

# Refugee Contribution to Europe

A feasibility study on the establishment of a  
*Fund for Refugee Employment and Education (FREE)*  
in the European Union

**Italy**

November 2002



The FREE project received funding from the European Refugee Fund

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## **1. GENERAL OUTLINE OF THE RIGHT OF ASYLUM IN ITALY**

### **1.a. Introduction**

In Italy the issues regarding the right of asylum and the presence (and tutelage) of refugees and asylum seekers have developed over the years in the 1990s. In fact in the last decade some changes have occurred for Italy, both on the (national and European) normative level and on the level of conflicts in nearby areas, forcing the Country to change its configuration and to transform itself from a country of mere transit into a country of permanence; from “drawbridge over the Mediterranean to hospitality centre”.

In 1990 a new law on immigration became effective (Law No. 39/1990 – the so-called *Legge Martelli*<sup>1</sup>) which removed the geographical restrictions regarding the reception of asylum seekers who previously could be accepted only if coming from Eastern Europe (politically defined by the Berlin wall). In September 1997 the Dublin Convention on the determination of the competent State for the examination of a request of asylum presented in one of the EU member states, finally became effective in Italy.

These laws have caused a remarkable increase in the number of asylum seekers in Italy, compounded by two great humanitarian crises occurring relatively closely. In the 1990s two Balkan conflicts occurred near the Italian land and sea boundaries: first, the war in former Yugoslavia and, at the end of the decade, the Kosovo crisis. Moreover, the worsening of the persecutions against the Kurds – especially in Turkey and Iraq – has increased the arrival of asylum seekers from these countries, because Italy suddenly became the hub of the trade of human beings coming from Turkey or Greece with a final destination of France or Germany.

Today Italy still remains the only EU member State without a law which regulates the right of asylum, although the 1948 Constitution (art. 10) granted such right and has set a saving clause for the deliberation of said matter. The new regulation regarding immigration (Law July 30 2002, c.d. *Legge Bossi-Fini*<sup>2</sup>) solely provides for such norms that will in some way fill the gaps in the existing regulation.

### **1.b. The presence of refugees and asylum seekers in Italy**

According to UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) there are 22,870 refugees in Italy; of which 12,800 have recognised refugee status according to the Geneva Convention of 1951 and 10,070 holders of humanitarian protection.

With regard to the requests for asylum in recent years the following table shows a remarkable increase in 1999 (the year of the Kosovo crisis) followed by a period of relative stability in the next two years.

Table 1 – Requests for asylum presented in Italy

<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>
7,100	33,360	18,000	16,000

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<sup>1</sup> Italian laws often take their names – informally – from the name of the member of Parliament or minister who promoted or proposed them.

<sup>2</sup> At the time that the present document was drawn up the law in question has not yet been assigned a precise number. It was, in fact, definitely voted by the Senate in July, promulgated by the President of the Republic on July 30<sup>th</sup> 2002 but not published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale*. According to Italian legislative procedure, publication (with relative numeration) should take place by August 29<sup>th</sup> 2002 and therefore the law should become effective on September 9<sup>th</sup> 2002.

In Italy a mechanism for counting the number of residence permits granted, while awaiting the results of the process of a request for asylum, does not exist. Therefore it is possible to know only the number of requests for asylum presented every year, but not the actual number of asylum seekers already present on national territory.

It is therefore impossible to gain simple yearly statistics:

*Number X of requests for asylum = Number X of asylum seekers already present in Italy*

This impossibility depends on the fact that the procedure for the recognition of refugee status takes an average of 18 months and is dealt with further on in this report (see paragraph No. 1.c).

The body heretofore predisposed to examine the requests for asylum is the *Commissione centrale per il riconoscimento dello status di rifugiato*, (the Central Commission for the Recognition of Refugee Status) sole body with headquarters in Rome<sup>3</sup>.

It might prove interesting, especially in the light of the aforementioned difficulty in establishing the exact number of requests for asylum in Italy, to examine the data relative to the work done by the Central Commission, in relation to the number of requests for asylum presented in Italy (as shown in Table 1).

Table 2 – Requests for asylum compared to requests examined by the Central Commission

	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>
Requests for asylum presented	33,360	18,000	16,000
Requests for asylum examined by the Central Commission	8,311	24,348	13,344

In particular, we should note the success of the examination by the Central Commission through a comparison of the work carried out in 1999 and 2001.

Table 3 – Results of the examination of the requests for asylum by the Central Commission

	<b>1999</b>	<b>2001</b>
Requests for asylum examined	8,311	13,344
Recognition of refugee status	809	2,098
Denial of recognition of refugee status	7,502	11,166

Should a negative decision on the recognition of refugee status be passed, it is possible to present an appeal to the judge. According to the legislation in force at the present time (and which is shortly to be changed<sup>4</sup>), a person can remain in Italian territory until such time as the judge has reached a decision regarding the appeal and a probable exclusion order can be suspended (the request for this suspension must be made to the judge). However, the possibility of gaining permanence does not correspond to the granting of a residence permit and those repeatedly requesting asylum have the title to remain in Italy, but without a residence permit, not even for reasons of justice<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> The text of the law *Legge Bossi-Fini* (see note No.2) recently approved by the Italian Senate, provides for the institution of territorial commissions, composed of representatives of the Public Security, local authorities and the UNHCR.

