Source: funded by JRS international; fundraising

Website: jrs.net (international); see.jrs.net (South East Europe).

Catholic Organization: Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), a work of the Society of Jesus; JRS South East Europe covers Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia and Kosovo.

Description

As O.S. makes clear at the outset, *"We are JRS, Jesuit Refugee Service."*[2] JRS is a Christian organisation founded in 1980 by the Spanish Jesuit Fr. Pedro Arrupe, in response to the plight of refugees forced to flee. In Kosovo, JRS began working in 2001, immediately after the war, first with landmine victims; after independence (2008), as the country adopted its laws on foreigners, JRS began in 2010 to collaborate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the first asylum-seeker centre.

2 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

JRS now works in three State centres under the Ministry: the asylum-seeker centre, the detention centre (built around 2012) and the temporary-reception centre (opened roughly four years ago). Kosovo, not bound by the Dublin Regulation, has long been a transit country on the Balkan route; the temporary-reception centre gives newly arrived migrants up to fifteen days, with legal orientation, to decide whether to apply for asylum or leave. The detention centre O.S. describes plainly: *"in poor words, it is a jail for non-criminals … a jail for people looking for a better life,"* where many are held simply for lack of information. A newer phenomenon is that of working migrants. Kosovo has four forms of international protection – refugee status, subsidiary, temporary, and stateless status.

A growing challenge comes from inter-State agreements. Kosovo has signed an agreement with Denmark to receive around 300 people finishing prison sentences, and another with the United States; under the latter JRS is accompanying, for example, a 78-year-old man who had lived in the United States since the age of three and was sent to Kosovo – a country he did not know – arriving very ill and with thirty dollars in his pocket. Such agreements, O.S. notes, leave unclear what becomes of these people once their situation is resolved.

Services

In the centres JRS provides medical assistance (its largest single service), psychological support, social activities and – in the asylum-seeker centre – Albanian-language courses, since those who obtain status will go through integration in Kosovo; legal support is being extended to the detention and temporary-reception centres. For those who receive protection, JRS offers a set of accredited integration training modules, certified jointly with the Ministry (JRS having helped to draft the State integration curriculum), accredited Albanian-language courses, career profiling and counselling, professional courses with accredited VET schools, and mediation towards employment.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

According to JRS Kosovo's 2025 annual data, the office reached 528 beneficiaries (383 individuals and 145 families), with mental-health and

psychosocial support (242) and health care (177) as the largest services, followed by emergency aid (61), education (26), and livelihoods (22). JRS is, in O.S.'s words, *"the only organisation"* present every day in each centre, accompanying people in their daily challenges.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is pursued on two fronts: services to beneficiaries and capacity-building of the institutions. JRS works to have the Ministry's Department for the Integration of Foreigners take ownership of the services – *"we want them to have the ownership,"* O.S. explains – referring cases and building capacity so that the State can sustain what JRS has introduced.

INNOVATION

For Kosovo the work is itself innovative: after the withdrawal of UNHCR's partners, JRS is now the sole organisation offering these services, which has earned it *"some green light from the institutions"* and daily access to the centres. JRS also helped create the State integration curriculum, embedding integration from day one: *"integration starts from the first day they arrive in a country that they don't know."*

EFFECTIVENESS

Outcomes are measured through tests and certification for language and integration courses, and for employment by tracking whether a person is still working three months, six months and one year after placement. JRS keeps each case on track and works in collaboration with the Ministry, while remaining critical where principle requires – *"as JRS, we are completely against the detention centre."*

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Participation is central: *"before we organise it, we always have meetings with the refugees,"* with a *"do no harm"* and human-rights-based approach, including an "inception phase" of workshops with potential beneficiaries before designing a project. A group of Ukrainian women, beneficiaries of JRS, have registered their own refugee-led organisation, which JRS supports – in contact with JRS Europe – to build their skills and autonomy.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

JRS works closely with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and its Department for the Integration of Foreigners, with accredited VET schools, and within the JRS South East Europe and European networks, exchanging experience at regular meetings. It took, O.S. notes, *"around three years to create this trust and to be able to enter the centres"* – access that colleagues in some other European countries do not have.

REPLICABILITY

O.S. identifies the transferable element as the relationship of trust built with the institutions, which secured JRS daily access to the centres. JRS, in turn, learns continually from The model depends on a fragile context where the young State still needs the expertise of civil-society organisations; colleagues across Europe through its networks. She also notes a paradox of context: although Kosovars were themselves once migrants, attitudes mix genuine empathy with skepticism, and greater openness is shown towards Ukrainians than to people from the Middle East or Africa – a pattern she observes across Europe.




JRS



A MINISTRY OF PRESENCE: CATHOLICS AND ORTHODOX TOGETHER ON THE BALKAN ROUTE, JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE, SKOPJE, NORTH MACEDONIA

Country and Place: North Macedonia, Skopje (with activities in Gevgelija)

Initiative: Presence and accompaniment of people on the move in transit, reception and detention facilities

Beneficiaries: Migrants, asylum seekers and foreigners accommodated in State facilities

Theme: Ecumenical partnership; presence and accompaniment; psychosocial and legal support

Project Duration: Since 1999 to date

Funding Source: JRS international network (Rome and Brussels offices) and international donors

Project: https://jrs.net/en/country/macedonia/

Catholic Organization: Jesuit Refugee Service (Society of Jesus)

North Macedonia sits at one of the crossroads of the Balkan route: people who enter Europe from Turkey through Greece cross its southern border and continue north towards Serbia and, from there, towards Central and Western Europe. Almost nobody plans to stay. *"Macedonia is not a country of residence for migrants; it is a transit country. People do not stop here for a long time: they use the country only as a line to continue their journey"*[3]. In this landscape of constant movement, the Jesuit Refugee Service has chosen to do something apparently simple but actually very difficult: to be there, day after day, in the places where people on the move are held, received or detained.

The history of JRS in the region goes back to the Croatian Jesuit Fr. Stjepan Kušan, who founded the service in Croatia in 1993, during the Yugoslav wars, and progressively extended it to Serbia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. The country office in Skopje opened in 1999, when hundreds of thousands of people fleeing the Kosovo war sought refuge in Macedonia, and it has now been working without interruption for more than twenty-five years.

3 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

What makes the Macedonian experience unique in the JRS world is its ecumenical architecture. Catholics represent less than one per cent of the population of a country whose religious majority is Orthodox. Instead of working alone at the margins, JRS built a stable partnership with the Macedonian Orthodox Church: *"Perhaps nowhere else in the world does something similar exist. The Orthodox Church arranges the agreements with the institutions, and the Jesuit Refugee Service is its partner. We have been cooperating for twenty-five years"*. The agreements that allow JRS to enter public facilities are signed with the Orthodox Church, with JRS named as its operational partner. They are deliberately open-ended: *"This is an open agreement; it is not for one year. When you have a time-limited contract, obtaining a new one is very hard"*.

Thanks to this arrangement, the small team enjoys a level of access that very few organizations in Europe can claim. JRS is present in the temporary transit centre of Vinojug, near Gevgelija on the Greek border; in the open reception centre for asylum seekers in Vizbegovo, on the outskirts of Skopje; in the Reception Centre for Foreigners in Skopje, where freedom of movement is restricted; and in prisons where foreign nationals are held. In the Reception Centre for Foreigners, JRS has opened and manages a communication room where people caught up in smuggling proceedings, often held for days or weeks as witnesses, can telephone their families: *"Today you can call your family and say: hi, I am okay"*. The team also organizes recreational activities, football, billiards and table tennis, so that waiting time becomes inhabited time, and contributes food, hygiene items, psychosocial support and free legal information on rights and procedures.

Behind these services lies a precise pastoral philosophy, expressed in a single word that the interviewee repeats like a refrain: presence. *"Sometimes you do not need to do something in particular; you just need to be present in the centre. Presence is much more important. If you lose the presence, to return is very difficult"*. Presence requires discipline: the agreements come with rules, and the rules are kept scrupulously, because a single violation could close doors that took decades to open.

The team is deliberately small and entirely professional: a psychologist based near the southern border, a social worker, a lawyer serving as advocacy officer, a project director and a country director, a woman close to a religious community, supported by an accountant. Volunteers, common in Western European projects, are not part of the model: access to public facilities is strictly regulated and nominal, and volunteering itself has little tradition in the country.

The figures reflect the nature of a transit country. In the year under study, around 150 asylum applications were lodged, while several thousand people passed through in transit, most of them remaining in the country only a few hours or days. Only a handful of persons currently hold international protection in North Macedonia; JRS knows and accompanies each of them personally, together with the twenty or so people present on any given day in the facilities where it works.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

Contact with each person is often brief, but it is dense: reliable information on rights and procedures, a first psychological support, a telephone call home from a facility with restricted movement, a warm meal. *"They do not want nice stories; they want something concrete in their hands"*, and JRS makes a point of always combining listening with tangible help. For people who spend days or weeks in closed facilities, the regular presence of a friendly, independent figure is itself a protection factor and a restoration of dignity.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is the initiative's most fragile point, and the interviewee names it with disarming honesty. Funding passes through the JRS network, the international office in Rome and the European office in Brussels, and depends on international donors whose attention has moved elsewhere: *"The donors are very tired. The cameras have already moved; migration is no longer the topic"*. Resources are secured for the current and the coming year; beyond that, the team may have to shrink to two or three workers, concentrated on maintaining presence in the centres.

INNOVATION

The innovation is ecclesial before it is operational: a Catholic organization working in an overwhelmingly Orthodox country not despite the Orthodox Church but through it, as its recognized partner. The choice of open-ended agreements over time-limited projects is a second, qui-

eter innovation: it treats access as a relationship to be cultivated over decades rather than a deliverable to be renewed each year.

EFFECTIVENESS

In a transit country, effectiveness cannot be measured by integration outcomes: *"In such a short time you cannot see the results; but people have the chance to be informed, to speak with a psychologist, to receive something"*. The real measure is access itself: JRS is one of very few organizations anywhere with a stable daily presence inside transit, reception and detention facilities, and it has maintained that presence continuously for a quarter of a century.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The services have grown out of the expressed needs of the people encountered: the communication room was born from the request to reassure families, the recreational activities from the weight of empty waiting time. In facilities where formal participation is impossible, the team practices participation in its most elementary form, being with people, listening, and adjusting the service to what each person actually asks for.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The entire practice rests on collaboration: with the Macedonian Orthodox Church, which anchors the agreements; with the State institutions responsible for the facilities; and with the JRS offices in Croatia, Serbia, and Kosovo, which cover the same migration route and share information and coordination. The interviewee is himself a theologian, a sign of a partnership lived also at the level of persons and formation, not only of institutions.

REPLICABILITY

The church-to-church model is replicable wherever Catholics are a small minority within another Christian majority, on the Balkan route and beyond. Its conditions are demanding but clear: humility in letting the

local majority Church take the institutional lead, scrupulous respect of agreed rules, and a long time horizon in which trust, the real capital of this practice, can slowly accumulate.





KOLPING UKRAINE, CHERNIVTSI, UKRAINE

Country and Place: Ukraine (national association), headquartered in Chernivtsi; operations in 8 regions, 25 Kolping families; cross-border cooperation with Kolping Romania (Oituz); humanitarian reach extending to Mykolaiv region and frontline villages

Initiative: Kolping Ukraine – humanitarian response, social inclusion and community development (wartime and peacetime operations)

Beneficiaries: Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and conflict-affected civilians; persons with disabilities (autism, Down syndrome); senior citizens; social workers, teachers, and psychologists (vocational training); local communities involved in administrative reform; wounded soldiers and veterans

Theme: Humanitarian assistance; social kitchen and food support; logistics and relief transport; shelter for displaced persons; social inclusion and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities; universities of the third age (elderly); vocational training; community development and civic education; pastoral accompaniment

Project Duration: Kolping Society in Ukraine since 1997; national association since 2015; humanitarian response ongoing since 24 February 2022 (full-scale invasion); pre-war social programmes uninterrupted throughout

Funding Source: Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation of Germany (BMZ) for social and community programmes; Danish Refugee Council; Renovabis; Caritas; donations from Kolping societies worldwide (from Peru to Malaysia, from Uganda to Lithuania); in-kind contributions from partner Kolping families across Europe

Website: kolping.net (Kolping International); kolping.ua (Kolping Ukraine)

Catholic Organization: Kolping International (Internationales Kolpingwerk), national association Kolping Ukraine.

Kolping Ukraine is the national association of Kolping International – a global Catholic social organisation founded in the 19th century by Blessed Adolph Kolping (1813–1865), a Catholic priest from Cologne whose response to the social dislocation of early industrialisation was to create a network of mutual support, housing and vocational training for young working men. Beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1991, Adolph Kolping

gave his name to a movement now present in more than 60 countries with approximately 430,000 members, animated by the founding principle of *Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe* – help towards self-help.

In Ukraine, the Kolping Society was established in 1997, initially as a local initiative in Chernivtsi. As V.S., Managing Director of Kolping Ukraine, explains in interview, the early years were not straightforward: *"It was really a little bit weird type of organization because the Soviet Union destroyed everything what meant membership. And we are a membership organization. And that's a little bit weird for Ukrainian mentality … to belong to an organization, not a political party."*[4] Despite this cultural friction, the association grew steadily, achieving national recognition in 2015 when it met the threshold of ten or more Kolping families required for formal affiliation as a national association within Kolping International.

Before the full-scale Russian invasion of February 2022, Kolping Ukraine had developed into a substantial and multifaceted organisation. Its three main pillars were: a network of 13 rehabilitation and day-care centres for persons with disabilities (primarily autism and Down syndrome), serving more than 2,000 families annually; 11 universities of the third age with 1,200 senior students; and an extensive programme of vocational training – more than 2,000 courses over twenty years for teachers, psychologists and social workers. In the decade preceding the war, Kolping Ukraine had also become a significant actor in community development, supporting local administrative reform and training citizens in transparency and civic engagement. These programmes, as V.S. emphasises, were not abandoned after February 2022: *"we tried to provide our work like before, even under this hard situation."*

The Response to the Full-Scale War

On 26 February 2022 – two days after the beginning of the full-scale invasion – Kolping Ukraine launched a social kitchen in Chernivtsi. From that day to the present, the kitchen has operated every day except Sunday (on Saturday it cooks double portions for the following day), preparing between 550 and 600 hot meals daily for internally displaced persons. As V.S. states in interview: *"up to date, we provided more than one million hot meals."* In 2024 alone, the Chernivtsi kitchen produced approximately 198,000 meals; additionaly around 200 meals per day are delivered to local hospitals for wounded soldiers and veterans.

In the first days of the war, Kolping Ukraine also converted its entire existing infrastructure – Kolping family houses, rehabilitation centres,

4 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

university of the third age offices – into shelters for internally displaced persons. To date, more than 3,000 persons have been provided with shelter through this network. Simultaneously, Kolping opened logistics centres for humanitarian aid in border cities: Lviv, Chernivtsi, and Uzhhorod (near the Hungarian and Slovak borders). These centres receive regular convoys from Kolping Romania, Kolping International and partner associations across Europe, redistributing goods to communities in need.

The scale of the logistics operation is remarkable. Since 2022, Kolping Ukraine has delivered over 700 tonnes of humanitarian aid directly to communities near the front lines – including food, first aid supplies, hygiene products, medicine, generators, clothing, and toys for children. The goods reach villages and small towns 5 to 10 kilometres from the front line, in areas exposed to combat drone activity. Deliveries are escorted by the national police to ensure security. As V.S. explains: *"these drones, combat drones, they can fly up to 50 kilometers. Means we are also under danger there, but we are always supported and secured by the police."* To date, humanitarian goods have been distributed to more than 100,000 people.

The cross-border logistics chain with Kolping Romania (based in Oituz, Bacău County) has been one of the most consistent supply arteries of this operation. By May 2025, Kolping Romania had completed its 75th transport since the beginning of the war – an average of roughly one convoy every ten to twelve days over three years. By October 2025, the count had reached the 79th transport, with further missions documented through November 2025. In January 2026, the operation expanded into the Mykolaiv region in southern Ukraine, among the areas most severely affected by the conflict.

A distinctive feature of the Chernivtsi kitchen is its participatory model: the facility is run by paid staff and Kolping volunteers together with the refugees themselves, who contribute their labour and skills to preparing and distributing meals. This co-production transforms beneficiaries into active participants, consistent with Kolping's foundational pedagogy of self-help and mutual responsibility.