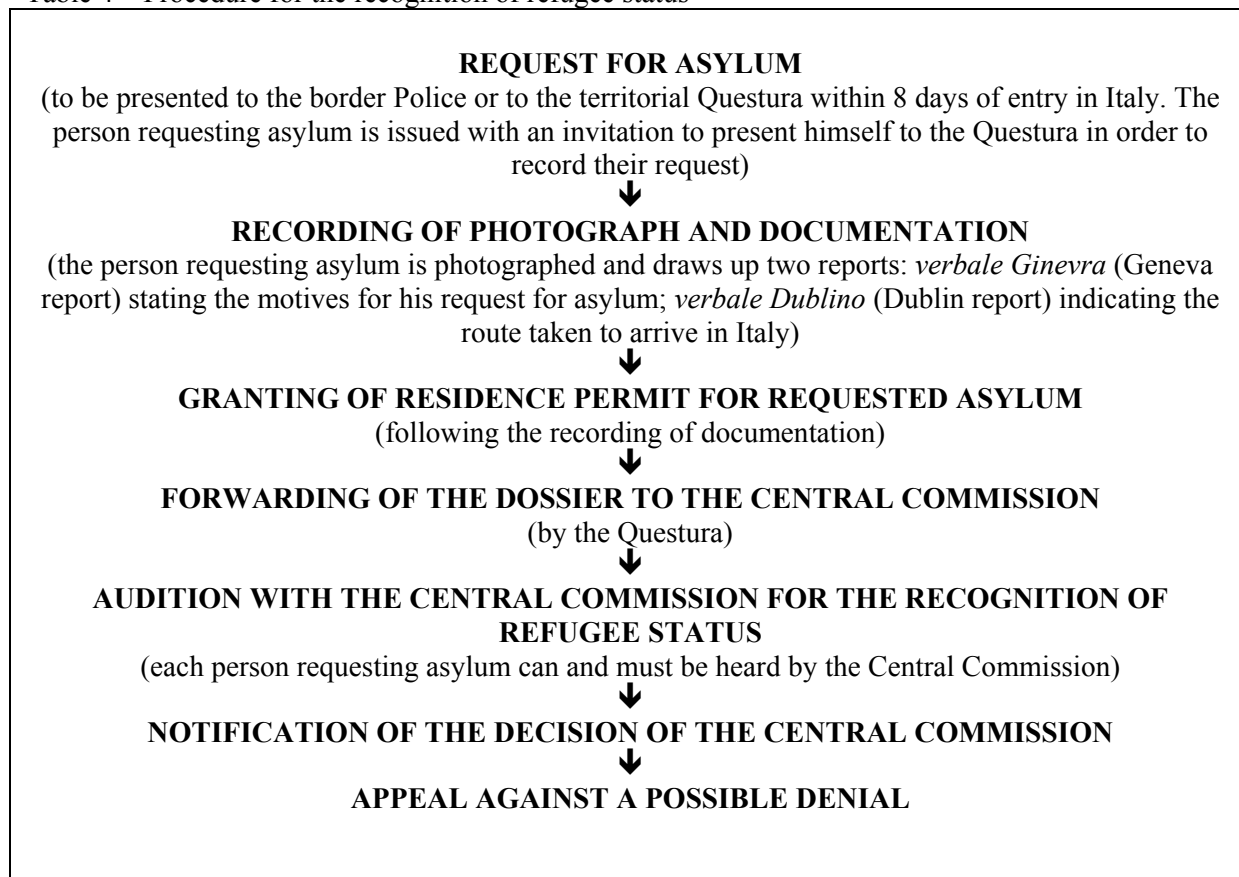
<sup>4</sup> The new law on immigration (*Legge Bossi-Fini*), contrary to that in existence at present, dictates that the person requesting asylum who is appealing against a negative decision in respect of their request must immediately leave Italian territory. Such regulation appears to be in complete violation of the principle of *non refoulement*.

<sup>5</sup> At the time of printing the present report a recent decision has been reached by the Tribunal of Bologna which defines that asylum seekers must have a residence permit for humanitarian reasons during the period of appeal.

### **1.c. The procedure for the recognition of refugee status**

In the following table the procedure for the recognition of refugee status is presented in brief, defined in part by art. 1 of Law No. 39/1990 and in part by customary regulations.

Table 4 – Procedure for the recognition of refugee status



At this time the Central Commission can decide in three different ways:

- To recognise the refugee status according to the Geneva Convention;
- To not recognise the refugee status;
- To not recognise the refugee status according to the Geneva Convention, but – in compliance with respecting the principle of *non refoulement* (as in the Geneva Convention and Italian regulation: art. 5, comma 6 and art. 19 of the Legislative Decree No. 286/1998) – to request a residence permit from the Questura for humanitarian protection.

### **1.d. The Programma Nazionale Asilo (PNA) (National Programme for Asylum)**

In July 2001 the Programma Nazionale Asilo (PNA) started in Italy and this constituted a main pathway for the development of a national system of hospitality and tutelage for refugees and asylum seekers. Before this, assistance and hospitality were guaranteed by various associations (both lay and religious) as well as NGOs which occasionally operated in the network without a common strategy. The involvement of both national and local institutions in the hospitality and assistance programmes were also sporadic.

The PNA was promoted by the Ministry of the Interior, by the UNHCR and by ANCI (Associazione Nazionale dei Comuni Italiani) and is structured in a network of 63 territorial hospitality projects which involve the Municipalities and third sector authorities for a total of about 2000 places for refugees and asylum seekers.

The hospitality structures (of the single territorial projects) are of small to medium size and hospitality is structured across several complementary levels:

- Material hospitality (food and board);
- Legal assistance for the procedure of the recognition of refugee status;
- Social orientation;
- Social integration, housing integration (which is autonomous and therefore excluded from assisted hospitality), and job integration.

The PNA provides services of assistance, training and consultation for the network of the territorial projects. This service is guaranteed on a national level by: ICS – Italian Consortium of Solidarity, CIR - Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati (Italian Council for Refugees) and Caritas and it provides assistance and a monitoring system *sur place* for each hospitality project. Special Assistance units have been created for handling integration especially with regard to housing and job integration.

On the basis of previous experience, it has been noted that integration streams must necessarily have strong territorial roots and must be followed by operators on local level.

On a national level the following can (and must) be defined:

- Integration policies and a monitoring of the actual implementation of the above policies;
- The exchange and adoption of best experience carried out on a local scale;
- The conclusion of agreements with category associations, unions and employer associations, etc.

The same three organisations who handle assistance within the network also guarantee a service of assistance and orientation in frontier areas for asylum seekers upon their arrival in Italy.

### **1.e. Key players in the tutelage of refugees and asylum seekers in Italy**

Table 5 – National non-governmental agencies

<b>Name</b>	<b>Legal assistance</b>	<b>Social orientation</b>	<b>Integration</b>	<b>Policies and Lobby</b>	<b>Other services</b>	<b>Training of operators</b>	<b>Hospitality</b>
ICS	X	X	X	X	Research	X	X
Arci	X	X	X	X	Research	X	X
CIR	X	X	X	X	Research		
Caritas	X	X	X	X	Research		X
CIES					Cultural Mediation	X	
Servizio Sociale Internazionale					Recognition of Educational Qualification and Reuniting of Families		
Sant'Egidio	X	X	X	X		X	X

There are also numerous organisations and associations of local character who have activated hospitality services (even outside of the PNA network as described in the preceding paragraph), legal assistance, social orientation and integration.

Table 6 – International agencies operating in Italy

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Amnesty International	Lobby and awakening of public opinion
Médicins Sans Frontières	Lobby and awakening of public opinion Legal assistance and monitoring Hospitality
IOM	Lobby Voluntary repatriation Research

Table 7 – Italian institutions

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Competence</b>
Ministry of the Interior	Procedure for recognition of refugee status Hospitality Programma Fondo Europeo per i Rifugiati (European Refugee Fund Programme)
Ministry of Labor and of Social Policies	Unaccompanied minors European Equal Programme
Local Administrations	Hospitality

## **2. THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES IN ITALY**

A brief introduction is necessary before discussing the subject. In Italy refugees generally share the same rights as Italian citizens regarding the access to public, sanitary, and educational services; as well as the right to social services and access to the work market. Further on we shall see how said equality in effect does not favour refugees because specific support and assistance programmes do not exist.

### **2.a. What is the meaning of “integration of refugees”?**

The process of elaborating a national system of assistance in favour of refugees and asylum seekers (PNA)<sup>6</sup> has also brought about a more in-depth examination on the theme of integration. In the debate between organisations working to protect of refugees, national institutions (in particular the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Welfare and Labor) and local administrations, the definition of several criteria for the integration of refugees has been established:

1 – The integration must be composed of three phases of insertion:

Social insertion (learning the Italian language; access to public, sanitary and educational service; knowledge and familiarisation with the territory where one lives; development of social dynamics with fellow citizens)

- Insertion in autonomous dwellings
- Insertion in the work force

2 – The path towards integration of the refugee (in the three aspects described above) must begin at the moment in which said refugee still has the status of asylum seeker.

3 – The intervention of the social workers must be aimed at the construction of a relationship of self-help. In this way the refugee/asylum seeker acquires the instruments for integration. The social worker intervenes only to sustain him in acquiring said instruments and does not substitute the person: the integration must be autonomous and not “forced or induced”<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> See paragraph 1.d

<sup>7</sup> For example in the approach of a public office which disburses services the refugee/asylum seeker will be accompanied by the social worker for the first time only, explaining how said office works, why he must go there and how he must relate. Subsequently the person must go by himself.