Relationship with the Local Church

Kolping Ukraine's relationship with the Catholic Church is structural, not incidental. As V.S. explains, each of the 25 Kolping families across Ukraine has a designated Catholic priest as spiritual adviser – called a *Präses* in the Kolping tradition – who provides pastoral guidance and leads the community in reflection on Scripture and the Christian foun-

dations of social commitment. This integration of spiritual accompaniment into associative life is one of the defining characteristics that distinguishes Kolping from secular social organisations operating in comparable fields.

In the wartime context, the pastoral dimension has taken on particular significance. The maintenance of Kolping community life – with its rhythms of prayer, mutual solidarity and shared Catholic identity – represents a form of spiritual resistance to the disorientation and loss brought by war. For the many internally displaced persons who have passed through Kolping's shelters and kitchen, the experience of a structured, caring community with clear values has been, alongside material assistance, a source of human sustenance.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

The quantitative evidence of impact is among the most thoroughly documented of any initiative in this collection. More than 1 million hot meals served since February 2022; over 700 tonnes of humanitarian aid delivered; more than 3,000 persons sheltered; more than 100,000 people reached with humanitarian goods. In 2024 alone, the Chernivtsi kitchen produced approximately 198,000 meals. These figures, provided directly by V.S. in interview, far exceed the numbers cited in previously available written sources and establish Kolping Ukraine as one of the most operationally significant Catholic humanitarian actors in the country.

Beyond the wartime emergency, the pre-existing social programmes – rehabilitation for persons with disabilities, universities of the third age, vocational training – have continued throughout the war, serving needs that predate and will outlast the current conflict. The cumulative social investment of more than twenty-five years constitutes an impact that no emergency operation alone could replicate.

SUSTAINABILITY

Kolping Ukraine's sustainability model is diversified across institutional, financial, and social dimensions. Institutionally, the organisation is embedded in the global Kolping network, providing structural continuity,

shared governance standards, and access to international solidarity. Financially, it draws on a deliberately varied funding base: the German Federal Ministry for Economic Development and Cooperation (BMZ) supports the social and community programmes; the Danish Refugee Council and Renovabis have contributed to the humanitarian response; Caritas has provided support; and donations from Kolping societies worldwide – V.S. names countries *"from Peru to Malaysia, from Uganda up to Lithuania"* – have sustained the wartime operation. This diversification reduces dependency on any single funder and distributes risk across a global Catholic solidarity network.

There is, however, a genuine sustainability challenge that V.S. acknowledges frankly: the decline in volunteer engagement over time. In the early weeks of the war, a single arriving truck could mobilise 30 to 50 volunteers to unload goods. Today recruitment is harder: *"this war … became a part of life, and it became … for maybe some people, not important anymore."* This normalisation of emergency – a well-documented phenomenon in protracted crises – poses a structural challenge that institutional funding cannot fully compensate.

INNOVATION

The initiative's innovation lies in several convergent features. The speed of response – a social kitchen operational within two days of the full-scale invasion, using pre-existing Kolping infrastructure – demonstrates the advantage of having a networked, institutionally rooted organisation over the improvised responses that characterise many emergency operations. The co-production model of the soup kitchen, in which refugees serve as both beneficiaries and operators, operationalises the Kolping principle of self-help in a context of extreme vulnerability. The progressive geographic expansion of deliveries toward frontline areas, with police escorts and logistical coordination at 5–10 kilometres from the line of contact, represents a form of operational boldness unusual among faith-based humanitarian actors.

At the programmatic level, the universities of the third age – 11 across Ukraine before the war – represent an approach to active ageing that V.S. identifies as replicable globally: *"It is really a good possibility for elderly people to stay active in the community, to feel that they are necessary, they can share their experience, but they also can learn something what they didn't learn as they were young."* The specialist training in Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) for professionals working with persons with autism and Down syndrome is another innovation with clear transferability potential.

EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness is documented with a level of quantitative precision that is unusual among the initiatives examined in this report. The regularity of operations – the social kitchen functioning every day since 26 February 2022, the cross-border transport chain averaging one convoy every ten to twelve days over three years – reflects organisational discipline and operational resilience. The geographic expansion from Chernivtsi to Mykolaiv and frontline villages demonstrates the capacity to adapt coverage to evolving needs rather than consolidating around comfortable delivery patterns.

The combination of bulk food supply (social kitchen), targeted hospital deliveries (200 meals per day to wounded soldiers), logistics centre operations and shelter provision ensures that different vulnerability profiles are served through a coherent, coordinated system rather than through fragmented parallel initiatives.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Participation is embedded in the operational model. The co-production of the social kitchen by refugees themselves is the most visible expression of this principle, but it runs deeper: Kolping's founding pedagogy of *Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe* positions every beneficiary as a potential active contributor. The rehabilitation centres for persons with disabilities, the universities of the third age and the community development programmes all reflect an approach in which the goal is not to provide for people but to strengthen their capacity for agency and self-determination. In the wartime context, this orientation has particular significance: maintaining the dignity of displaced persons through meaningful activity is a form of humanitarian care that purely material assistance cannot supply.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Kolping Ukraine's collaborative framework operates at multiple scales simultaneously. Internationally: Kolping International coordinates fundraising and communication through kolping.net; Kolping Romania provides the primary cross-border logistics hub; Kolping societies across more than 60 countries contribute financially and in-kind. Among institutional partners: the Danish Refugee Council, Renovabis, Caritas and the German BMZ have all supported specific programme components. With state actors: the national police escort humanitarian convoys to

frontline areas, a collaboration that bridges faith-based civil society and state security structures in a manner made possible only by the trust built through sustained, documented delivery. Locally: hospitals, community structures and the network of 25 Kolping families across 8 Ukrainian regions constitute an internal distribution and support ecosystem.

REPLICABILITY

The components of the Kolping Ukraine model carry different replication potential depending on context. The social kitchen model – converting existing associative infrastructure into emergency food production within days of a crisis – is replicable wherever a Kolping or comparable Catholic associative network has pre-existing premises and community relationships. The universities of the third age and the disability rehabilitation network are, in V.S.'s own assessment, transferable to any context with trained staff: *"other staff, like social inclusion and disability support, it can be duplicated in every country. You just have to have good, trained staff."* He draws explicitly on his experience visiting African countries, where he observed comparable needs for food security, clean water, clothing, and housing.

The essential conditions for replication are: an institutionally rooted associative network capable of rapid activation; a pre-existing relationship of trust between a sending and a receiving hub across a border; and a funding model diversified across international, national, and local sources. The global Kolping network's presence in more than 60 countries makes horizontal transfer structurally feasible in ways that would be impossible for a locally bounded initiative.


KOLPING · EUROPE





II. HOUSES OF FIRST WELCOME

MAISON BAKHITA, ASSOCIATION DU DIOCÈSE DE PARIS, PARIS, FRANCE

Country and Place: France, Paris

Initiative: La Maison Bakhita

Beneficiaries: Migrants and refugees, including people in situations of social vulnerability

Theme: Reception, relational accompaniment, integration pathways, community building, pastoral presence

Project Duration: Project conceived in 2017; opened September 2021 – ongoing (active in 2025)

Funding Source: Diocese of Paris; Fondation Notre-Dame; private foundations; enterprises; individual donors

Website: https://www.maisonbakhita.fr

Catholic Organization: Association du Diocèse de Paris

La Maison Bakhita was born as a direct response to the appeal of Pope Francis to "welcome, protect, promote and integrate" migrants. As the director explains, *"the project began to respond to the call of Pope Francis… the desire was to involve all Catholics of Paris in this call."*[5]

The discernment process that led to its creation was not merely administrative but deeply ecclesial. Between 2017 and 2020, the Diocese of Paris engaged in a broad consultation involving parishes, small local initiatives, and larger organizations such as Caritas. Rather than creating an additional specialised service, the intention was to establish a visible and unifying place. As the director recalls, *"we wanted this house to be a sign for the whole diocese, something visible, something that says: the Church in Paris is committed."* Many parishes were already involved in welcoming migrants, yet often in isolation. *"Many parishes were doing*

5 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

small things," she explains, *"but they felt alone. The Maison was meant to connect them and give them confidence."*

The Maison officially opened its doors in September 2021, in the 18th arrondissement of Paris – a densely populated and multicultural district. The Church in Paris already had numerous initiatives for migrants, but it lacked a common space of encounter capable of connecting and strengthening them. The Maison Bakhita was, therefore, entrusted with three main missions.

First, it functions as a hub within the diocesan network, supporting and connecting parishes, associations and volunteers engaged in migrant ministry. It shares experiences, disseminates practices, and fosters collaboration. The objective is also pedagogical: to show that welcoming migrants is not reserved to specialists, but belongs to the ordinary pastoral life of the Church.

Second, the Maison is a concrete place of reception. It is not an emergency shelter, nor a food-distribution centre, nor a classical social service with professional social workers. Rather, it complements existing structures by offering activities that promote integration, autonomy and dignity through relationships and skills. Approximately one hundred people per week attend French language classes. Additional programmes include professional training – notably a certified culinary course run with a partner association – digital literacy, carpentry, sewing workshops, civic education sessions on French history and democratic values, and socio-cultural activities such as sports and art. A nursery managed by a partner organization operates within the building, while volunteer psychologists and a retired doctor provide occasional consultations. In collaboration with the association Utopia 56 and local parishes, the Maison also offers temporary night hospitality several times a week to families without accommodation.

Third, the Maison fosters encounter with the wider public. A recently launched "Café Bonjour" opens its convivial space to neighbours and parishioners, encouraging intercultural dialogue. One afternoon, participants spontaneously discussed marriage customs in their respective countries, an ordinary yet profound experience of mutual recognition.

The pastoral dimension is explicit yet non-proselytising. Two Scalabrinian sisters live on site, animating the spiritual life of the house. Weekly Mass is celebrated, and moments of prayer and reflection are offered. About half of participants are Muslim. The project does not aim at conversion; rather, as the director states, *"the goal is not evangelisation but to*

bear witness to our faith through action." She underlines that the spiritual identity of the Maison is not hidden: *"We do not hide who we are. People know this is a Catholic place. But what they experience first is welcome."* The building itself – entirely renovated by the Diocese with a significant investment – embodies a long-term ecclesial commitment. The Maison operates with three salaried staff members and around one hundred volunteers, approximately 30% of whom are migrants themselves.

A particularly meaningful testimony illustrates the relational impact: at the end of a culinary training, one woman told the director, *"Here is my home now."* For the director, the most significant impact lies precisely in this sense of recognition: *"What touches me most is when someone says: here I feel recognised."*

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

Impact is primarily relational and qualitative. While the Maison does not accompany beneficiaries through formal social case management, it provides a stabilising environment where migrants can build confidence, skills, and networks. The fact that many former participants return for celebrations or become volunteers indicates durable belonging and long-term relational impact. The 2024 social impact evaluation conducted with an external agency further formalised perceived changes among beneficiaries, volunteers, and diocesan partners. Beyond measurable indicators, the initiative contributes to transforming attitudes within the local Church, fostering a culture of hospitality that extends beyond the walls of the Maison itself.

SUSTAINABILITY

The initiative benefits from strong diocesan anchoring. The Diocese of Paris financed the building's renovation (approximately €3.5 million) and continues to provide structural support. Funding is diversified through the Fondation Notre-Dame, private foundations and fundraising. The combination of ecclesial backing and civic partnerships enhances long-term viability. Moreover, the strategic planning cycles (2025 objectives and a broader 2030 vision) demonstrate that sustainability is financial, but also pastoral and institutional, rooted in a long-term diocesan commitment rather than short-term emergency logic.

INNOVATION

Innovation lies not in a single service but in the integrated house model: a relational, non-emergency space where diverse actors collaborate under a clear pastoral identity. The director describes the Maison as living in a state of *"permanent experimentation,"* constantly adjusting activities according to emerging needs rather than following rigid programming. Its originality also consists in bridging pastoral life and social integration within the same space, avoiding fragmentation between "spiritual" and "social" dimensions and embodying an integrated understanding of human development.

EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness is measured through participation rates, volunteer engagement, and periodic evaluations. Strategic planning cycles (2025 ambitions, a 2030 orientation plan, annual action plans) demonstrate structured governance. The presence of external evaluation processes strengthens accountability and learning capacity. Effectiveness is understood not as service delivery alone, but as the ability to generate meaningful and sustainable pathways of inclusion within both civil society and ecclesial communities.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Participation is substantial. Migrants are not merely beneficiaries: they are active contributors: approximately 30% of volunteers have migrant backgrounds. This reinforces dignity and social integration. The participatory dynamic extends to programme design, as activities evolve in response to expressed needs and feedback from participants. In this way, the Maison fosters co-responsibility and avoids a paternalistic model of assistance.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The Maison works with around 130 partner structures – Catholic and non-confessional. This broad ecosystem avoids duplication and enhances complementarity. Collaboration with associations such as Utopia 56 and with parish-based initiatives demonstrates an openness that transcends confessional boundaries while maintaining a clear Catholic identity. Such networking strengthens the initiative's capacity to respond flexibly to complex and changing migratory realities.

REPLICABILITY

The model is transferable to other diocesan contexts, provided certain conditions are met: a dedicated physical space, episcopal commitment, volunteer mobilisation, and openness to partnership beyond confessional boundaries. Several French dioceses have already expressed interest in learning from this experience. While replication requires adaptation to local contexts, the core elements – a visible ecclesial commitment, relational accompaniment, and integrated collaboration – constitute a framework that can inspire similar initiatives across Europe.







SHELTER AND INTEGRATION FOR MIGRANTS, JOHN XXIII PEACE LAB, ĦAL FAR, MALTA

Country and Place: Malta, Ħal Far

Initiative: Shelter, integration support and peace education for migrants and refugees

Beneficiaries: Adult migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees

Theme: Welcome, hospitality and peace education

Project Duration: Peace Lab since 1971; shelter for migrants and refugees since 2002

Funding Source: Agreement with the Maltese State, European Union funds, private donations and volunteer work

Website: www.peacelab.org

Catholic Organization: John XXIII Peace Laboratory, founded by the Franciscan friar Fr Dionysius Mintoff OFM.

The John XXIII Peace Laboratory stands on a site whose history explains its mission. Ħal Far, in the south of Malta, was a British military airfield that saw intensive air combat during the Second World War, a hub through which thousands of soldiers and sailors from across the Commonwealth passed. In 1971 the Franciscan friar Fr Dionysius Mintoff, responding to the appeal of Pope John XXIII, author of the encyclical Pacem in Terris, who had called on the world to reflect on peace, justice and human rights, led a group that decided to transform this place of war into a place of peace. What they began was described as an experiment in fostering solidarity and moral values based on Christian beliefs, without excluding any other idea or any other person: an open and unrestricted meeting place where people of all backgrounds and attitudes could mix together. *"As a Franciscan, and a Maltese who has personally seen the outcomes of war, I decided to open a space that advocates for peace education in Malta"*[6], the founder has explained. The compound, which includes a sanctuary, various buildings and extensive gardens, developed over the decades into a centre for peace education and adult education, with radio programmes and publications reaching a wide public.

6 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

With the arrival in Malta of growing numbers of migrants and asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East, the Peace Lab translated its message into concrete hospitality. Its location proved providential: the centre sits close to Malta's largest reception structures and to what served for years as a detention centre for people seeking asylum. Since February 2002, the Peace Lab has offered shelter on its own grounds to migrants who, after leaving detention, had nowhere to go. In November 2005 it signed an agreement with the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity to provide accommodation for adult asylum seekers, with the State providing for basic care while the Peace Lab dedicates itself to what the State does not provide: dignity, empowerment, education and a path towards independence and meaningful integration into Maltese society. Over the years the residential capacity has grown from around twenty to some fifty adult residents.

Around the residential core, a range of services has grown. A drop-in centre is open daily in the late afternoon to residents and to migrants living in the surrounding open centres, offering information, education, and responses to practical needs; those welcomed come mainly from countries such as Mali, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Senegal, Sudan and Somalia. English classes help newcomers acquire the language of daily life in Malta. Since 2006, weekly medical clinics have been organised both on the Peace Lab premises and in the nearby migrant accommodation centres, and an internet café was opened in 2009 to keep residents connected with their families and with the world. The centre is run essentially by volunteers: doctors, teachers, IT specialists, broadcasters and others come in daily, each with a specific task, in a structure that its founder has described as sustained by volunteers and providence.

The significance of this practice was recognised at the highest level of the Church when Pope Francis chose the Peace Lab as the final stop of his apostolic visit to Malta, meeting the migrants hosted there on 3 April 2022. On that occasion, residents shared their personal stories of flight and of the life-threatening Mediterranean crossing, and the Pope warned against what he called a shipwreck of civilization, which threatens not migrants alone but everyone, if humanity and kindness do not prevail.

The centre has remained fully active in the year under study. In January 2025 the regeneration of the Peace Lab garden, a space of some 2,000 square metres restored with the support of the national environmental programme Project Green, further opened the site to the local community; in August 2025 the founder, at the age of ninety-four, celebrated the seventieth anniversary of his priestly ordination while continuing to direct the centre he established more than half a century ago.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

For more than two decades the Peace Lab has given a home, and not merely accommodation, to migrants who had exhausted the official reception system. Beyond shelter, residents receive language education, medical attention, information, and a protected environment in which to rebuild autonomy. The centre also acts on Maltese society itself: through its peace education programmes, its media presence and its open days bringing together asylum seekers and the Maltese public, it works to dispel prejudice on an island that has borne a disproportionate share of Mediterranean arrivals.

SUSTAINABILITY

The practice rests on a combination of sources: the 2005 agreement with the State covering the basic care of residents, European funds used for infrastructural improvements to the residential facilities, private donations and, above all, a large and stable base of daily volunteers. The fact that the initiative has continued without interruption since 1971, and the shelter since 2002, is itself evidence of resilience; at the same time, the identification of the work with its founder, who established and guided it for over five decades, raises the question of generational turnover.

INNOVATION

The originality of the Peace Lab lies in the fusion of two missions that are usually kept separate: peace education and the direct reception of migrants. Welcoming asylum seekers on the very grounds of a peace centre built on a former battlefield gives the hospitality a symbolic force that few practices possess: the people fleeing war become part of the living demonstration that a place of war can be converted into a place of peace. The model of an open, unrestricted meeting place, where education, media, spirituality and residential welcome coexist, was conceived decades before integration became a policy category.

EFFECTIVENESS

The centre aims to enable residents to realize a life with dignity and opportunities to fulfil their potential and integrate into the communities in which they live. The daily opening of the drop-in service, the continuity of the weekly clinics and the English classes provide regular, verifiable outputs.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Migrants at the Peace Lab are not recipients of services but inhabitants of a shared place, living alongside volunteers within the compound and taking part in the cultural and community events organised there, such as the open days in which African and Maltese culture, music and dance are shared with the local public.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The Peace Lab operates within a dense network: the agreement with the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity anchors it institutionally; its medical clinics extend into the neighbouring state-run open centres; its work has been publicly recognised by UNHCR Malta; and it maintains close ties with the Archdiocese of Malta and the Franciscan family, its founder being among the co-founders of Franciscans International, the order's presence at the United Nations, which conferred on him its inaugural Human Rights Award in Geneva in 2010. In 2023 an international branch of the Peace Lab was launched in The Hague, hosted by Leiden University in collaboration with academic and diplomatic partners, extending the model beyond Malta.

REPLICABILITY

The core intuition, giving migrants a home inside an institution whose declared mission is peace, can be replicated wherever the Church has underused spaces charged with history and a community of volunteers willing to animate them. The Maltese experience suggests the necessary conditions: a stable agreement with public authorities covering basic care, so that the organization can concentrate on education and accompaniment; a broad volunteer base with professional skills; and a founder generation capable of handing the vision on. The opening of the branch in The Hague indicates that the model is already travelling.



FU SHENFU MIGRANT CENTER, DIVINE WORD MISSIONARIES, WARSAW, POLAND

Country and Place: Poland, Warsaw (ul. Ostrobramska 98, 04-118 Warszawa)

Initiative: Werbistowskie Centrum Migranta "Fu Shenfu" / SVD Migrant Centre "Fu Shenfu"

Beneficiaries: Migrants, refugees and foreign workers of any nationality, language or religion, and second-generation children of migrant families. The communities served include the Vietnamese (the largest), Spanish-speaking, English-speaking African, Chinese, and Ukrainian communities.

Theme: Reception and accompaniment; free Polish, English, and Spanish language courses; Vietnamese heritage-language courses for second-generation children; free legal and administrative support with physical accompaniment; community building and pastoral accompaniment.

Project Duration: Centre opened and blessed on 12 September 2005; foundation established on 8 October 2008; renamed Werbistowskie Centrum Migranta "Fu Shenfu" in 2018 – ongoing, active 2025–2026.

Funding Source: Polish SVD Province (primary, structural funding); extraordinary grants from the SVD General Curia in Rome (e.g. the Ukraine emergency, 2022).

Website: www.migrant.pl

Catholic Organization: Society of the Divine Word (SVD – Verbiti), Polish Province.

Description

The Migrant Centre "Fu Shenfu" in Warsaw is a long-standing initiative of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD – Verbiti), an international missionary congregation that gathers, in Fr. E.'s words, *"almost 80 nationalities, 80 countries."*[7] It was opened and blessed on 12 September 2005 by the then bishop of Warsaw-Praga, Abp Sławoj Leszek Głódź, with Fr. Antoni Koszorz SVD as its first director; the supporting foundation was established on 8 October 2008, and in 2018 the centre took its present

7 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

name. It is named after the first SVD missionary to China, Saint Joseph Freinademetz, whom local people called *Fu Shenfu* – in Fr. E.'s translation, *"the good father."*

The centre's origins lie in the rapid growth of the Vietnamese community in Warsaw at the turn of the millennium. As Fr. E. explains: *"It was the answer to the needs which were there because there were a lot of Vietnamese coming to Poland … They work in shopping and all this. They provide restaurants and all this. And our congregation started gathering them to celebrate the Mass for them, to help them, because sometimes they don't know the language."* The work was later institutionalised within a registered foundation, giving it institutional continuity as the SVD Migrant Centre.

Today the centre is staffed by six religious – in Fr. E.'s words, *"I am from Togo and I have 4 priests from Vietnam and I have one sister, and we are 6, those in charge"* – supported by *"almost 20 volunteers,"* including language teachers and volunteer lawyers. Its premises hold offices and classrooms, and it is open, by founding principle, to persons of any nationality, language, or religion.

Activities

Free language courses. Volunteer teachers run several Polish-language groups every day, Monday to Friday, alongside free English and Spanish courses and tutoring. The courses are free by deliberate choice: *"language courses are very expensive, and not everybody is able to pay for that. So, in our centre, they have the possibility to learn for free, at least the minimum so that they can talk and live here."*

Vietnamese heritage-language courses for second-generation children. A distinctive activity rooted in a clear conviction: *"The children from these Vietnamese families who are born here … can speak, but they cannot write. The reason why we started … organising the Vietnamese courses for them, so that they can learn to write their own language. It's very important that everybody should know his own language before knowing other languages."*

Free legal and administrative support, with physical accompaniment. Volunteers help migrants prepare and complete the documentation required to legalise their stay, identify the correct office, and accompany them in person – to hospitals, public offices, and service counters – acting as interpreters and mediators. Volunteer lawyers handle the more complex cases. As Fr. E. notes, external help *"is very expensive. And most of them, they don't have money to pay for that."*

Community building and pastoral accompaniment. Beyond individual conversations, the centre invites foreigners to shared moments – a Christmas Eve supper (wigilia), carol singing, prayer meetings and missionary gatherings, and joint sightseeing visits around Warsaw – and marks together the celebrations of Christmas, Easter, and the Chinese New Year. Among the foundation's statutory objectives are also the promotion of employment and support for entrepreneurship, although in the interview Fr. E. described the centre's active services as concentrated on language, legalisation, and community life.

Relationship with the Local Church

A dimension that emerged strongly in the interview is the intentional integration of migrant communities into the wider diocesan Church of Warsaw. Each year the centre prepares, jointly with the local Church, a Mass for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees: *"We organize the Mass together so that people realise that the migrant communities are not apart, but they are part of the church. We are all in the church."* Fr. E. also leads the African community on visits to parishes across the city, bringing their choir: *"It's an opportunity for me to preach about this issue of migrants and refugees … because in the social medias … there are a lot of fake news and sometimes the people, they don't know what is going on."* The centre also takes part in an annual meeting convened by the bishop responsible for migrant pastoral care, where organisations share experiences and coordinate.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

Impact operates on two registers. Practically, free language instruction and hands-on administrative support remove two of the most concrete barriers to a stable life in Poland – language and legalisation of stay; documentary sources indicate the centre has handled residence and legal matters for over 500 people. Relationally, the centre serves above all as a meeting place (świetlica) open to all, where its community life generates bonds of belonging well beyond service transactions. The heritage-language courses address an intergenerational need that mainstream reception structures rarely identify, helping children born

in Poland to remain rooted in their families' culture while integrating fully into Polish society.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability rests on the institutional stability of the Polish SVD Province, which provides premises, personnel, and continuity – a model not dependent on annual grant cycles. In exceptional situations the centre can also draw on supplementary funds: *"I can write a project to … SVD in Rome. It was the case when the war started in Ukraine."* The global SVD network, present in some eighty countries, further reinforces this resilience by supplying translators, cultural mediators and advisers from within the congregation itself – an internal resource that few civil-society organisations of comparable size could replicate.

INNOVATION

The centre integrates within a single relational space services that are usually fragmented across specialised institutions: language education, legal and administrative support, physical accompaniment, community building and pastoral care. The heritage-language courses for second-generation children are a genuinely original element, expressing the conviction that knowing one's own language and culture is a prerequisite for openness to others.

EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness is evidenced by the regularity and density of activities (several language groups daily, Monday to Friday), the long institutional life of the centre, and its demonstrated capacity to respond rapidly to new challenges, such as the 2022 Ukrainian emergency. The sustained engagement of around twenty volunteers, including lawyers and teachers, reflects the perceived value of the work.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Asked whether beneficiaries are recruited as volunteers, Fr. E. was candid: *"Not … but we collaborate with other organisations."* Participation is expressed primarily through community life – shared celebrations, the choir, prayer meetings – rather than through formal volunteering.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The centre works within a network described by Fr. E.: *"We worked with Caritas … with other congregations … sometimes also … we have to work with the police. And also the embassies, sometimes."* It refers cases of abuse to specialist organisations, coordinates with new bodies created after the 2022 Ukrainian emergency, and draws on the international SVD network for translation and cultural mediation.

REPLICABILITY

Fr. E. identifies the transferable elements as the accumulated expertise in administrative procedures and the integration of social and pastoral accompaniment: *"We have more than 20 years' experience, and the way we try … to help about the administrative procedures is very important … you need to share experiences."* The essential conditions are institutional continuity guaranteed by a religious community, an accessible physical space, a mixed team of religious and volunteers, and a framing that treats migrants as persons to be encountered rather than objects of service.






Polski

III. DEFENDING RIGHTS AND LEGAL DIGNITY

ASYLUM, MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION PROGRAMME, INSTITUTE FOR THE RULE OF LAW, LUBLIN, POLAND

Country and Place: Poland, Lublin

Initiative: Asylum, Migration, and Integration Programme

Beneficiaries: Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in vulnerable legal situations (including detained foreigners and war refugees from Ukraine)

Theme: Legal assistance, access to rights, refugee protection, advocacy, education

Project Duration: Ongoing (active in 2025; intensified activities since 2022 in response to the war in Ukraine)

Funding Source: Project-based funding, foundations, and institutional partnerships (including academic cooperation)

Website: https://www.panstwoprawa.org

Catholic Organization: the Rule of Law Institute (foundation rooted in the Catholic University of Lublin)

The Rule of Law Institute (RLI), based in Lublin, operates in the field of legal protection of fundamental rights, with a specialised focus on asylum, migration, and refugee law. The Asylum, Migration, and Integration Programme constitutes one of its core areas of activity.

The foundation is institutionally and culturally rooted in the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, from which a significant part of its staff is recruited, particularly through the Refugee Legal Clinic. The programme director teaches refugee law at the university and serves as Consultor of the Polish Bishops' Conference in the Council for Migrants and Refugees. The organisation maintains explicit links with the Church, promotes Catholic Social Teaching, and is widely recognised among Polish NGOs for its Catholic identity.

Context and Activities

In the Polish legal and political context, access to reliable and independent legal assistance is crucial for asylum seekers and migrants, particularly in situations of detention or complex administrative proceedings. The Institute provides:

- Legal counselling and representation in asylum procedures
- Legal assistance to detained foreigners
- Strategic litigation aimed at preventing arbitrary detention (in particular, detention of children)
- Legal support to Ukrainian war refugees
- Educational programmes in refugee protection

In 2023–2025, the programme assisted Coptic Christian families from Egypt who had fled to Poland and were detained for 60–90 days in a detention centre for foreigners. Through legal intervention, the Institute successfully encouraged courts not to prolong their detention. Approximately ten Coptic Christians continue to receive support while awaiting refugee status recognition.

The Institute was also one of the three founding members of the Lublin Civic Committee to Aid Ukraine, formed on 24 February 2022, immediately after the Russian invasion. It contributed to emergency coordination and support for thousands of refugees travelling through Lublin. For these efforts, the organisation was awarded the Medal "Lublin to the Heroes."

Among its 20+ staff members, five are graduates of scholarship programmes connected to the John Paul II Foundation, who themselves had previously come to Lublin as students from Ukraine and Belarus. Their professional engagement within the Institute represents a form of reciprocal integration and community empowerment.

The Institute collaborates regularly with local Caritas centres (Lublin, Zamość, Siedlce), providing legal assistance to war refugees from Ukraine.

Educational and Advocacy Dimension

Beyond individual legal cases, the Institute actively promotes Catholic Social Teaching on migration through public interventions and social media. It responds to misinformation and anti-migrant narratives circulating within certain Catholic *milieus*, including public engagement in debates and congresses on Catholic Social Teaching (e.g. Warsaw 2025).

Each year, in cooperation with the Catholic University of Lublin, the Institute organises a Certificate Programme in Refugee Protection and Humanitarian Assistance, contributing to the academic and professional training of future practitioners.

The organisation also maintains international academic partnerships, including collaboration with Notre Dame Law School (USA) and the Catholic University of Ukraine in Lviv.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

The positive impact of the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Programme is observable primarily at the level of concrete legal outcomes and protective interventions in situations of high vulnerability. The Institute's legal action in cases involving detained Coptic Christian families from Egypt demonstrates its capacity to prevent prolonged deprivation of liberty. More broadly, the organisation's involvement during the Ukrainian refugee crisis contributed to the assistance of thousands of persons transiting through Lublin, combining emergency support with structured legal counselling. Impact is not limited to advisory functions but extends to effective protection of rights, judicial remedies and long-term accompaniment of individuals awaiting refugee status determination.

SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability of the programme is closely linked to its structural anchoring within the academic and ecclesial environment of Lublin. Its roots in the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin ensure a continuous exchange between academic education and legal practice, particularly through the Refugee Legal Clinic, which functions as a stable recruitment and training channel. This institutional embedding reduces dependency on short-term project cycles and provides intellectual and organisational continuity. Furthermore, the organisation's long-standing presence before and after the 2022 escalation of the Ukrainian crisis indicates operational resilience and adaptability beyond emergency-driven funding frameworks.

INNOVATION

The innovative dimension of the programme lies in the integration of specialised legal defence with an explicit reference to Catholic Social Teaching. Rather than limiting its identity to technical legal service provision, the Institute situates refugee protection within a broader ethical and ecclesial framework. This dual positioning allows it to operate simultaneously in judicial arenas and within Catholic communities, where it actively counters misinformation and anti-migrant narratives. The combination of academic expertise, strategic litigation and faith-informed public engagement represents a distinctive approach within the Polish civil society landscape.

EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness is reflected in the Institute's ability to maintain sustained legal activity, respond rapidly to emergent crises and achieve tangible procedural results. The successful prevention of detention extensions, the ongoing representation of asylum seekers, and the structured cooperation with Caritas centres demonstrate operational capacity and institutional credibility. The programme's recognition by local authorities, including the awarding of the Medal "Lublin to the Heroes," further confirms its acknowledged contribution to the local response to forced migration. Although aggregate statistical data are not publicly detailed, qualitative evidence points to consistent and results-oriented intervention.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Participation within the programme is not primarily formalised through structured co-design mechanisms but emerges through pathways of empowerment and professional integration. A significant number of the staff members are themselves graduates of scholarship programmes linked to Catholic institutions, including Ukrainian students who have transitioned from beneficiaries of support to legal professionals assisting new arrivals. This trajectory reflects a model of reciprocal integration, where former recipients of solidarity become active agents within the protection system. Educational initiatives, such as the annual Certificate Programme in Refugee Protection and Humanitarian Assistance, further contribute to prepare new actors in the field.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The Institute operates within a dense network of ecclesial, academic, and civic partnerships. Its cooperation with local Caritas centres in Lublin, Zamość and Siedlce enables the provision of legal assistance in coordination with social and pastoral services. Academic collaboration with international institutions, including Notre Dame Law School in the United States and the Catholic University of Ukraine in Lviv, strengthens its transnational dimension. At the local level, its role as a founding member of the Lublin Civic Committee to Aid Ukraine demonstrates capacity for rapid coalition-building in times of crisis. This multi-layered collaboration enhances both legitimacy and operational reach.

REPLICABILITY

The model developed by the Rule of Law Institute is replicable in contexts where a Catholic academic institution can serve as a stable intellectual and organisational base. Key transferable elements include the integration of legal clinic training with professional litigation, the combination of rights-based advocacy and explicit Catholic identity, and the capacity to operate both in judicial settings and within ecclesial communities. Replication would require technical legal expertise, together with a supportive academic environment and ecclesial openness to engagement in migration-related issues.








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LEGAL AID / JURIDISK RETSHJÆLP, CARITAS DANMARK, COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

Country and Place: Denmark, Copenhagen (Caritas Migranthus, Reventlowsgade 10, 1651 København V)

Initiative: Migranthus – an integrated "one-stop shop" for migrants and refugees (legal aid, social counselling, job counselling, multilingual therapy, a health clinic, food and material assistance), complemented by mother-tongue "senior cafés"

Beneficiaries: Migrants and refugees in Denmark – chiefly labour migrants, but also long-resident migrants and refugees (including seniors), students and persons on family-reunification or marriage permits

Theme: Reception and accompaniment; legal and social counselling; employment counselling; multilingual psychological therapy; health-system access; basic-needs assistance; community building in the mother tongue

Project Duration: Caritas Danmark founded shortly after the Second World War (*"almost 80 years"*); domestic activities in Denmark developed over the past *"around 10 years"* – ongoing.

Funding Source: Mixed – in the interviewee's words, *"a puzzle of all kinds of different finances"*: chiefly private foundations (supporting specific, usually new, activities), small parish collections, and limited project-based public funds.

Website: https://caritas.dk

Catholic Organization: Caritas Danmark, member of the global Caritas confederation; a single diocese (Copenhagen).

Description

Caritas Danmark is, as D.D. explains, *"almost 80 years old as an organisation, and was formed just after World War II, supporting German refugees in Denmark."*[8] Historically focused on international humanitarian and development work, *"for around 10 years we have also been more active in Denmark doing domestic activities."* Its domestic work serves chiefly labour migrants, but also longer-resident migrants and refugees (including seniors), students, and family-reunification residents. A defining feature is that activities are *"mainly run by volunteers … that's sort of a main value in all our work."*

8 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

The flagship of the domestic work is the Migrant House (*Migranthus*), conceived as a single point of access: *"We've tried to make it one place … because especially migrants new to Denmark were sort of sent around to different organisations."* Under one roof it brings together legal aid and social counselling (treated as one project for the user, since a social issue usually carries a legal dimension; the legal-aid clinic itself opens, per the public schedule, on Wednesdays 17:00–19:00 and Saturdays 12:30–15:00), job counselling (CV preparation, labour-market rules and access), a multilingual therapy programme, a physical health clinic for those with limited or difficult access to the health system, twice-weekly food distribution, and donated clothes and hygiene materials. Alongside these, Caritas Danmark runs a Christmas-support scheme – an important tradition in Denmark – so that vulnerable families, and especially their children, are not left out at Christmas.

A distinctive method: the mother tongue

Across all activities Caritas Danmark treats *"language as an opportunity, not a barrier."* It is *"okay to use your mother tongue"* in every project; volunteers between them speak many languages, so an interpreter can almost always be found, and consultations are given the extra time interpretation requires. This is most visible in the "senior cafés," where older migrants meet, build local connections and learn about Danish society in their own language – cafés the organisation is now extending across the country. It also underpins a therapy programme currently in some ten languages, which D.D. considers genuinely unusual: *"You would never be able to get therapy in the language you prefer. So that's why this project is quite special and unique."*

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

Across all its activities, Caritas Danmark reached around 15,000 people in 2025, a total that includes its Christmas-support scheme. The impact lies in turning a fragmented set of entitlements into accessible, dignified support, with particular reach among newly-arrived labour migrants, refugees and isolated seniors – the latter often long resident in Denmark yet still carrying, as D.D. puts it, some sort of identity as migrants or refugees. Because so many beneficiaries enter through one of the many doors of the Migrant House, the centre is able to meet several

needs of the same person at once rather than dispersing them across institutions.

SUSTAINABILITY

Funding is a "puzzle" dominated by private foundations, which tend to support specific, new activities rather than ongoing running costs or staff – a difficulty compounded, D.D. notes, by the general reluctance to fund anything labelled "migration." Small parish collections and project-based public funds complete the picture. The volunteer base is the organisation's main structural asset: around 80 active volunteers taking shifts, plus some 40-50 local volunteers (one per parish), while the domestic department itself counts five staff and five to seven part-time project staff – a legal professional in charge of the legal aid and a doctor in charge of the clinic.

INNOVATION

The innovation is the mother-tongue principle applied systematically, together with a barrier-navigation approach: *"We always try to look at what are the barriers now, and can we in some way navigate those barriers and make it easier for people to access what they actually are entitled to."* The multilingual therapy programme is a clear case: in the Danish system, psychological care involves an element of self-payment and long waiting lists, and is rarely available in the patient's own language – gaps the programme is designed to fill. Underlying the whole approach is an explicit value – *"people are entitled to move"* – and a deliberate effort to counter a negative public rhetoric so that those who come *"are received in a much more dignified way than they would be elsewhere."*

EFFECTIVENESS

The one-stop-shop design reduces the referral burden on newcomers, while the multilingual model removes the language barrier that comparable services elsewhere struggle with. The system is built to give each consultation the time it needs, interpretation included – *"if the patient needs one hour for their consultation, then we're using one hour."* Volunteers also serve as a bridge into Danish society: *"if you know someone in Denmark already from the beginning, then you will also get some good tips and your children will easier integrate."* D.D. contrasts this with peer organisations that *"always mention issues finding volunteers, which we do not have."*

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Beneficiaries are involved as volunteers *"very, very much."* The food distribution itself grew out of demand from the Ukrainian refugee group, and on the first, under-staffed day *"people who were in line … walked around the other side of the table and started helping distribute … and they started being volunteers for the next distribution."* The organisation is still developing ways to involve more vulnerable beneficiaries and to gather their feedback before launching new activities.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Because Denmark has a single diocese, cooperation is close: *"We have really great cooperation with the bishop … it's never a problem for us to recruit volunteers,"* and in-kind support (premises, goodwill) is readily available. A youth strand is developing with the country's few Catholic schools, including exchange visits to project countries such as Uganda.

REPLICABILITY

The transferable core is the one-stop-shop model combined with a deliberately multilingual, volunteer-based approach – conditions that depend less on funding than on a committed volunteer community able to cover many languages, and on a Church network that makes recruiting such volunteers easy.


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ENVIRONMENT CONSERVATION IS A KEY TO DEVELOPMENT



FASA – SOCIAL WORK FOR REJECTED ASYLUM SEEKERS, CATHOLIC CHURCH REGION BERN, SWITZERLAND

Country and Place: Switzerland, Bern

Initiative: Asylberatung der Fachzentrums Mensch und Gesellschaft (MuG) der Katholischen Kirche Region Bern

Beneficiaries: Rejected asylum seekers

Theme: Psychosocial counselling, support with administrative tasks, referral to other services (triage), and, depending on the individual's situation, financial assistance for German language courses, transportation costs, leisure activities, or legal fees, coordination of the "Chance Project" for psychosocial support

Project Duration: Indefinite

Funding Source: Katholische Kirche Region Bern

Website: https://www.kathbern.ch/region-bern/angebote/soziale-angebote/asylberatung

Catholic Organization: Catholic Church Region Bern

Introduction

The asylum counselling service was established in 2009 and is integrated into the MuG (formerly FASA) social counselling. Two social workers on the team are responsible for supporting rejected asylum seekers within the pastoral region. They provide counselling, case management, and individual support.

The client group includes rejected asylum seekers receiving emergency assistance (Nothilfe). People who have gone underground or are undocumented (sans-papiers) cannot be counselled and are referred to specialised organizations (In this case: Berner Beratungsstelle für Sans-Papiers).

Rejected asylum seekers live under the states' emergency assistance system (Nothilfe). Their situations vary considerably: some of them have only recently received a negative asylum decision, some others are still challenging the decision through legal procedures, while others have been living in Switzerland for several years. As a social worker at the

centre explains, *"Counselling, guidance, and support are tailored to each person's individual needs and circumstances."*[9]

Most clients meet their social worker once a month. These serve both to address questions and discuss current developments, and to provide ongoing psychosocial support. Each client is assigned to one of the two social workers, with whom they typically build a long-term working relationship.

In addition to psychosocial issues, administrative matters are frequently addressed. This may include explaining official correspondence and the current legal situation or other correspondence regarding everyday life. Close collaboration with legal representatives and other legal professionals is essential.

Clients are also referred to specialized services, projects, and community resources, such as free German language courses, community centers, and leisure activities that are accessible to rejected asylum seekers. The social workers maintain strong links with the local support network and they are able to connect clients with the services available.

Financial assistance is provided primarily to cover transportation costs, enabling clients to travel independently and access support services and activities. In some cases, funding is also available for German language courses, leisure activities, or medical treatment. These costs are covered either through an internal fund or, where possible, through applications to external funding sources. Legal fees are only rarely covered because they are typically very high, but financial support may be provided in exceptional cases.

In addition, the "Chance" Project offers particularly vulnerable individuals the opportunity to participate in unpaid activities for two half-days per week. The primary objective of the project is to promote psychological stability and well-being among people experiencing significant mental distress.

9 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

A central strength of the project is its emphasis on relationship-building. Many clients live in highly unstable circumstances and experience frequent changes in accommodation, legal representation, administrative responsibilities, and available support. *"Having a consistent social worker provides continuity in an otherwise fragmented and unpredictable situation,"* she says. The assigned social worker serves as a reliable contact person who knows the clients' personal history, current legal situation, and support network.

The project functions as a low-threshold point of contact (*Niederschwellig*). Clients can raise a broad range of concerns without first having to determine which specialised service is responsible. The social workers can clarify the issue, provide direct support where possible, and refer the client to an appropriate service where necessary.

Through this combination of relationship-based counselling, practical assistance, psychosocial support, and referral, the service contributes to greater stability and orientation in clients' everyday lives. Even when their legal situation cannot be changed, concrete improvements can be achieved in relation to mobility, access to services, social participation, and psychological well-being.

SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability of the initiative is based primarily on the development and maintenance of long-term relationships, both with clients and with partner organisations. Continuous relationship-building allows support to remain available even when a person's legal, health-related, or social circumstances change.

At the same time, the long-term sustainability of the service depends on secure institutional funding, sufficient staffing, and the continued availability of flexible financial resources. Since the structural causes of clients' precarious situations cannot be resolved through individual counselling alone, the support of and network with initiatives, which focus on structural changes, is a form of working towards ensuring the situation for rejected asylum seekers betters in the long run.

INNOVATION

People whose asylum applications have been rejected are a particularly vulnerable and marginalised group. They are excluded from many regular social welfare services and have access only to the limited support provided through the state emergency assistance system (*Nothilfe*). The Nothilfe is based on the assumption that recipients will leave Switzerland within a foreseeable period. In practice, however, many people remain in the country for several years because return is legally, practically, medically, or personally impossible. As a result, they may live for prolonged periods under conditions that were officially designed as temporary.

This group is largely excluded from the welfare state and frequently unable to access civil society projects, charitable initiatives, and funding from foundations. Eligibility criteria often require a residence permit, recognised refugee status, participation in the regular social assistance system, or realistic prospects of professional integration.

The innovative aspect of the MuG counselling service lies in its ability to use institutional resources and professional discretion to support people who fall between the gaps of existing systems. As she puts it, *"its flexible and individualised approach makes it possible to respond to urgent, real-life needs that are not adequately addressed by state services."*

EFFECTIVENESS

People whose asylum applications have been rejected often live with extremely limited financial, social, and institutional resources. In her words, *"in this context, even relatively small forms of assistance can have a significant effect on everyday life."*

Public transport is one particularly important example. Transport costs in Switzerland are high, while many emergency assistance and return centres (Rückkehrzentren) are located outside the city of Bern. Without financial support for public transport, clients may be unable to attend counselling appointments, meet legal representatives, access healthcare, participate in language courses, or maintain social relationships.

Providing a public transport pass therefore has several effects. It increases clients' freedom of movement, enables independent access to support services, and reduces social isolation. It may also strengthen clients' ability to organise their everyday lives autonomously rather than depending on individual tickets or informal assistance from others.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The counselling service follows an individual, needs-based approach. Clients are actively involved in defining the issues to be addressed and in deciding which forms of support are appropriate. Counselling is not based solely on institutional assessments but also on the clients own priorities, goals, experiences, and understanding of their situation.

However, participation currently takes place primarily at the level of individual counselling and support planning. Clients are not yet systematically involved in the strategic development, governance, or evaluation of the counselling service.

There are local projects and initiatives, in which rejected asylum seekers can participate that allows for more participatory approaches, to which the social workers can refer the clients.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Networking and active participation in the local support network are essential components of the counselling service. Close cooperation enables organisations to combine resources, share knowledge, and provide more coordinated support. This creates added value both for clients and for the professionals and organisations involved.

Collaboration is not limited to occasional exchanges concerning individual cases. It also includes the regular sharing of knowledge and experiences, discussions about changes in professional practice, and joint reflection on legal and political developments.

Networking is a central element of social work in general, but it is particularly important when working with people whose asylum applications have been rejected. The number of organisations offering accessible support to this group is small, while their work is heavily shaped by legal restrictions, limited funding, and changing political conditions. Regular exchange between the relatively small number of involved actors is therefore necessary to maintain professional capacity and prevent clients from being left without support. Cooperation also helps organisations identify gaps in services, coordinate responses, share specialised knowledge, and develop joint advocacy positions.

REPLICABILITY

The counselling service is transferable to other cities and regions. It does not require a highly specialised infrastructure, but it does depend

on qualified social workers, stable institutional support, access to flexible financial resources, and strong cooperation with local partner organisations.

What is particularly relevant in this context is that the supporting organisation is convinced of the value of the work and deliberately makes use of the limited room for manoeuvre available.

As she notes, *"the model should not be replicated as a substitute for adequate state support."* Its purpose is to respond to existing gaps and reduce immediate hardship, while continuing to advocate for structural improvements. For this reason, any replication should combine individual assistance with networking, documentation of unmet needs, and political or institutional advocacy.



IV. PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE

ASBL SAWA, BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

Country and Place: Belgium (street outreach in Brussels and beyond; emergency shelters in Wallonia and Brussels; a larger transition shelter in Flanders).

Initiative: Sawa – accompaniment of persons in prostitution and the fight against human trafficking, through street outreach, housing. and prevention/awareness.

Beneficiaries: Persons in prostitution (mostly women of immigrant origin) and victims of trafficking, regardless of legal status or religion; also, in specific cases, clients and the families of prostituted persons; and at-risk publics (e.g. unaccompanied foreign minors) for prevention

Theme: Street outreach; emergency and transition housing; individualised accompaniment towards exit from prostitution; prevention and awareness in schools and universities; accompanied return to the country of origin

Project Duration: Founded in 2009; statutes changed to those of an explicitly Christian association in 2013; consecrated to the Virgin Mary in 2014 – ongoing.