4 – The integration is basically the responsibility of those agencies which operate on a local basis, because the relationship between insertion and the territory to which he/she belongs must be tightened. There are many people, therefore, in a single city and province who work for the integration of refugees. On a national level the work is mainly centered in the elaboration of standards and policies for the integration, rather than the direct distribution of preparatory services to assist the insertion.

### **2.b. The condition of asylum seekers in Italy**

During the entire procedure for the recognition of refugee status (at the moment it takes an average of 18 months) asylum seekers cannot work, nor can they attend ordinary study courses. They can, however, take language courses – illustrated in the following paragraph – and in some cases they can attend training courses, provided that said courses do not require registration at the unemployment office (not accessible to asylum seekers because they are not qualified to work).

The “Legge Martelli” (Law No. 39/1990) provided that asylum seekers be granted first assistance contribution (€17.56 for 45 days), because it is impossible for them to work. Recently – as of August 1st 2002 – the disbursement of said contribution has been suspended. In fact the majority of asylum seekers “work under the table” without any contract whatsoever and completely lacking any form of social protection.

### **2.c. Learning the Italian language**

Generally learning the Italian language takes place during the period in which one is an asylum seeker. In Italy language courses are offered:

by middle schools

by local administrations

by private agencies

directly by the hospitality centres although the latter is less favourable from a point of view of social integration of the refugee/asylum seeker and his relationship with the territory.

There seem to be no particular obstacles to the access to the numerous language courses being offered on the whole national territory. It is worthwhile underlining that where there are no such courses, local administrations and schools are generally available to collaborate with the local associations in offering these courses.

In spite of the fact that there are numerous opportunities to learn the Italian language many refugees refuse to participate in these courses for various reasons: incompatibility with work hours; lack of confidence in the course; cultural opposition; etc.

Therefore, major incentives are required to stimulate the participation in language courses, such as:

- practical hours even for those who work
- separate classes according to age group
- special attention for those courses directed to women
- language courses should be tied to other initiatives favouring integration
- less academic and more practical teaching tools
- language, and at the same time, Italian culture courses (customs and traditions)

### **2.d. Middle and secondary school**

In Italy the right/duty to attend school for all foreign minors of obligatory school age (up to 16 years old) is guaranteed. This rule is valid even for unaccompanied minors and children of refugees and asylum seekers. As suggested above adult asylum seekers do not have the possibility of attending regular school courses. On the contrary refugees are guaranteed free school access, including

secondary school. Refugees, therefore, are considered on a par with Italian citizens, however, support tools are not used for their actual school integration.

We should therefore underline:

- a lack of remedial teachers specialised in intercultural mediation (remedial teachers employed in the schools are mainly specialised in handling the handicapped);
- a lack of language courses specifically for students registered at the school (this is with sole reference to the above-mentioned language courses);
- a lack of ability on the part of the teachers to recreate former scholastic backgrounds.

Those adult refugees who wish to obtain middle school diplomas can attend evening courses intended for working students. An increase in evening courses would guarantee more possibilities to both refugees and foreign citizens in general.

### **2.e. Professional training**

In Italy there are numerous professional training institutes thanks to funding by the European Social Fund. In general professional training is structured on regional plan with dynamics and methods which vary from region to region. Refugees can attend both courses created for foreigners and those reserved for Italian citizens. The courses which are offered are numerous and aimed at a large variety of professions ranging from computer technicians to specialised workers; from jewellers to cooks; from child-care specialists to mechanics. The registration procedures are normally fast and easy. In view of the fact that there are many courses offered, competition between the various training institutes allows for relatively good publicity for training opportunities.

We should, however, take note of the various difficulties that refugees encounter in when undertaking the training being offered:

- professional and training backgrounds are not recognised nor are they taken into consideration in defining course programmes;
- not all training courses provide financial assistance for the participants. This implies that many refugees give up attending courses in favour of a job which will allow them to survive;
- although many courses are provided with stages, they do not offer the actual possibility of entering the work market;
- in many training courses the teachers do not take into consideration the peculiarities of the status of refugee, and have no knowledge (even basic) of the tools for cultural mediation.

### **2.f. Professional re-qualification**

Just as the panorama relating to professional training appears wide and is evolving, that relating to professional re-qualification appears decidedly underdeveloped. The major difficulties encountered by refugees are in particular:

- The necessary ability of territorial employment offices to reconstruct the professional and training backgrounds of the refugees are lacking. Tools such as “stock-taking of skills” have not yet been acquired or properly applied and distributed.
- The recognition of educational and professional qualifications is bound by mutual terms.
- Registration to professional bodies is governed by strict bonds, and so is the possibility, for refugees and foreigners in general, of exercising a profession.
- Agencies or programmes which can provide qualified intermediation between single refugees and professional bodies are lacking.
- Agencies and specialised programmes which can intervene in professional re-qualification of refugees are lacking.
- The recognition of educational and professional qualifications (as we shall see in the following paragraph) is handled by a single agency – located in Rome – which is burdened by numerous

requests. The procedure for recognition is long and complex: those refugees who intend to face the procedure alone find themselves entangled in a bureaucratic web.