Funding Source: Donations only (no public subsidies and no Church funding); an annual budget of around €150,000. There are no paid staff: the work is carried out by trained, professionally competent volunteers.

Website: sawa-prostitution.be

Catholic Organization: Sawa ASBL, a Catholic Christian association founded and chaired by Fr. P.G. OP (Dominican).

Description

Sawa ("together" in Arabic) was founded in 2009 by Fr. P.G., a Dominican priest and trained social worker, drawing on his experience of the world of prostitution in Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands. Although the founders were Christian, the association did not initially

specify a Christian identity; after an internal debate it chose, in 2013, to change its statutes to become officially a Christian association. The purpose, Fr. P.G. explains, is *"that the association itself be Christian and care for all persons, whatever their religion"* [10] – it welcomes Muslims, Orthodox and others alike. Most of the persons they accompany are of immigrant origin: chiefly, in Belgium, women from Nigeria and Ghana, from Brazil and Ecuador, and from Albania, Romania and Bulgaria – the latter groups, which arrived in the late 1990s, having shifted a prostitution that had once been largely Belgian into a markedly international one. Sawa welcomes them regardless of legal status or religion.

The work turns on three axes. The first is street work – meeting people in the streets, the "vitrines" and the bars. The second is housing – emergency shelters in Wallonia and Brussels and a larger transition shelter in Flanders. The third is prevention and information – prevention with publics directly at risk (such as unaccompanied foreign minors) and information in universities and colleges, to counter the dominant "regulationist" view that treats prostitution as a job like any other. Each year Sawa meets more than a thousand different prostituted persons and carries out more than two hundred individual follow-ups; since 2014 it has also accompanied clients, mostly men who make contact about an addiction – an approach Fr. P.G. traces to the late Marie-Louise Fluch and to the conviction that, in this world, *"everyone suffers,"* and the aim is to seek not the guilty but the suffering.

Sawa's standpoint is explicitly Christian. The human body, Fr. P.G. argues, has a dignity that places it outside the market – it cannot be bought, sold or rented – and a person cannot be detached from it; the discourse that separates "my body" from "myself" is, in his thirty years' experience, one that no one ultimately sustains. The association neither judges nor idealises anyone, and seeks to keep open the possibility of a different life for whoever desires it.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

At least twenty-five people leave prostitution each year with Sawa's support – up from "one or two" a year when it began. The Christian di-

10 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

mension is, in Fr. P.G.'s experience, often present among the people accompanied: Sawa organises several pilgrimages a year to Marian shrines, and some of those accompanied have prepared for baptism, confirmation or first communion.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sawa is funded *"solely on the basis of donations,"* with an annual budget of around €150,000 and no paid staff. As an explicitly Christian anti-trafficking association it cannot, Fr. P.G. notes, obtain public subsidies in Belgium, and it receives nothing from the Church. He is emphatic that material means are essential – *"without money you cannot help,"* since the people concerned lack money – and that the association, now too large for volunteers alone, needs to begin employing staff.

INNOVATION

Sawa's distinctiveness in Belgium is that it stands *"at the junction"* between the associations that support prostitution as an activity and the federal centres for recognised trafficking victims: it judges no one, but exists to help those who wish it to live something other than prostitution, regardless of victim status – and backs that offer with real financial and housing accompaniment, so that the words are matched by deeds.

EFFECTIVENESS

Although unsubsidised and unrecognised by either State or Church, Sawa is, in practice, *"very widely recognised"*: it sits on the Brussels prostitution platform alongside the federal and local police, the public social-welfare centres (CPAS), the equal-opportunities centre and other associations, is invited to brief European parliamentarians, and receives referrals even from associations and the sex-workers' union that hold opposing views, when a person wishes to leave prostitution but they lack the means to help them do so.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The approach is non-judgemental and relational, meeting people "without judgement" and walking with them over the long term; some who once defended the separation of body and self later return to say

otherwise. Accompaniment extends, where chosen, to a full year of support back in the country of origin to help a person restart.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Sawa cooperates closely with the wider associative and institutional world – the police, public social-welfare centres (CPAS) and other associations – even those that disagree with its position. Cooperation with dioceses and parishes, by contrast, is limited: in Belgium there is no diocesan pastoral ministry for prostituted persons, unlike in France, where the Episcopal Conference supports the "Mouvement du Nid"; Fr. P.G. has had only individual contacts with sympathetic bishops.

REPLICABILITY

Fr. P.G. believes the model is reproducible worldwide: it began small, with about fifteen founders, simply going to meet prostituted persons in the streets. What is needed, he argues, is volunteers who care for these persons, among them at least one or two who are competent and know the local law well enough to reorient people towards the right services; a progressive structuring with the financial means to provide housing and daily accompaniment; and credibility – the capacity for serious, listening dialogue with all potential partners.


sawa


Dimanche
RCF
RADIO

CARE FOR UNACCOMPANIED MINOR REFUGEES, DON BOSCO SOZIALWERK, AUSTRIA

Country and Place: Austria, Vienna

Initiative: Socio-pedagogical shared-living communities for unaccompanied minor refugees, open youth centres and support for care leavers

Beneficiaries: Unaccompanied minor male refugees aged 14 to 18, mainly from Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine; and, through the youth centres, young people living in Vienna more broadly

Theme: Reception, Protection, and Integration of Unaccompanied Minors

Project Duration: Since 2002 to date

Funding Source: Austrian public system (Fonds Soziales Wien, Wiener Flüchtlingshilfe)

Website: www.sozialwerk.at

Catholic Organization: Don Bosco Sozialwerk (Salesians of Don Bosco)

The Don Bosco Sozialwerk was founded in Vienna in 2002, at a time when a growing number of unaccompanied minors were reaching Austria and the existing youth-care system was not equipped to receive them. As the organisation recalls, responsibility for these young people fell between two systems: *"two parties always saying the other is responsible"*[11], with neither the ordinary youth-care structures nor the reception system for refugees ready to take charge of children arriving on their own. In response, the Salesians of Don Bosco, together with the Don Bosco Sisters and the organisation Jugend Eine Welt, decided to set up a dedicated structure. The first shared-living community opened in 2004, initially hosting a small group of boys from Syria and Afghanistan and financed by private donations; from 2005 the work was integrated into the publicly funded system. Originally established as the Don Bosco Flüchtlingswerk, the organisation was renamed Don Bosco Sozialwerk in 2019 to reflect the breadth of its activity, and today the Salesians carry the main responsibility for it.

At the heart of the practice are socio-pedagogical shared-living communities for unaccompanied minor refugees, boys aged 14 to 18, of whom the great majority arrive in Austria on their own. Each community

11 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

houses up to fifteen young people and is staffed around the clock by qualified professionals. The organisation currently runs five such communities in Vienna. The declared aim is simple and demanding at once: to offer each young person a real home for the time they can stay, usually three to four years, within a familiar and secure atmosphere in which they can grow and discover who they are. The organisation is careful not to present itself as a substitute family, since the young people have families of their own, and it actively supports them in keeping regular contact with relatives, which today is made easier by the internet.

The pedagogical approach is that of Don Bosco, a preventive method built on presence and relationship. In the words used by the organisation, this means *"active presence"* and watchful care rather than control, and a readiness to keep believing in the young person: not a third or fourth chance, but, as a member of the team put it, *"a hundredth try"* so long as there remains a connection to build on. In practice, each young person is accompanied through an individual development plan, drawn up together with them within the first three months and revised every six, covering arrival and current situation, emotional life, health, education, social behaviour, the asylum procedure, and free time. Particular attention is given to trauma-sensitive care, to cultural sensitivity and to health, alongside sustained support for schooling and language learning, which the organisation regards as decisive for the young people's longer-term prospects.

The shared-living community known as WG Ruth, in Vienna's tenth district, illustrates the model. Fifteen boys aged 14 to 18 live there in two- and three-bed rooms, supported by a team whose members between them cover German, English, Pashto and Arabic. During 2025 the community developed a series of workshops on democracy and media literacy, including participation in a mock election and preparatory work on the Austrian political landscape, together with monthly outings under the title "Life in Vienna" that make use of the city's cultural pass. Alongside the housing, the organisation runs five open youth centres, which are safe spaces available to all young people in the city, not only refugees, as well as German-language and cultural-orientation courses. In 2025 the living projects accompanied around 150 young people, while the youth centres reached, on average, some fifty young people per day in each location.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

The clearest impact concerns the housing itself. Giving a young person a stable home for several years, in a period the organisation describes as difficult for any adolescent and more so for those arriving alone in a very different culture, allows trust to be rebuilt where earlier experiences had made it hard to form stable bonds. The organisation notes that the few conflicts within the communities and the good co-existence across cultures are themselves signs that a secure basis has been created.

SUSTAINABILITY

The work is almost entirely financed through the Austrian public system, having moved from private donations in its first years to full integration into state funding from 2005. The Salesian congregation continues to guarantee the orientation of the organisation, which today operates as a publicly funded non-governmental body. The organisation is candid about the pressure that reductions in staffing have placed on the quality of individual accompaniment, and about the need for adequate staff-to-young-people ratios to safeguard the children properly.

INNOVATION

While the Don Bosco method is long established, the organisation locates its distinctiveness in the refusal to give up on any young person. As a member of the team explained, so long as there is still *"a good part"* to work with, the accompaniment continues, and the approach is deliberately less rigid, less *"black and white"*, than more standardised models. This patient, relational stance, applied to young people who have often experienced repeated rupture, is what the organisation regards as its most original contribution.

EFFECTIVENESS

Results are read above all in the young people's growing autonomy and integration. The intensive work on democracy and elections in 2025

produced, in the organisation's words, a real "aha" moment: the young people came with many questions, learned that a democratic system allows great freedom while still setting clear rules, and began to reflect on and compare the norms of their countries of origin with those of Austria. The shared outings across Vienna widened their horizons and left them more willing to try new things on their own and to move beyond their immediate community, which the team reads as a further sign that integration is taking hold.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Participation is built into daily life. A weekly meeting gives the young people a structured say in the life of the community, and they are directly involved in shaping and revising their own development plans. The organisation also treats the community itself as a school of participation: the fifteen boys come from different nations and must learn to live together, so that, as the team observes, *"integration starts at home"*, with a shared language to be found and one another's different talents to be recognised and drawn upon.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The accompaniment relies on a dense network of partners. The organisation works closely with the public reception and youth-welfare authorities, on which its mandate and funding depend, and with a wide range of specialised bodies for education, health, psychological and trauma support, legal guidance, and leisure. Volunteers are described as essential to sustaining the quality of the work, and are engaged through a structured programme that includes long-term volunteers, a voluntary social year, interns, and civil-service participants.

REPLICABILITY

The organisation considers the essential elements of its practice broadly replicable, because what carries the work is less a particular facility than a way of living and working with young people. Whether in a residential setting or in the open youth centres, the model rests on demonstrating in daily action how people of different origins can live and communicate together, an approach the organisation believes can be adapted to many other contexts.







CASA MAGNIFICAT, ROME, ITALY

Country and Place: Italy, Rome (Tuscolano district, southern periphery)

Initiative: Casa Magnificat

Beneficiaries: Migrant women and women in situations of vulnerability, including victims of trafficking, domestic violence, and forced marriage; often accompanied by young children.

Theme: Welcome, protection, accompaniment towards autonomy, action against trafficking, integration pathways, community building, pastoral presence.

Project Duration: Founded at the end of 2020, still active

Funding Source: The sisters' pensions; Providence (private donations); individual benefactors. The apartment was donated to the parish of San Gabriele dell'Addolorata and made available to the Ursuline sisters free of charge. Renovation costs were covered thanks to a network of private women donors.

Website: No dedicated website found. Press coverage: L'Osservatore Romano (May 2024); Avvenire (December 2024); Vatican News (November 2024); Vita.it (January 2025).

Catholic Organization: Ursuline Sisters SCM; the Casa Magnificat initiative was founded by Sr. Rita Giaretta OSU.

Casa Magnificat was born on the initiative of Sr. Rita Giaretta, an Ursuline sister from the Veneto who, before taking her vows, had worked as a nurse and as a trade unionist. In 2007 she was made an Officer of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic by President Giorgio Napolitano for her social commitment.

In 1995, together with other sisters, Sr. Rita Giaretta founded Casa Rut in Caserta, an experience that over more than thirty years has accompanied more than six hundred women and girls (Nigerian, Moldovan, Romanian, Albanian, South American) who were victims of trafficking and domestic violence, along with more than eighty children born or welcomed while still small, together with their mothers. Casa Rut also gave rise to the social cooperative New Hope, which, through its workshop of ethnic and ethical tailoring, continues to give women back their power and to promote dignity, rights and integration through training and work.

When the cooperative became autonomous, Sr. Rita felt called to a new missionary challenge and moved to Rome together with her fellow sister, Sr. Assunta Pavanello.

Casa Magnificat opened in Rome at the end of 2020, in a 140-square-metre apartment on the sixth floor of a residential building in the Tuscolano district, a densely populated and multicultural area in the southern periphery of the city. The apartment had been donated to the parish of San Gabriele dell'Addolorata by its owner following a personal tragedy, and was then made available to the Ursuline sisters free of charge. The costs of renovation and furnishing were covered thanks to a supportive network of private women donors, whose names are written on a large tree painted on the wall by a young Bolivian woman who had stayed in the house.

In its first four years of activity, Casa Magnificat welcomed about twenty women, including five mothers and six young children, from Africa, Romania, Peru, Cuba, Afghanistan, and Italy. Some had survived trafficking; others had fled domestic violence or forced marriage. The house also supports vulnerable women from the surrounding neighbourhood.

The model of accompaniment is relational and long-term. Sr. Rita describes it as *"kneading humanity together."*[12] The women are supported in obtaining their documents, in accessing the school system, in learning Italian and in vocational training. Volunteers help with language learning and practical matters; scouts follow the children with their homework. Volunteer psychologists and a retired doctor offer occasional consultations.

The pastoral dimension is explicit but not proselytising. The house keeps a clear Catholic identity (weekly Mass is celebrated and moments of prayer are scheduled) but is open to women of any religious background. As Sr. Rita puts it: *"We do not hide who we are. But what people experience first is welcome."*

A particularly telling testimony is that of Joy, a Nigerian woman forced into prostitution on the streets of Castel Volturno (Caserta) and supported by Casa Rut. Her story, told in the book *I am Joy* (San Paolo) with a preface by Pope Francis, has become a symbol of the mission. Joy later chose to move to Casa Magnificat to support its work. In Rome she completed her year of civil service, obtained the qualification of health and social care worker, found a job and married in October 2024. She asked Sr. Rita to walk her down the aisle.

12 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

The impact is above all qualitative and relational. In its first four years the house welcomed about twenty women, accompanied towards autonomy and supported in rebuilding their lives. The long-term nature of the accompaniment, which continues even after the women leave the house, distinguishes the initiative from emergency-centred approaches. Concrete results include the regularisation of legal status, the enrolment in school of mothers and children, vocational training, and entry into work. The case of Joy, today a health and social care worker, exemplifies the transformative potential of long-term relational accompaniment.

SUSTAINABILITY

Economic sustainability rests on a fragile but resilient model: the pensions of the two sisters, private donations, and the free use of the apartment. The absence of institutional funding is at once a limit and a source of freedom, since it allows the house to operate without rigid administrative constraints and to raise its voice when dignity and rights are not promoted, or are even trampled upon. The strong symbolic and media visibility of the initiative helps to sustain both the network of donors and the awareness-raising that the issue requires. The continuity with the legacy of Casa Rut and the reputation of Sr. Rita Giaretta ensure long-term organisational stability.

INNOVATION

The innovative character of Casa Magnificat lies in its model of a residential community, in which consecrated and lay women, migrants and non-migrants, share daily life together. It is not a dormitory, a social service, or a vocational-insertion programme: it is a home in the full sense of the word. The model deliberately avoids the fragmentation between the spiritual and the social dimension, embodying an integrated anthropology of care. The continuity between Casa Rut (Caserta) and Casa Magnificat (Rome) is itself an innovative model of institutional transmission and missionary renewal.

EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness is measured through concrete results: the regularisation of documents, school enrolment, professional qualifications, and entry into work. The initiative responds to forms of vulnerability (invisible domestic violence, forced marriages, undocumented mothers with children) that often escape ordinary social services. The referral network (anti-violence centres, social services, word of mouth) ensures that the house is reached by those who need it most.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The women hosted at Casa Magnificat are active participants, not passive beneficiaries. Their stories, cultures and skills shape the life of the house. The large tree on the entrance wall, painted by a former guest, symbolises the co-construction of the community. Former residents return for celebrations or stay in touch over time, a sign of a lasting sense of belonging and shared responsibility.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The initiative operates within a broad network of informal and formal collaborations: the parish of San Gabriele dell'Addolorata (which provides the space), the diocesan Caritas, religious communities and anti-trafficking associations, volunteer psychologists, scouts, private donors, anti-violence centres and social services. The link with the wider Ursuline congregation and with the legacy of Casa Rut extends the collaborative network as far as Caserta and the New Hope social cooperative.

REPLICABILITY

The model is transferable, under certain conditions: the availability of a physical space through an ecclesial collaboration, the presence of a religious community willing to live in close proximity to those it welcomes, and an approach to accompaniment that is relational rather than merely functional. The experience of Casa Rut shows that the model can, over time, generate autonomous social enterprises. Several Italian dioceses and religious congregations have expressed interest in learning about this experience.




GRAZIE FRANCESCO



V. PATHWAYS TO AUTONOMY: WORK, HOUSING, AND LONG-TERM INTEGRATION

MIGRACIÓN Y REFUGIO, CESAL, MADRID, SPAIN

Country and Place: Spain. Social-action work rooted in Madrid (the CEPI Tetuán integration centre of the Comunidad de Madrid, managed by CESAL; the Casa Nazareth reception centre in El Espinar, Segovia) and extended to Valencia, Toledo, the Canary Islands and other regions

Initiative: CESAL Migración y Refugio – a programme line combining reception, legal and psychosocial accompaniment, language learning and, above all, employment integration through a "learn-by-doing" model

Beneficiaries: Migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees; young people (from 16) and adults (up to c. 70) in situations of social exclusion; families and unaccompanied minors; persons inside and outside the formal reception system

Theme: Reception and accompaniment; administrative and legal support; psychological support; school and family support; vocational training and labour insertion; integration enterprises; awareness-raising; community integration.

Project Duration: CESAL founded in 1988; social-action work in Spain begun *"al inicio del 2007."* Active and ongoing in 2025–2026

Funding Source: Predominantly public funding (national and regional calls for proposals), complemented by private and bank/corporate foundations through competitive calls. AECID-qualified NGO and among the most AECID-funded Spanish NGOs; accredited by Fundación Lealtad

Website: https://www.cesal.org

Catholic Organization: CESAL, registered on 14 April 1988 originally as the Centro de Estudios y Solidaridad con América Latina (the explicit reference to Latin America was later dropped as the organisation broadened its scope). A lay, Catholic-inspired NGO born from members of the Communion and Liberation movement, with no formal institutional link to it.

Description

CESAL is a Spanish international NGO working in fourteen countries across Latin America and Africa, with twelve delegations in Spain and offices in six countries (Peru, Honduras, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mozambique). L.G. recounts its origin: *"We were born in 1988 … through people who belonged to Communion and Liberation and who began to have relationships with people in Latin America … it was a centre of studies for the exchange of knowledge between Latin America and Spain."* Its social-action work in Spain began in 2007, when the public institutions CESAL already worked with in international cooperation invited it to act locally during the first migration boom: *"You work well … these people come from the countries where you are working, so perhaps you know the culture."*

That year CESAL took over the management of the CEPI Tetuán (Centro de Participación e Integración), a centre of the Comunidad de Madrid – originally the "Centro Hispano-Dominicano," as its early Dominican profile shifted over the years to Colombians, Filipinos, Chinese, and many others. There it offers legal and psychological advice, nationality examinations, intercultural mediation, and employment-oriented training; its inclusion activities are co-financed up to 40% by the European Social Fund Plus (2021–2027). From this base the work grew to span administrative and family-reunification support, psychological and school support, and, increasingly, employment integration.

On the ecclesial dimension, L.G. is precise: *"We were founded by people [of the movement], but we are not an entity tied to the movement – they are two different things … there is no formal institutional relationship."* CESAL is, she notes, the largest of the social works linked to that charism in Spain, while remaining a professional organisation: with 383 employees in total (204 women and 179 men), of whom 141 are contracted in Spain, it delivers its core services through professionals rather than volunteers – *"we have chosen to do professional work"* – while still mobilising volunteers for specific initiatives (355 volunteers and 1,355 members and collaborators were recorded in 2023).

Reception and the employment-integration model

Within the Ministry's international-protection programme (MISSM), CESAL runs the Casa Nazareth in El Espinar (Segovia), a 126-place centre owned by Hermandades del Trabajo and leased by CESAL with the authorisation of the Archdiocese of Madrid; it was officially inaugurated in June 2024 in the presence of the Secretary of State for Migration,

Pilar Cancela, hosts mostly families (30–40% minors), and offers reception periods of six to eighteen months. Reception in Madrid city began in 2017 with 50 places at the "La Almudena" centre (San Blas district), when the Ministry first invited CESAL to join the National Reception System; capacity in Madrid now stands at 89 places, bringing CESAL's total to 215 reception places nationally.

The heart of the practice is labour insertion through a "learn-by-doing" method built on the master–apprentice relationship, with short, ad-hoc training oriented to rapid entry into work, beginning with hospitality. Realism is part of the method: *"In a kitchen there is one chef, but the rest are kitchen assistants … everyone who finishes training wants to be a chef, but what is needed is to be a good commis first."* CESAL also created an insertion enterprise: trainees who complete the course are given contracts and work in its own restaurants for up to three years before moving to the ordinary market. The model grew from a small school into two restaurant-schools owned by the Madrid City Council and still managed by CESAL, "La Quinta Cocina" (in the Espacio Abierto de La Quinta de los Molinos) and "Las Águilas" (Aluche district), and, from October 2024, CESAL's own Mercado San Cristóbal in the Chamartín district, a market-school run for the municipality which, after an integral, sustainable refurbishment, reports over 70% immediate insertion; replications are under way in Segovia and Valencia, where it has also begun courses for traditional bakeries. Beyond Madrid, CESAL took social-action work to Valencia (from 2022, adding hospitality training in 2023), opened two offices in Tenerife and one in Granada in 2024, and planned for 2025 a new office in Gran Canaria, a training project in Murcia and community-development work in Madrid's Arganzuela district.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

From 2024, the migration and social-action programmes reached a substantial number of people. Reception centres hosted more than 500 persons of some 30 nationalities, supported by over 1,700 legal interventions. The CEPI Tetuán served around 7,200 persons, of whom some 1,800 took part in the "Conoce Tus Leyes" legal-literacy programme and several hundred women in activities designed specifically for migrant women. The employment area accompanied around 3,800

persons in labour-insertion itineraries, of whom roughly 970 reached employment, while the Proyecto Construyendo Puentes accompanied highly vulnerable persons falling between the formal reception phases. Per the interview, CESAL works across the age range *"from 16 to 70."*

SUSTAINABILITY

Funding is predominantly public, won through national and regional calls, complemented by private and bank-foundation calls; CESAL is working towards more direct corporate alliances for labour insertion. Declared of public utility in 2001 and an AECID-qualified NGO since 2005 (renewed in 2009), CESAL submits its accounts to external audit and to Fundación Lealtad; it belongs to the Spanish NGDO Coordinator (CONGDE), the AVSI Network, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and the Euro-Arab network READI. Its professional staffing and these accreditations provide institutional credibility; CESAL is among the most AECID-funded Spanish NGOs and received the Medalla de Madrid in 2022 for its work with young people at risk of exclusion. The organisation has grown substantially in recent years – *"we have grown a great deal."*

INNOVATION

For L.G. the decisive innovation is not the training as such – *"there are many courses"* – but the human accompaniment around it: *"Taking someone by the hand without cutting off their capacity to decide, without substituting for them … and we are here forever. This is not a job that you do and it ends."* A second original element is that CESAL accompanies not only the worker but the employer: *"We don't only accompany the person, we accompany the employer"* – illustrated by a young man from Mali hired on the spot once an initially reluctant employer saw him work. CESAL also uses a "Social Cooking" encounter methodology as a tool against racism, xenophobia, and discrimination.

EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness is shown by labour-insertion outcomes, the consolidation of the restaurant- and market-school model, and its replication across regions. L.G. also flags a structural challenge: reception timelines under the Ministry programme have shortened drastically – *"before it was six, even nine months … now it is sometimes not even a month"* – leaving people without documents and exposed to Spain's acute housing shortage.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

CESAL's method rests on five principles (centrality of the person, starting from the positive, "doing with," subsidiarity and partnership). It insists that this is less a *"hacer con"* ("doing with") than an *"estar con"* ("being with"), in the sense of sharing people's lives rather than applying a merely pragmatic participatory model; the person is the protagonist. Some beneficiaries have joined CESAL as staff – L.G. cites a refugee from Russia now working in administration and a young Venezuelan woman whom CESAL helped to regularise and then employed: *"She understands much better than others what migrants go through."*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

CESAL operates within the formal reception system in partnership with the Spanish Ministry; manages public centres and markets for the Comunidad and Ayuntamiento de Madrid; partners with private and bank foundations; and cultivates relationships with local Churches case by case (for example, inviting the bishop to visit its work in the Canary Islands). It also mobilised a rapid collaborative response to the October 2024 DANA floods in the Valencia region. Each Christmas it organises the *"Te invito a cenar"* dinner for vulnerable families, an initiative linked to the CEPI Tetuán that in its twelfth edition mobilised some 700 volunteers.

REPLICABILITY

The model is replicable where an organisation can combine formal reception, gap-filling accompaniment, employment integration, and an insertion enterprise within one professional framework. The restaurant- and market-school template is explicitly structured for replication and is being extended to new regions.


cesal





REFUGEE SERVICE / MIGRANT PROJECT, CROSSCARE, ARCHDIOCESE OF DUBLIN, IRELAND

Country and Place: Ireland, Dublin

Initiative: Information, advocacy and support services for migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees

Beneficiaries: Non-EU migrants, international protection applicants, and refugees

Theme: Access to rights, information and advocacy

Project Duration: Crosscare Migrant Project since 1987; Crosscare Refugee Service, originally founded as the Vincentian Refugee Centre, later integrated into Crosscare

Funding Source: European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, Irish statutory funding, Emigrant Support Programme of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin

Website: www.crosscare.ie / www.migrantproject.ie

Catholic Organization: Crosscare, social support agency of the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin.

Crosscare was founded in 1941 by the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin as the Catholic Social Service Conference, an initiative that brought together the social activities of the Church to respond to the severe poverty affecting wartime Dublin. More than eighty years later, it has become one of the largest Catholic social care agencies in Ireland, with around 500 staff working in youth services, homeless services, food poverty programmes, and migrant and refugee services. Its history reflects a broader Irish trajectory: projects originally founded and funded by dioceses, religious orders, nuns, brothers and priests have gradually become mainstreamed, registered as companies under Irish charity law and funded largely through statutory sources. Today about 95% of Crosscare's income comes from public funding, while the organization remains formally linked to the Archdiocese of Dublin, whose Archbishop is its patron.

Within this large structure, two closely connected services are dedicated to people on the move. The Crosscare Migrant Project was established in 1987 under the name "Emigrant Advice", to assist the many Irish citizens who were then leaving the country. When migration flows reversed in the 1990s and 2000s, newcomers began walking through

the door of its city centre office: they had seen the word "migrant" and asked for help. The service developed organically to work with people of all nationalities, and today it supports non-EU migrants with immigration, residency, citizenship and family reunification issues, while continuing its original work with Irish emigrants and returning emigrants. The Crosscare Refugee Service was originally set up by the Vincentians as the Vincentian Refugee Centre in Dublin; it later merged into Crosscare and now works with people in the asylum system on housing, integration and social welfare. The two teams share the same offices in the north inner city of Dublin, an area where many of the people they serve live within a few square kilometres.

The model the two services have developed is that of an information and advocacy service. There is no professional degree or established framework for this type of work in Ireland; the staff members, who mostly come from legal and social science backgrounds, have built the practice themselves. The work follows the entire arc of a migrant's settlement: informing people about the systems they must engage with, helping them navigate online portals, registering their immigration permission, connecting them with social welfare and health services, advocating for those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and, in the longer term, supporting applications for citizenship and family reunification. The focus is deliberately on systems: the services do not provide psychosocial, health, food or material support, but concentrate on the key administrative and legal gateways that determine whether a person can live, work and settle.

The ethos behind this work is explicitly rooted in Christian and Catholic thinking, reduced, as the manager of the two services explained during an interview, to its simplest component: *"everyone is created in the image and likeness of God, and therefore everyone has the same human rights and deserves respect"*[13]. This translates into a precise idea of accompaniment: *"We are not taking over people's lives. We are helping them at a time and point in their lives and to the extent that they need it … we are trying to insert ourselves at the time when they need us and then take ourselves away when they have the autonomy and the ability to do what they need to do themselves"*. Some people receive one focused consultation and never return; others are accompanied every month for years while their immigration status, payments or housing are resolved.

13 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

The two services work with about 3,000 people and families a year, coming from some 120 different countries. Outcomes range from the soft and hard to measure, such as a person leaving with the right information to make a decision, to the very concrete: applications completed for people without English or digital literacy, and appeals for housing or social welfare won on behalf of people who had been denied a service. One example illustrates the depth of this impact: a terminally ill student, whose restrictive visa gave no right to housing or social welfare, was initially excluded from a transplant because the medical team could not guarantee safe aftercare. The service worked to obtain a type of immigration permission granting access to housing and welfare supports, and the transplant could go ahead.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Migrant Project has been funded for many years through European integration and asylum funds, allocated on a competitive basis in three-year cycles, while the work with Irish emigrants is supported by the Emigrant Support Programme of the Department of Foreign Affairs; the Refugee Service is funded through Irish statutory sources. Although funding is never guaranteed beyond the short term, the organization has deliberately chosen to plan long: about twenty years ago Crosscare adopted a twenty-year vision articulated in successive strategic plans, at a time when it had funding secured for only one year. *"Regardless of the reality of where your money comes from, you need to think 5, 10, 20 years into the future"*, the manager observed, adding that *"one of the great things about religious organizations and the Church is long-term thinking"*.

INNOVATION

The most distinctive element is the deliberate construction of an ecosystem of connections with other frontline providers. Rather than waiting for people to arrive, the services go out and build relationships with those who encounter migrants at moments of crisis. In every Dublin hospital, for example, there is a medical social work team; when a

patient's immigration permission blocks access to the treatment they need, that team can refer the case, the immigration issue is resolved, and the patient regains full access to care. The approach is summarised as: *"we have expertise in this area, let's work with the experts in other areas, so that we can get a shared solution"*. The services do not advertise at all: people arrive exclusively through word of mouth, *"I went to this place, these people helped me"*.

EFFECTIVENESS

Each staff member is a genuine expert in their subject area, so that anyone who comes receives up-to-date, accurate and bespoke advice: *"It is not putting a search into Google. It is sitting down and talking to someone and asking them what they need"*. Advisers do not simply execute requests but explore the underlying need, often reordering the steps a person must take. When a service is denied, the team becomes the person's representative and files appeal whose outcomes can be tracked directly. Not every case can be fixed; even then, the person has been listened to, has understood what is and is not possible within the systems, and has been directed to where support might be found.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Former beneficiaries often return to volunteer or fundraise, although this is intentionally deferred until their own situation is resolved and they are independent. Given the scale of the organization and the diversity of its users, there is no client board: with 120 nationalities, no single person could represent all of them. Instead, beneficiaries and former clients are involved in shaping the organizational strategies, through consultations and surveys asking how the services can improve and what they should focus on.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

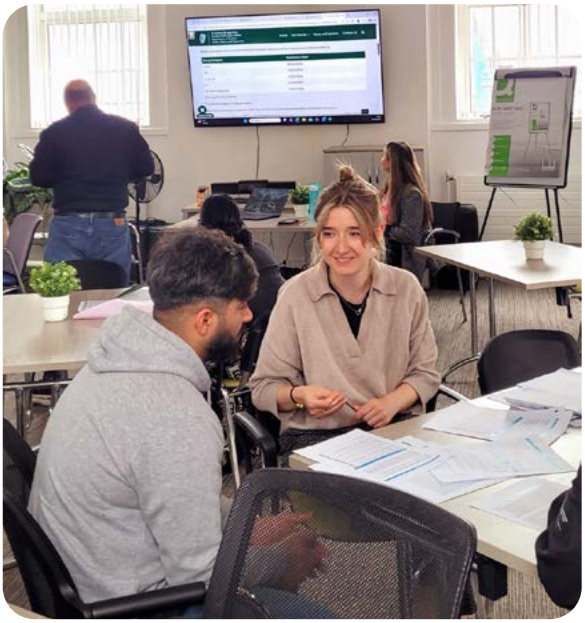
Collaboration is structural. Over many years the services have developed and now chair two national forums in which NGOs from around the country engage directly with policy makers in the Department of Social Protection and the Department of Justice. Alongside these institutional channels there are organic connections with other NGOs, with statutory housing, medical, and immigration services, and with the Church on the ground: the offices have historical links with the surrounding parish and

the pro-cathedral of Dublin, and parish priests across the diocese refer parishioners in difficulty directly to the service.

REPLICABILITY

A building with specialised workers exists in many contexts; what makes this practice worth replicating is the intentional decision to cross service boundaries. Where most services define what they do and stop at that line, this approach asks how one service's expertise can bring other actors into a shared solution. Replicating it requires specific expertise, deliberate intentionality and longevity: services running on annual funding tend to think within a twelve-month horizon, remaining reactive in a field where *"there is a crisis every day, there is a crisis every year"*. Building beyond the short term, and cultivating the ecosystem of supports and connections around the core work, is described as both the hardest challenge and the truly important condition for implementing this model elsewhere.






Our Values:
LOVE, RESPECT
& EXCELLENCE

HOUSING AND INTEGRATION SUPPORT, CARITAS CELJE, SLOVENIA

Country and Place: Slovenia, Celje (Diocese of Celje)

Initiative: Reception and integration of refugees and migrants, centred on a host-family model for Ukrainian refugees and a structured programme of social inclusion for vulnerable people.

Beneficiaries: Refugees and migrants, in particular Ukrainian refugees (largely women and children) since 2022; migrant women from Albania and Kosovo arriving through family reunification; longer-standing labour migrants from the countries of the former Yugoslavia; and, during the Balkan-route years, transit migrants from the Middle East

Theme: Reception and accommodation; integration and legal accompaniment; social inclusion, language learning and work orientation; care for community, culture and spiritual needs.

Project Duration: Škofijska karitas Celje founded on 2 February 2007; the Ukrainian programme has run since 2022 and is ongoing; the work with migrant women and the social-inclusion model has developed over several years

Funding Source: For a long time, chiefly donations (including from the Knights of Columbus and from private individuals); the accommodation house is made available by the Diocese of Celje; since December 2025 one worker is funded by the Slovenian Ministry for Social Affairs (state co-financing)

Website: karitasce.si

Catholic Organization: Škofijska karitas Celje (Diocesan Caritas of Celje), one of the six diocesan Caritas of the Church in Slovenia.

Description

Škofijska karitas Celje, the Diocesan Caritas of Celje, was founded in 2007 to carry out the charitable mission of the Church in one of the six dioceses of Slovenia. It is one of six diocesan Caritas that, while each remains independent in its own field, coordinate at national level, above all for fundraising, given the small size of the country. Its work with migrants has developed along several lines. For decades the diocese has accompanied labour migrants from the countries of the former Yugoslavia, whose origins have shifted over time from Bosnia towards, more recently, Serbia, Albania and Kosovo.

A distinctive strand concerns women arriving from Albania and Kosovo through family reunification. They are often very young, sometimes illiterate, and come from a strongly traditional context; Caritas works with the women rather than the men. Within a state-funded project in which it is a partner, the organisation offers a small number of these women each year a period of inclusion and a supervised introduction to the world of work, so that they can learn some Slovenian and gain a measure of independence. The aim, the Secretary General explains, is *"to empower these women … to be independent"*[14], a goal he describes candidly as demanding and, at times, delicate for a Catholic organisation, but rooted in the conviction that no person should be treated as less than free.

The organisation's main ongoing project began a few weeks after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in 2022, when it welcomed the first busloads of refugees, mostly women and children, from the east of the country. Following the appeal of Pope Francis, it chose a deliberately different path from large collective centres: *"not to put them into big centres, but to have them live with ourselves."* It found around fifty host families across Slovenia and placed the refugees with them, supporting them with integration, documents and the acquisition of temporary protection. The model continues today: new arrivals are now linked directly with host families, while Caritas keeps accompanying them. A diocese-owned house, made available to Caritas for twenty years free of rent, can accommodate up to fifty people and served as the first point of welcome. Determined that the Ukrainian community should also keep its own culture and bonds alive, Caritas hosts monthly gatherings in two locations, reaching some 140 people a month, at which the spiritual needs of the participants are also cared for, with a Greek Orthodox Ukrainian priest celebrating for them every few months.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

The reach is considerable for a small diocese: in its most intense year the organisation assisted, in one way or another, around eight hundred

14 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

people from Ukraine, of whom about one hundred and fifty were accompanied closely and on a daily basis. Beyond the numbers, the impact is read in concrete changes: refugees who obtain a legal status and settle into ordinary life with a Slovenian family, and migrant women who, for the first time, gain some autonomy. The Secretary General notes that the profile of those arriving has grown poorer and more wounded over time, so that the people now reaching the organisation correspond ever more closely to those charity most exists to serve.

SUSTAINABILITY

For years the programmes rested almost entirely on donations, both from partners such as the Knights of Columbus and from ordinary people, supported by the diocese's decision to provide the accommodation house without rent. A significant step came at the end of 2025, when the organisation obtained state co-financing for one worker dedicated to Ukrainians and other migrants; this was important not only in financial terms but as public recognition of an approach that remains, in the words of the Secretary General, *"always a little bit pastoral"*, even within a strongly secular state.

INNOVATION

Two features stand out. The first is the host-family model itself, which was new for Slovenia and asked ordinary households to share their homes, and which the organisation accompanied family by family. The second is the choice, from the very first bus, to bring a person with lived experience into the team: a Ukrainian woman, herself a refugee and fluent in several languages, has been part of the staff since the start and now works on the project, offering a perspective from the inside that has proved decisive in the relationship with the community.

EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness is read less through formal indicators than through the durability of the arrangements and the complexity of the needs met. Many of the Ukrainians accompanied carry difficulties that go well beyond the request for protection, and the organisation has learned to respond to these layered situations while sustaining, over more than four years, a network of host families that continues to renew itself as some families step back and others step forward.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

The organisation runs a programme of social inclusion for people of different backgrounds, designed so that participants take part in community activities rather than only receive help. Ukrainian women assist elderly people, help in Caritas' own houses and prepare warm meals for other refugees; there have been English classes and art therapy, and a monthly evening group brings together Ukrainian, Albanian and Slovenian women around shared craft work, where each discovers how much she has in common with the others. During the summer, children from Ukraine take part in holiday camps, with a Ukrainian woman among the volunteer animators. The aim, as the organisation puts it, is to help people *"to participate, to be useful"*, not merely to be assisted.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The practice draws on a wide web of collaboration: the host families themselves, the Knights of Columbus, the Diocese of Celje and its bishop, the Slovenian Ministry that now co-funds a worker, and a Greek Orthodox Ukrainian priest who attends to the spiritual life of the community. The relationship built with the civil authorities during the emergency, including the police and government during the Balkan-route years, has allowed the organisation to act as a recognised and trusted interlocutor.

REPLICABILITY

The Secretary General considers the model highly applicable elsewhere, recalling the appeal that every Catholic parish welcome at least one family. What it requires, he suggests, is above all *"evangelical courage"*: priests willing to speak out, and communities willing to be asked whether they have an empty house, a spare flat or a room to share. Given such willingness, the host-family approach, less costly and less institutional than large centres, can be reproduced in many other settings.







FUNDACIÓN RED ÍNCOLA, VALLADOLID, SPAIN

Country and Place: Spain, Valladolid

Initiative: Integral accompaniment of migrants and the community hospitality model

Beneficiaries: Migrants and refugees, including people in an irregular situation: families, women, minors, young people and elderly migrants

Theme: Integral welcome and community hospitality

Project Duration: Since 2006 (foundation since 2013), ongoing

Funding Source: Public grants, European projects, private donations, and premises made available in kind by the member congregations

Website: https://redincola.org

Catholic Organization: Fundación Red Íncola (inter-congregational foundation)

Red Íncola was born in Valladolid, in the Castilla y León region of Spain. Around the year 2000, volunteers and religious congregations that were already working with homeless people in a small shelter beneath a Capuchin Franciscan church noticed that a growing number of migrants were arriving in the city with needs different from those they were used to attending: language, families, women. They began to work together, first informally and then, in 2006, as an inter-congregational association created to support the migrant population arriving in Valladolid. The name expresses the aim of the whole project: *íncola*, the Latin word for inhabitant or dweller, points to the goal of turning each migrant into a full-right inhabitant of the city. In 2013 the initiative became a foundation, Fundación Red Íncola. Its board (*patronato*) brings together eight religious congregations, each of which places a concrete resource at the service of the network: welcome flats, education for minors, an intercultural centre where people can meet, a women's residence. Together, these resources form a single path of integral welcome. The board, chaired by the representative of the Jesuits, meets every two months to guide the programming and to decide the foundation's institutional positioning. In 2025 the organisation completed twenty years of activity.

The foundation accompanies people from the moment they arrive until they complete their process of integration and build a new life project,

working across several areas: social action and basic needs, participation, training and employment, and a specific pastoral care of spiritual accompaniment. In 2025 it accompanied more than 7,400 people. The first-reception programme, which offers information, orientation, workshops, and psychological and legal support, reached around 4,200 people in Valladolid, most of them without a residence permit and in an irregular situation. *For us, what matters is the person: not whether they are refugees or migrants, but that they are persons,*[15] explains a member of the foundation's team.

Around this first reception, the foundation has developed a wide range of services. On housing, it offers 47 places for recently arrived or highly vulnerable people, together with a smaller residence with three to five places for young women. Attention to basic needs includes a clothing bank and a food service, as well as *café solidario*, a night-time street presence alongside homeless people, most of them also migrants, who receive blankets, warm clothing and, above all, companionship. A women's area, launched in 2025, attends to recently arrived migrant women and to migrant women survivors of gender-based violence. The childhood and youth programme provides educational and emotional support to minors, mediates between families and schools, and grants scholarships to very vulnerable families with no access to social aid; for young people it runs an intercultural youth space in which those who have just arrived are accompanied by other young people, both migrant and Spanish. A further area of awareness-raising and citizenship includes an intercultural centre that works against unwanted loneliness, a group for migrants over 65 opened in 2025, workshops in schools to promote coexistence, and an interreligious space. The pastoral dimension accompanies the spiritual life of the people welcomed, acts as a bridge towards the parishes for Catholic migrants, and offers a monthly Eucharist and a space of listening.

The foundation follows a community model of hospitality in which volunteers do not simply carry out a task but accompany the people they meet. Its most distinctive feature is what the team calls hospitality volunteering: the flats where families are welcomed belong to parishes, and people linked to those parishes volunteer to accompany the families, welcoming them to the neighbourhood, introducing them to local shops, and going with them to the doctor and the school. In 2025 this programme welcomed 24 people across four hospitality communities, involving two parishes and two religious communities. The profession-

15 The following passages in quotation marks and italics are statements from the interviewee.

al team consists of 25 people, including a social worker, educators, an Arabic intercultural mediator, a psychologist and a lawyer, coordinated by a team of four; it is supported by a network of around 280 volunteers and by volunteers of the European Solidarity Corps.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

For newly arrived people without a permit, the first impact is emotional. They must often wait around two years before they can work legally, or work in the informal economy in the meantime; helping them to sustain their emotional wellbeing during this period is decisive. Many minors and young people arrive under duress and in a very hard emotional situation: providing them with stability is the first form of support. Beyond covering basic needs, the emphasis is on emotional wellbeing, so that people can face the search for work or training with dignity once they obtain their permit. In 2025, the foundation accompanied more than 7,400 people and was one of only three entities in Valladolid initially authorised to issue vulnerability reports, having managed 728 such reports and 428 individual orientations.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability rests on shared resources. The member congregations place premises and housing at the disposal of the network, so that the foundation bears only the cost of utilities and avoids rents that would otherwise be unaffordable; this is itself a significant form of self-financing. Funding combines public grants, European projects (in which the foundation has taken part since 2018) and private donations from companies and individuals, supported by around 200 collaborating members. Institutional positioning is decided by the board rather than by the technical staff: even where a regional government questions the welcome of migrants in an irregular situation, the board maintains the commitment. *We keep welcoming these people, because they are persons; if part of it is no longer funded, we will look for funding*, a member of the team explains.

INNOVATION

The hospitality model introduces a third actor alongside the migrant and the foundation: the welcoming community. Parishes and religious communities do not only provide housing, they share daily life, so that welcome becomes a relationship rather than a service. *We do not only give them food; when we give them food, we accompany them*, the team notes. A culture of celebration runs through the whole approach: the foundation celebrates the end of a regularisation process, a new job, a passed exam or a child's birthday, accompanying people *from the joy of the Gospel*. People who arrive, whether Catholic or not, recognise this as something distinctive, together with a spiritual accompaniment in which they can speak freely about their own beliefs.

EFFECTIVENESS

The foundation evaluates its work through satisfaction and evaluation surveys, applied in programmes such as training, where it measures how long participants take to find employment and whether their well-being and social relationships have improved. It monitors its activity through key performance indicators and works with a quality-management system. *It is very difficult to measure everything*, the team acknowledges, *but we do try to measure it*. The foundation reports that it holds a quality certification.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the foundation has worked to make migrants not only participants but part of the change. Many arrive with great potential and, having received help, wish to give back; a dedicated strand of the volunteer programme supports migrants who want to volunteer despite the instability of their own situation. When migrants help other migrants, they become a living reference for those who have just arrived. *This person arrived just as I did, took a course, found work, and is now helping me; so yes, you can move forward, and there is hope*, is how the team describes the effect. This is especially visible among young people: around forty take part each week and some 120 pass through the intercultural space over the year, of whom around twenty are currently volunteering in the summer camps.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Networking is a core value. Beyond the member congregations, each of which brings schools, a university residence and pastoral groups and therefore a broad lay base, the foundation works closely with public social services for access to aid and for referral to more specialised programmes; for migrant women survivors of gender-based violence, for example, it acts above all as a bridge towards specialised institutions. It coordinates with schools through mediation between families and educational centres, with parishes through the hospitality communities, and with other church-linked entities such as Caritas, the Mercedarians and the Salesians, as well as through European projects, in order to build joint initiatives and reach a greater impact, particularly in awareness-raising. It also works with the diocesan migration delegation and, aware that on its own it has a local reach, it seeks to align with other organisations and even to lead networking initiatives that larger national entities can then amplify.

REPLICABILITY

The hospitality volunteering model is highly replicable: it shows how to link parishes and lay communities to a mission of accompaniment built on being a neighbour and sharing everyday life. *Being accompanied by a neighbour always opens more doors*, the team observes, and the model is already being extended in Spain through the Jesuit network. The work with young people, in which migrants who have been settled for some years accompany newer arrivals alongside local volunteers, is equally transferable and carries a strong impact. Intercultural mediation and community work with elderly migrants, itself learned through a European project, complete a set of practices that other territories can adapt to their own context. The team sees this openness as part of the same logic: just as the foundation shares its own experience, it has taken up ideas from the organisations with which it works in network.