### **2.g. Recognition of educational qualifications**

In Italy, the procedure for the recognition of educational qualifications acquired abroad is extremely complex and entails multiple bureaucratic passages. Furthermore it is bound by bilateral reciprocity agreements with foreign Countries. The procedure requires that a formal request be forwarded to Ministry offices accompanied by authenticated and officially translated copies of the original educational qualification. In Italy there is only one agency which provides a service of assistance to refugees: the Servizio Sociale Internazionale.

The complexity of the procedure, coupled with the numerous bureaucratic pathways, discourage refugees from handling the process of recognition by themselves (without assistance from an agency). The acquisition of major skills on the part of local subjects, accredited by the appropriate Ministries, would result in an increase in requests – and therefore the acquisition – of the recognition of educational qualifications.

### **2.h. Access to university**

Refugees have the same rights as Italian citizens in regard to access to university. In Italy, in fact, there is a quota of foreign students who can have access to university studies. Refugees - recognised as equal to Italians - are not part of this quota. Although this regulation seems to favour refugees, it actually penalises them as they must sustain the same university admission procedures as Italians and this often requires them to pass both oral and written exams and admissions tests. Refugees are obviously penalised because they do not have an advanced knowledge of the Italian language. Refugee university students do not have adequate support tools which would allow them to follow their course of studies in serenity.

The obstacles which they encounter:

- difficult access (as described above)
- limited number and very small size of scholarships
- poor number of advanced Italian language courses at university level.

### **2.i. Job integration of refugees**

The migration phenomenon in Europe is becoming an increasing issue in economic, social, and political terms. The integration process of regular migrants therefore occupies a place of significance in the studies of the European Commission; this is particularly so in the matter of access to the labour market and the promotion of means for the strengthening of the contribution which the presence of immigrant workers brings to the economy of the single member states.

Project FREE is reflected herein with the purpose of verifying the feasibility of an economic fund which would support individual projects of professional requalification, training and business launching promoted by refugees.

The information on the foreign work force present in Italy refers to data taken from registration at Employment Centers<sup>8</sup> with subsequent employment, without differentiation of legal status. For this reason it is impossible to give specific data on the integration of refugees into the labour market and on the specific paths of integration, or with what qualifications and in which sectors there is a major presence.

The recognition of refugee status grants access to the labour market by registering at Employment Centres and by giving the possibility of attending professional training courses on an equal basis for

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<sup>8</sup> Territorial employment offices.

both migrants in general and Italian citizens. This formal equality with Italian citizens does not, however, allow for easier integration into the labour market with respect to other migrant workers and in general the market sectors in which refugees do integrate normally correspond to those sectors requiring low and medium qualifications. In fact the difficulty in recognising training qualifications and previous working experience contribute to keeping almost all of the immigrant work force (including refugees) in work circles characterised by low professionalism.

The data provided by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policies for the year 2000, with regard to work permits according to sector and qualifications, indicate that 66.74% of said permits refer to the category of “*operai generici*” (unskilled workers), the lowest level on a contract basis.

The increase in number and the stabilisation of the presence of migrant workers in Italy have given rise to the production of numerous analyses and studies on the opportunities offered to foreign citizens by the labour market. These studies often show a strong disparity between scholastic and university education, professional experience obtained in the country of origin and the actual jobs held by foreign citizens in Italy. The experience of NGOs involved in the tutelage of refugees and asylum seekers, show that in Italy numerous refugees (over 60%), in spite of the fact that they have university degrees and high professional qualifications, hold jobs that are not related to their backgrounds, such as: pizza chefs, brick layers, home assistants, cleaning people and clerks at market stalls.

Even the wide spread of temporary work agencies, as well as the precariousness and flexibility which now characterise the Italian work market, are leading refugees to accept jobs that have no connection with their personal training. This often means that job situations are temporary and precarious, governed by “bad contracts”. As with foreign citizens in general, refugees are left with several kinds of job that have no contract.

However, notwithstanding the high number of people employed in low-level-qualification jobs, it is not irrelevant that during the year 2000 about 30% of foreign workers were employed in working positions requiring some sort of specialisation. This is a signal of an ever-increasing request by employers for specific professional and duly trained employees. It can therefore be confirmed that the Italian labour market strongly needs professionalism and, consequently, the acquisition of a means by which immigrant labourers can grow and recognise their skills, is fundamental.

The key players which intervene in job integration of refugees are:

- territorial employment offices: Of a public nature, they manage the unemployment lists for all foreign citizens present in Italy (including refugees). Registration is necessary.
- foreign offices of the Unions that take care of employment rights and access.
- job and assistance centres managed by both non-profit associations and companies: These assist refugees in setting up their *curriculum vitae*; they map out job, stage and training opportunities; they give information on job and training possibilities; they give information on the rights of workers.
- temporary job agencies: These hire workers temporarily and compile contracts with employers (always on a temporary basis) on behalf of the workers.

## **2.j. Self employment and the creation of a business**

Many refugees are interested in starting a business activity. Establishing one’s own business seems to be the answer to primary necessities such as:

- recognition of one’s own training and professional background;
- quitting concealed and casual labor;
- possibility of choosing a type of job.

In fact, starting a business is particularly complex especially because of the difficulty in knowing and understanding the mechanisms of the Italian economic market. Unfortunately there are many cases of

businesses started by refugees failing immediately. From an analysis of unsuccessful cases it is possible to establish the main obstacles in setting up a business:

1. The lack of a project and an accurate study to verify if the business is sustainable. In all the cases of failure examined in a study undertaken by ICS in 1998<sup>9</sup> none of the unsuccessful businesses had drawn up a business plan, a feasibility plan which adequately examined the market, potential clients, a three-year business forecast, etc.
2. The difficulty in finding the necessary funds to start up the business.
3. The difficulty of internal mediation among the business partners of different nationalities, their refugee status being the sole point in common.

Although in Italy the business myth has given rise to numerous agencies and companies for the development of an enterprise, it is difficult to find people specialised in the assistance and support of refugees in this sphere. Furthermore in Italy the law does not provide for specific funding which can support refugee entrepreneurs while it does support youths or female entrepreneurs. Similarly the law on social cooperation (Law No. 381/1991)<sup>10</sup> does not consider refugees in the category of the underprivileged for whom tax reliefs are provided when social cooperatives are set up. The concept of an underprivileged person has already been defined in the sphere of social enterprise<sup>11</sup> and many do not recognise refugees as such. In fact, a system of economic and specific technical assistance should be provided and as such Project FREE could prove to be the ideal tool.

### **2.k. Social benefit system**

Refugees have equivalent rights to Italian citizens in the access to public social-sanitary services to the point where they enjoy the same invalid pension benefits, as well as access to “low-income housing”. This parity regime, however, seems to be merely theoretical because in fact very few refugees actually manage to enjoy the full benefits of the social system.

An actual assistance and specific support plan for recognised refugees does not in fact exist, with the exception of the assistance programme (completed in 2001) provided by the Ministry of the Interior in accordance with UNHCR. This programme provided for contributions to be distributed to refugees on the basis of a well-defined case history:

- state of destitution;
- very large family;
- handicap and disability;
- launching a business;
- educational support.

One could gain access to the funds of this programme upon presentation of a request, complete with all the documentation necessary to justify the request of funds. Should the request be accepted, the allotted sum was distributed for a limited period of time and was not always sufficient to satisfy the economic needs of the person (the sum of €2000 was allotted for launching a business).

### **2.l. Integration in the sphere of the PNA**

As mentioned several times in this report, the operative aspects for the integration of refugees is the responsibility of those who intervene on a local basis. The PNA provides for the single territorial hospitality projects to elaborate on personalised integration programmes. In this way the operators of hospitality projects intervene, favouring the construction of territorial networks which will allow the

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<sup>9</sup> ICS – *Dall'accoglienza all'integrazione*, Roma 1998

<sup>10</sup> Law activated from single regional laws

<sup>11</sup> Social cooperatives can have as their main objective the job integration of underprivileged persons: physical, psychic and sensory invalids; former psychiatric institutes patients; drug addicts, alcoholics, minors of working age with difficult family situations, convicts who have been granted alternative measures to detention.

numerous key integration players to interact. The work of integration occurs therefore through direct contact between the hospitality operators and other interlocutors: employers, Unions, real estate agencies, tenant associations, training institutes, etc. Over and above this type of work, a constant activity of promotion and lobby takes place addressed to local subjects (almost always institutional): local health agencies, public administrations, schools, etc. The main objective of the lobby is the realisation of specific services for refugees where these are not provided, or the possibility of access to services already in existence.

## **2.m. Programme “Equal” for the integration of refugees**

The experience of the PNA (as in point 1.d) in Italy has opened the path to new pilot projects with the following characteristics:

- national coordination of several territorial subjects;
- coordination between associations which deal with the tutelage of refugees and local administrations.

To this end, the project “Integ.R.A.”, in the sphere of the European programme “Equal”, is now being developed. The project calls for the involvement of the Ministry of Welfare and Labor, ANCI and UNHCR (as in the PNA), and the Censis Foundation. The project provides the creation of territorial tables for the integration of refugees in 10 cities. Local administrations (of the City and the District) will participate in the territorial tables together with associations dealing with the tutelage of refugees, Unions, employer associations, and territorial agencies which are involved in the intervention of job access and housing integration. The aim of the project, which is a pilot project in Italy, consists in the realisation of 50 integration packages (job + housing) for each territorial table. The project is still in the initial phases: undoubtedly numerous elements will arise which will help in the creation of new models for the integration of refugees.