COMPARTE
TU
LOS TIEMPOS
SABAO






Hombres y
mujeres
con y para
los demás

VI. COMMUNITIES THAT WELCOME: PARISHES AND LOCAL NETWORKS

PRAAT CAFÉ, PARISH OF OUR SAVIOUR, THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS

Country and Place: Netherlands – The Hague

Initiative: Praat Café ("talk café"): weekly Dutch-conversation meetings for refugees, within the parish's "Hand in Hand" refugee-outreach programme

Beneficiaries: Refugees and asylum seekers (newly arrived and status holders)

Theme: Language learning (Dutch), social integration, community encounter

Project Duration: Ongoing – started in 2018

Funding Source: Partly from the parish; the remainder from private and institutional donors

Website: https://parish.nl/our-outreach/hand-in-hand/

Catholic Organization: Parish of Our Saviour – International English-speaking Roman Catholic "Church of Our Saviour", The Hague (Bezuidenhout district); Justice & Peace Ministry, "Hand in Hand" Refugee Project

The Hague is one of Europe's most international cities, and for refugees and asylum seekers who are beginning to rebuild their lives there, gaining confidence in Dutch is among the most decisive steps toward integration – and one of the hardest to practise outside a classroom. Praat Café ("talk café") responds directly to this need. It is a weekly conversation initiative carried by volunteers of the International English-speaking Roman Catholic Parish "Church of Our Saviour" in The Hague, within the parish's "Hand in Hand" refugee-outreach programme and its Justice & Peace Ministry. The aim is simple but ambitious: to foster community through informal social contact and language practice, bringing refugees and asylum seekers currently in The Hague into regular contact

with the local community and helping them build both language proficiency and social confidence in an unhurried, welcoming way.

The meetings take place every Monday in a relaxed, informal setting. A group of Dutch-speaking volunteers and refugee guests come together to share experiences, play language games and discuss everyday topics, all with the goal of improving participants' spoken Dutch. Each evening builds around one-to-one Dutch conversation, warmed up by small-group talk and ice-breaker games, so that guests can speak and be heard rather than sit through a lesson. The emphasis throughout is on encounter rather than instruction: the same volunteers and guests meet week after week, so that language practice grows naturally out of a steady, friendly relationship. The parish is candid that the real fruit reaches well beyond language – the meetings build connectedness and friendship, and, in its own telling, there is a great deal of laughter and joy, so much that people can hardly wait for the next session. In 2026 the Praat Café has continued to meet on a regular basis, as confirmed by the parish's own communications and schedules, and it remains an active part of the community's pastoral and social outreach.

Praat Café sits within a much wider parish life. The "Church of Our Saviour" is a large and strongly international English-speaking Roman Catholic community – with around 1,600 registered families, over a thousand worshippers each weekend, parishioners from more than seventy countries, and over fifty active groups. Based in The Hague, which the parish describes as a world capital for justice and peace, it is known locally for an extensive outreach programme and presents justice and peace as central to its identity. It is within this culture of service, through the Hand in Hand Refugee Project, that Praat Café takes its place, alongside other initiatives such as the parish's weekly Soup Kitchen. The parish is clear that this wide programme is made possible only through its volunteers and the generosity of its parishioners, and Praat Café is best understood as one thread within a single, ongoing relationship with the people the community welcomes rather than as an isolated service.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

For people who have recently arrived or been granted status, regular spoken practice with local speakers is both hard to come by and de-

cisive for integration. Praat Café supplies exactly that, weekly and free of charge, while also countering the isolation that often accompanies the asylum process and its aftermath. In 2025 the sessions drew, on average, around fifteen guests every Monday, supported by four to five volunteers – a small but steady group in which each participant can be given genuine personal attention.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability rests on the parish's ongoing commitment and on volunteer involvement. As the coordinator notes, *"the Parish supports this project by offering us the space,"*[16] and the volunteers largely come from within the parish community itself, while funding is met partly by the parish and partly through private and institutional donors. This embedding in an established parish ministry gives the initiative real continuity; the main risk – common to volunteer-run activities – Is dependence on a committed core of people, offset here by the strength of the surrounding community.

INNOVATION

The innovation lies in setting and tone rather than in method: conversation practice takes place in an informal, welcoming context within parish life rather than in a classroom. Volunteers from the group also reach beyond their own premises, regularly engaging with newly arrived and established refugees through the reception centres run in and around The Hague by COA (*Centraal Orgaan opvang asielzoekers*), the Dutch central agency for the reception of asylum seekers, so that newcomers are actively invited in rather than left to find the initiative on their own.

EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness is best read in continuity and regularity – a weekly meeting sustained over the years, which by September 2022 had already been held for the fiftieth time. A particularly telling sign is that past participants who have since integrated into mainstream Dutch society often return, either simply for the connection or to share with newcomers how far they have come and how the initiative supported their growth.

16 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

Taken together with the steady weekly turnout of around fifteen guests, this quiet loyalty is perhaps the clearest measure that the format works for the people it is meant to serve.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Participation is the heart of the model. Refugees are not passive recipients of a service but active conversation partners who contribute through mutual exchange – sharing their experiences, their culture, and both their struggles and their successes. The milestones of integration are marked together: in the coordinator's words, *"it's always a celebration when someone gets their diploma or driving licence."*

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Although organised within the parish, Praat Café works closely with external partners. It engages regularly with COA to encourage newcomers in the reception centres to come and experience the café, and it turns to organisations such as the Rotary and the city of The Hague when funding or additional support is needed. This combination of a parish base and local partnership keeps the initiative both firmly rooted and open to the wider city.

REPLICABILITY

The model is highly replicable. Any parish or community group could organise a regular conversation evening pairing local volunteers with newcomers, at minimal cost, to support language learning, integration and community building. Its essential ingredients – a regular weekly slot, willing volunteers, a relaxed setting and a focus on relationship as much as on language – transfer readily to other parishes, cities and languages.







REFUGEE SUPPORT PROJECT, ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW – JUSTICE AND PEACE, SCOTLAND (UK)

Country and Place: Scotland (United Kingdom); a national body covering all eight dioceses

Initiative: Justice & Peace Scotland – education, advocacy and campaigning on refugees and migration (among other areas), read through the lens of Catholic social teaching

Beneficiaries: Catholics across Scotland (the audience for education and awareness), and refugees, asylum seekers and migrants (on whose behalf the advocacy is directed)

Theme: Education and awareness-raising; political advocacy and campaigning; public-witness and solidarity events; ecumenical and interfaith collaboration

Project Duration: Operating since around 1975–1976 – ongoing

Funding Source: Funded directly by the Bishops' Conference of Scotland (it is not a charity and does not fundraise)

Website: justiceandpeacescotland.org.uk; bcos.org.uk

Catholic Organization: The National Commission for Justice and Peace of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland (operating name: Justice & Peace Scotland); a member of Justice and Peace Europe.

Description

A.M.C. is employed by the Bishops' Conference of Scotland at its National Commission for Justice and Peace, whose operating name is Justice & Peace Scotland; it links into the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development through the Episcopal Conference. Operating since the mid-1970s, it has one full-time and one part-time staff member, supported by a network of diocesan commissioners – volunteers appointed by their bishops across Scotland's eight dioceses, who advise the staff and promote the work locally: priorities are set nationally and then carried into each diocese by its commissioner. Its remit covers international peace and non-violence, human rights, social justice, refugees and migrants, and care for creation. The work is entirely advocacy-based: *"we're not a charity, so we don't fundraise … our work is all advocacy based."*[17]

17 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

Two main channels structure the work: direct engagement with government on policy (statements and letters, under a mandate from the Bishops' Conference), and engagement with Catholic audiences to raise awareness – parish and school visits, talks and workshops on Catholic social teaching. As A.M.C. observes, the commission is structured unusually, almost *"like an NGO inside the Bishops' Conference."*

Public witness on migration

On refugees and migrants, the work takes the form of political advocacy and of annual public-witness events, held ecumenically with the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and other Christian and faith communities. Twice a year, Justice & Peace Scotland gathers outside Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre – the only immigration detention facility in Scotland – under the banner *"Dignity Not Detention,"* led by a bishop (in June 2025, Archbishop William Nolan of Glasgow), to let detainees know they are not forgotten and to advocate for alternatives to indefinite detention. A second annual event is an ecumenical peace vigil at the site in Scotland where the United Kingdom's nuclear weapons are based, attended by bishops and other Christian leaders; attendance has grown markedly in recent years, and last year it was covered in the national media. A.M.C. underlines that the United Kingdom is the only country in Europe that detains people without a time limit, sometimes for something as minor as breaching the work conditions of a visa.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

Technically the audience is the whole Catholic population of Scotland (around 700,000), though A.M.C. is candid that the small commission reaches far fewer. Impact is visible in the growing attendance at the public-witness events and in the national media coverage they now attract.

SUSTAINABILITY

The commission is funded directly by the Bishops' Conference: each year it presents its proposed priorities for approval, and – in A.M.C.'s ex-

perience over three to four years – the bishops have been consistently supportive, especially as the public work *"is getting a good return."*

INNOVATION

The distinctive contribution is to address the human-rights, social-justice and political issues of the day *"through the lens of Catholic social teaching,"* giving Catholics a way to connect their faith with action – *"putting gospel values into practice"* – which sets it apart from purely secular advocacy.

EFFECTIVENESS

A concrete success was a policy win. Asylum and migration are reserved to the UK government, so Scotland has no formal say over them; but the Scottish Government has sought to extend the policies it does control to include people seeking asylum. When it piloted extending free bus travel – already available to under-22s and over-65s – to people seeking asylum, Justice & Peace Scotland, with the Church of Scotland, submitted an intervention, written during Advent and recalling the Holy Family as refugees, which was used in the Scottish Parliament debate; Parliament voted to proceed, and the outcome was covered in national media.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Where conditions allow, the people being supported take part. The *"Together for Sanctuary"* event – an ecumenical service held with the Church of Scotland and other denominations in a high-immigration area of Glasgow – brought together people of some 27–28 nationalities, who were invited to wear their cultural dress and to bring food from their own culture, so that those being supported were themselves protagonists of the event. The detention-centre witnesses, by their nature, instead mobilise the wider Justice & Peace network of Catholics from across the dioceses, who then carry the message back to their own parishes.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The work is markedly ecumenical and interfaith, conducted with the Church of Scotland, other Christian denominations and other faiths,

as well as secular organisations sharing the same priorities. Justice & Peace volunteers also serve as volunteer chaplains in the detention centre, subject to clearance. A.M.C. also pointed to a small community group near Glasgow, founded by Catholics though not advertised as such, which visits asylum seekers housed in hotels, takes them out, and runs activities such as a football team and an English-language café – the kind of grassroots initiative the commission seeks to connect and amplify.

REPLICABILITY

A.M.C. suggests that any parish or group could replicate the witness events using Justice & Peace Scotland's as a case study – for example, vigils of witness and support outside immigration detention centres elsewhere – without needing a formal Justice and Peace structure.




I WAS A STRANGER
REFUGEES
WELCOME

GRUPPO LEGÀMI – TRA I GIOVANI E LA STRADA, COMO, ITALY

Country and Place: Italy – Como

Initiative: Legàmi – a youth movement of encounter with homeless people and migrants, built around weekly street outreach ("il Giro"), witness in schools, and shared life and community events in its houses (the "case Legàmi")

Beneficiaries: Homeless people and migrants; migrant young people involved as witnesses; students of local schools; and the young volunteers themselves, who are transformed by the encounter

Theme: Relational accompaniment and socialisation; street outreach; encounter and awareness-raising in schools; community life and neighbourhood events; networking with local associations

Project Duration: Since 2015 – ongoing in 2025

Funding Source: Private donations and fundraising; volunteer-based, with no paid staff

Website: www.facciamolegami.it

Catholic Organization: Legàmi, a Catholic youth group, rooted in the Diocese of Como

Description

Legàmi – whose full name, "Tra i giovani e la strada" ("Among the young and the street"), captures its twofold vocation – describes itself as *"a group in movement in the city of Como, to create occasions of encounter and dialogue with those in deep marginality and with the young."*[18] It gathers a core organising group of some forty young people and involves, each month, around 120 to 130 participants from the age of sixteen upwards; its action is rooted in the Gospel, the commandment of love. The very name, written with a hand-drawn accented "a," points to *"the unique value that each person adds, because what counts is the love one puts into doing things."*

What distinguishes Legàmi is its starting point: instead of a service to be delivered, it links its action to a relationship to build. The homeless people and migrants are not approached as cases to be managed but

18 All passages in quotation marks and italics correspond to the interviewee.

as persons to be met – and, in the group's own experience, as teachers. The group took shape gradually over the years, on the initiative of a priest: first came the "Giro", the street outreach that remains its heart; then the summer camps; then the witness in schools; and only after many years the houses (the "case Legàmi"), which have become an important centre of its life.

Il Giro – weekly street outreach

The heart of Legàmi is *"il Giro"* ("the round"), the regular encounter with the homeless and migrants of Como – held on the third Saturday of each month, setting out from the church of Santa Cecilia in the centre of the town, and every Tuesday evening from Casa Legàmi. After a moment of shared reflection on the meaning of the experience, participants divide into small groups, each with an accompanier and a different destination – reception facilities, makeshift shelters, and places where people sleep in the open. With a cake to share and a cup of hot tea (or orangeade in summer), they draw close to people *"with no claim to have something to give, or to change their life, but with the desire to be alongside them and to come to know one another."* What each volunteer is asked to bring is simply him/herself – a "backpack" of a desire for encounter, an open heart, sincere listening ("good ears") and a homemade cake – in what the group calls *"a school of life in which we learn the beauty of encounter, and carry it into daily life."*

Witness in schools and community life

Through its school project, Legàmi enters classrooms across the territory – primary, middle and secondary schools – to introduce students to the themes of fragility and social marginality, breaking down stereotypes and fostering active citizenship. Each path includes a live encounter with a homeless person or a migrant young person; in offering their own story, these are, in the group's words, *"rediscovered as true masters of life."* Migrants thus become protagonists and educators of the local community, rather than the objects of its assistance – a reversal that lies at the core of Legàmi's contribution.

The case Legàmi and community events

The houses – the "case Legàmi" – were born only after many years of the group's life, from the young people's desire to share a fraternal life

together, and have since become an important centre of Legàmi's life. They are several: there is a main house, "Casa Legàmi," in the Camerlata district of Como, alongside others – three at present and six over the years. Each is a place of shared, "generative" living where, *"whether you are a local or a foreigner, rich or poor, young or old,"* each person is welcomed as *"an indispensable tile in its great mosaic of bonds."* Around them the group organises occasions of celebration and socialisation that bring young volunteers and many migrants together – recurring community events such as the "Olimpiadi Legàmi," summer camps, themed weekends, and the neighbourhood lunches ("pranzi di vicinato"). These moments turn encounter into shared belonging and extend the relationships begun on the street into ongoing community life.

EVALUATION ACCORDING TO THE SEVEN PARAMETERS OF GOOD PRACTICES

POSITIVE IMPACT

The impact is primarily relational: bonds of trust and belonging built with homeless people and migrants who are otherwise isolated, and a wide educational effect on the young – around 120 to 130 participants each month – and on the students reached through the school project. Migrants who take part as witnesses gain recognition and voice.

SUSTAINABILITY

Legàmi rests on a broad, renewing base of young volunteers and on the stability of its houses as permanent hubs of community life, anchored in the Diocese of Como. Its low material requirements make it resilient, though its funding base is private donations and fundraising.

INNOVATION

The original element is the inversion of the conventional helper–helped relationship: homeless people and migrants are met as *"masters of life"* and invited to teach and to take part, while the encounter is deliberately stripped of paternalism – *"no claim to have something to give."* The model is youth-led and relational rather than service-based, making presence, listening and friendship its principal "method."

EFFECTIVENESS

Effectiveness is shown by the regularity of the Giro (weekly and monthly), the continuity of the experience over roughly a decade, the steady involvement of a large number of young people, and the reach of the school project, which also offers older students a concrete way to continue with the group after the classroom encounter.

PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Participation is constitutive: the people Legàmi meets are protagonists, not recipients. Migrants act as witnesses and "teachers" in schools and take part in the community events – the Olimpiadi Legàmi, the camps, the themed weekends and the neighbourhood lunches – so that the relationship is mutual and the boundary between helper and helped dissolves.

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

Legàmi works within the wider fabric of Como's solidarity world, in connection with other local associations and church realities – among them the oratory and parish community of Camerlata, the Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, and partners with whom it has carried out shared initiatives – as well as the schools of the territory. The neighbourhood lunches of Camerlata, in particular, knit the group into the life of its district.

REPLICABILITY

The model is highly replicable, precisely because its threshold is relational rather than material: it asks for young people willing simply to "be alongside" the marginalised, a meeting place such as the houses, a method of presence and sincere listening, and a willingness to let those who are usually helped become teachers and protagonists. The school witness and the neighbourhood events are readily transferable formats for other cities and parish communities.







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