## **2.n. Barriers and needs**

<b>Topics</b>	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Needs</b>
<b>Learning the language</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Restrictions posed by the refugees themselves.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Classes divided into age groups;</li> <li>- Special attention to the culture of women;</li> <li>- Connection of the courses with other integration initiatives;</li> <li>- Less academic and more practical learning tools;</li> <li>- Hours of the courses compatible with working hours.</li> </ul>
<b>School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Refugees on an equal level with Italian citizens without provision of adequate support programmes;</li> <li>- High cost of didactic material.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Remedial teachers competent in intercultural mediation;</li> <li>- Language courses specifically for students;</li> <li>- Training and updating of the teachers on the subjects of interculture and right to asylum;</li> <li>- Increase in evening courses;</li> <li>- Scholarships.</li> </ul>
<b>Professional training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of recognition of professional and training backgrounds;</li> <li>- Financial support for student is not always provided;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use of methods that reconstruct the backgrounds of refugees;</li> <li>- Introduction of scholarships;</li> <li>- More competent teachers;</li> <li>- Protocols between training agencies and companies offering</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Programmes made up with no knowledge of refugees' special circumstances;</li> <li>- Little guarantee of access to the work market.</li> </ul>	stages and job integration.
<b>Professional requalification</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inability of territorial employment offices to reconstruct professional and training backgrounds;</li> <li>- Restrictions by professional roles;</li> <li>- Difficulty in recognition of educational and professional qualifications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creation and distribution of re-qualification tools such as “stock-taking of skills”;</li> <li>- Programmes or agencies involved (even on a territorial level) in professional re-qualification;</li> <li>- Lobby activities with the advice of professional roles;</li> </ul>
<b>Recognition of educational qualifications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Complex procedure and numerous bureaucratic loopholes;</li> <li>- Closed list of educational qualifications.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More competence on a territorial level;</li> <li>- Lobby for the simplification of the procedure;</li> <li>- Lobby for the elimination of the list of educational qualifications and for the identification of general parameters for recognition.</li> </ul>
<b>Access to Universities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficulty in accessing the courses (especially that apply restricted entry);</li> <li>- Few and insufficient scholarships;</li> <li>- Very few advanced level language courses available.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preparation courses for university screening;</li> <li>- Increase in the number and value of scholarships;</li> <li>- Increase in advanced language courses;</li> <li>- Simplification of registration procedures.</li> </ul>
<b>Job access</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of recognition of backgrounds;</li> <li>- Job and previous training incompatibility;</li> <li>- Lack of and bad contracts;</li> <li>- Jobs of a precarious and temporary nature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reformation of the employment system of foreign citizens in general;</li> <li>- Major involvement of the Unions (even in terms of services);</li> <li>- Agencies offering assistance for job re-qualification.</li> </ul>
<b>Social benefit system</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of specific assistance plans for refugees.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specific assistance programmes for refugees.</li> </ul>
<b>Business activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poor familiarity with business plans;</li> <li>- Inability to locate financing to start up a business;</li> <li>- Lack of assistance for the first years of activity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Specialised agency for the development of businesses run by refugees which could also provide training for those who have good business ideas, and monitoring of the first years of activity;</li> <li>- Planning of specific financing for refugees.</li> </ul>

### **3. FREE IN ITALY**

#### **3.a. Information activities and awakening of public opinion offered by Project FREE**

The main objective of Project FREE is to gather (on behalf of the social, economic and institutional world) observations, suggestions and support for the project to establish an economic fund for individual integration and strengthening of skills held by refugees.

In the first phase of the study numerous interlocutors were found and material containing information on the Project was made available specifically for Italy. A campaign to awaken public opinion regarding Project FREE was begun followed by a request for collaboration through an interview. A letter of introduction for Project FREE was furthermore forwarded to all the PNA<sup>6</sup> hospitality centres present on almost all of the national territory and who therefore have a direct relationship with the potential beneficiaries of the project.

In Italy it is difficult to find specific awareness on the rights of asylum outside of those organisations who specifically deal with the problems of refugees and migrants in general; the absence of a regulation in this matter is the most evident expression of lack of interest and knowledge in this issue.

This fact frequently came to light during the interviews with contacts made for the studies on Project FREE. The major difficulty encountered was that of underlining the specificity of the status of refugee with respect to the generality of migrants, because only very few specialists are qualified to handle the right of asylum in Italy. Often, in fact, the people interviewed have requested information on who these refugees are, what countries they come from and what the conditions are for the recognition of said status. Through the contacts involved in this study it was possible therefore to specify the background of the refugees (their prosecutions, their escape, their search for protection) and any other difficulty they might encounter in their search for hospitality and integration in Italy. In particular public awareness and information was made available on the difficulty that asylum seekers encounter, during the long trial of the procedure of recognition of refugee status<sup>7</sup>, due to the fact that they have no permit to work or to attend normal studies.

#### **3.b. Project FREE interviews**

Although numerous contacts were made to present Project FREE for a possible interview it is essential to note that the agencies willing to collaborate were very few indeed; only about 10% of said contacts.

In any case the majority of those interviewed gave a positive evaluation on the idea of setting up a Fund for Refugee Employment and Education. However, it was far more difficult to obtain an actual willingness to contribute economically to the fund.

All of those interviewed have underlined the necessity that such a fund should for the most part be sustained by funds of the EU and have, for the moment, offered (in this phase of the study) a willingness to contribute on a merely technical level.

In particular the local agencies have underlined that, as in the territorial policies of the services, the eventual decision to sustain specific projects such as FREE is strongly related to the evaluation of the consequences to the territory of this type of intervention by local administrations. Therefore an eventual support to Project FREE must be evaluated beforehand in respect of the presence of refugees on the territory (with a qualitative and quantitative survey) and sustained by a political willingness to intervene. Inevitably, such political willingness to economically sustain a fund in favor of refugees necessarily depends on meeting with the favor of the electorate. This appears extremely difficult in

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<sup>6</sup> See paragraph 1.d

<sup>7</sup> On average the procedure for recognition of refugee status lasts 18 months.

many Italian areas (especially the richer and more productive areas of northern Italy) where the equation “*presence of foreigners = increase in crime*” is strongly rooted in the collective imagination.

Furthermore, all of those interviewed underlined the necessity, for projects such as FREE, of achieving coordination among the associations, the agencies (public and private) involved in hospitality and integration, and labour services, in order to:

- promote strategies of common intervention;
- avoid fragmentation of the interventions;
- guarantee a functional network of support for individual projects.

The structures that act as support to projects of business launching have underlined the importance of sustaining the course of the creation of a new business with adequate support and training. According to those interviewed, FREE should not limit itself to the mere disbursement of loans, but provide integrated packages for potential beneficiaries which include:

- technical training on the launching and the management of a business;
- training on the regulations regarding constitution and management of a business;
- support in creating a business and, particularly, a study of the feasibility plan;
- assistance at the beginning of the business, verifying the work done;
- assistance in setting up relations with territorial agencies and direct and indirect interlocutors of the business.

The support of the single projects must not therefore be a strictly economic contribution, but must provide the creation of networks which assist individual beneficiaries to access territorial resources necessary for economic development.

This necessity was also underlined in the interview with Banca Etica whose nature and aim is to sustain both projects regarding micro-businesses and the constitution of Ethic Funds<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Banca Etica promotes the development of the economy of solidarity through the financial support of social projects which propose to reduce the hardships of the less fortunate, to safeguard the environment, international cooperation, and the promotion of cultural and sport activities which better the quality of life.

The financial participation in the fund is therefore subordinate to two aspects:

- the participation of public guarantee funds
- the achievement of adequate support instruments to the single projects with the intention not only of technical support, but also as the possibility of entering into relationships with other businesses or with wholesalers.

The above institution evidenced the importance of sustaining projects for the launching of businesses through:

- access to easy credit;
- access to assistance services;
- assistance to the owners of new businesses in setting up a network of contacts and commercial relations.

For potential businessmen in general (whether they be Italian or foreign) the latter is an element of difficulty which may prove even more so for people such as refugees, often lacking a network of their own relations in the local economic world.

In this phase of the project, as already mentioned, it was difficult to gather commitments with respect to an eventual financial participation in the fund. The majority of those interviewed stated the necessity of having more specific information regarding the constitution of the fund in a more advanced phase.

With the exception of the bank, the structures interviewed have a financial availability which is conditioned by the participation in projects or by agreements sustained by public funds. For this reason it was found necessary that the fund should be mainly funded by European financing. Most probably future commitments might be more successful should an already established fund be presented.

In this phase the interviews brought to light elements of observations and suggestions on the necessities that must be taken into consideration for the success of the projects.

The structures already involved in activities of promotion and support of projects for launching businesses and for local development, offered their support in collaborating in:

- the technical support of individual projects;
- the activity of local networks made up of public and private agencies to optimise interventions.

With regard to the support of training projects, particularly for professional training, the willingness of the agencies to collaborate is tied to the necessity which these agencies have to train certain professional figures.

### **3.c. Conclusions**

Regarding the elements gathered from the interviews the following can be listed in brief:

#### **Financial participation**

- More elements are necessary to formalise financial adhesions.
- The structure of the fund mainly with European financing.

#### **Structure of the FREE Fund**

The structure of the fund should be of a mixed form with coordination at European level and operative management of funds at local level.

#### **Suggestions**

- Project FREE should not be a project for the sole disbursement of credit, but should provide packages which include the evaluation of the projects and methods of assistance for their realisation.

- At a local level coordination should be set up between public and private structures to integrate and harmonise the projects supported by FREE with other interventions of local development.
- Training must be coordinated with the necessities of the agencies on the one hand, and with the beneficiaries' motivation and personal skills on the other.
- The beneficiaries of the fund must be sustained particularly in the projects of business launching as well as in the construction of a proper network with other agencies in the economic and productive world.