



MEDITERRANEAN CITY-TO-CITY MIGRATION

CITY CASE STUDY TURIN

A GRASSROOTS APPROACH:
THE MORUS ASSOCIATION FOR INTEGRATION



SOCIAL COHESION ACTIVITIES

DECENTRALISED

CULTURE

COMMUNITY-LED

ENTREPRENEURIAL

HOUSING

Implemented by



This case study was developed in the framework of the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project (MC2CM), a project coordinated by ICMPD and funded by the European Union and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The MC2CM project has been working since 2015 with Amman, Beirut, Lisbon, Lyon, Madrid, Tangiers, Tunis, Turin and Vienna to increase the knowledge base on urban migration. Additionally the

project has sought to nurture a peer-to-peer dialogue and mutual learning on specific urban challenges such as socio-spatial cohesion, intercultural dialogue, employment and provision of shelter and basic services for refugees and economic migrants, among others. The case study was selected by the Municipality of Tunis in order to showcase a practice that contributes to socio-spatial inclusion of migrants at the local level.

COMMUNITY-LED INITIATIVE TRIGGERS MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION TO SUPPORT REFUGEES HOSTED OUTSIDE TURIN IN THE LANZO VALLEYS

ABSTRACT

Morus is a voluntary association that focuses on migrant inclusion. The association supports a small number of refugees in the Valli di Lanzo region, northwest of Turin. The association works with those individuals who have been granted refugee status in Italy in order to help them find housing and employment in the region's rural towns and villages. To this end, volunteer workers take time to map the individual needs and competencies of refugees with a view to matching individuals with appropriate opportunities in the area.

In addition, this process helps identify cultural and sporting activities capable of building relationships between new arrivals, longstanding residents and local authorities. To date, the Morus association has supported a range of inter-cultural projects such as the fashion initiative (MoroStyle); a community choir (ComoMoro); and a football team (MoroTeam).

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Metropolitan City of Turin seeks to promote an integrated approach to migration and refugee governance. Effectively, this entails facilitating collaboration across different municipal departments in order to develop inclusion pathways for recent arrivals, along with the promotion of coordinated responses between local public, private and civil society stakeholders. In the case of the Morus Association, the active engagement of Metropolitan Turin has, to date, been relatively limited.

The Metropolitan city of Turin further adopts a decentralised approach to migrants integration. Approximately 10, 000 refugees are hosted in decentralised locations throughout the Piedmont region of Italy. This represents a conscious strategy designed to direct migrants and refugees into mountainous areas in order to repopulate declining communities and reduce pressures on inner-city / suburban neighbourhoods. Responding to this decentralised approach, the Morus Association, located in the valleys north-west of Turin, was founded in March 2016. It is a civil society initiative, designed to support the coordination of various integration activities offered by local volunteers for those refugees who have been resettled to the Valli di Lanzo area since 2014.

The association emerged after two Turin-based cooperatives (Babel and Liberi Tutti) chose, in 2014, to host groups of 18 and 42 refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa in the villages of Ceres and Pessinetto re-

spectively. Neighbouring villages within the Valli di Lanzo region, Ceres and Pessinetto are located approximately 50km from Turin. Ceres has a population of 1000 and Pessinetto of 600. Most of the refugees hosted in this region come from Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Senegal.

Responding to the settlement of refugees in the area, several local community members offered clothing and Italian conversation classes. As the local volunteer network grew, bi-weekly co-ordination meetings were held in Pessinetto, drawing in civil society actors from other host municipalities in the region, such as Balangero, Coassolo and Lanzo. These meetings provided a platform to share volunteer challenges and practice and also promote collaboration with cooperatives managing refugees hosting programmes such as Babel and Liberi Tutti.

Between 2014 and 2016, the network organised the following activities:

- Local internship and apprenticeship opportunities for refugees with enterprises offering on-the-job training;
- Italian language classes;
- Local meet-up opportunities for refugees and the settled community;
- Support for decentralised hosting within the homes of local residents.

As activities in the region increased over the period, the Morus Association, set up in 2016.

IMPLEMENTATION

Morus' human rights based approach can be seen through the provision of additional housing opportunities for refugees that go beyond the initial hosting offered by local cooperatives. To this end, Morus volunteers work with newcomers to build a profile that maps their needs, skills and aspirations. This approach is not only essential to identify suitable housing/hosting opportunities in the area, it also enables the association to support refugees in finding appropriate employment opportunities.

In addition to mapping migrant housing needs, Morus has also established strong connections with local estate agents to identify available housing options. The association also provides interest-free deposit to foster refugees' access to the private rental sector.

Morus volunteers also support access to gainful employment for refugees. The initial migrant profile is crucial to matching newcomers' skills with the local labour demand. So far, five refugees have been placed within local businesses, whilst others are currently benefiting from a retraining programme designed to help refugees access employment in the understaffed social-care sector.

Another dimension of Morus' work, is the promotion of inter-cultural activities fostering social cohesion between local and refugee communities:

- **CoroMoro:** A choir project that connects West African refugees with local residents in Ceres as a way of promoting intercultural exchange and facilitating the acquisition of Italian language skills. The choir's repertoire (available on their YouTube channel) combines music from both the local Piedmont and West African Mandinka traditions. The choir has been invited to perform at a range of events across Italy. In January 2016, for example, Turin Municipality invited CoroMoro to perform at their "Un Natale coi Fiocchi" concert in Piazza Castello. More recently, having collaborated on a music video for MAU MAU, a well known Turin-based band, CoroMoro have been touring with the band.
- **MoroTeam:** A football team for refugees set up in June 2015 with the support of volunteers from Ceres. The team has since competed in regional and national competitions. This initiative promotes the active and equal participation of refugees in Italian social life.
- **MoroStyle:** A fashion enterprise initiated by five refugee tailors producing African inspired clothing. Emerging as a unique brand and style in the region, MoroStyle regularly exhibit their clothing designs during summer cultural and tourism events. Since March 2017, MoroStyle has secured a regular sales pitch at the Turin's Gran Balun open air market.

In addition to supporting migrant opportunities in the areas of housing, employment and cultural life, Morus Association also provides an element of "civic education" to

newcomers. Migrant and local volunteers are drafting a handbook on refugees' rights and duties to be translated in English and French, and disseminated in the region.

FINANCING AND RESOURCES

Morus activities are self-financed and, to date, have not received any financial contributions from local authorities. This said, some in-kind support from local authorities has been mobilised, such as the inclusion of CoroMoro in events organised by Turin Municipality. In 2016 the various Morus activities (especially CoroMoro) and sponsorships generated revenue totalling €48,000. These resources were used to cover operational expenditures and finance Morus initiatives.

Since 2016, Morus has been exploring the possibility of establishing partnerships through responding to international and local funding calls to support the association's on-going activities. Morus is also exploring the idea of generating income by starting a restaurant and catering service (RistoMoro) for African and Piedmont cuisine. This initiative could also be coupled with food production activities carried out by refugees.

RESULTS AND IMPACTS

To date, no formal evaluation of Morus' activities has taken place. However, a number of Morus activities were quoted in a 2015 report to the Italian Parliament addressing

Mountain Development. The report, prepared by the Intergruppo Parlamentare per lo Sviluppo della Montagna (Parliamentary Mixed Group for Mountain Development), acknowledged CoroMoro and MoroTeam as positive contributions to refugees' local integration.

Besides, Morus' activities fostered refugees' access to employment. The traineeship sponsored by the Piedmont regional authority named "borsa lavoro"¹ offered work placements to refugees. In collaboration with the Babel and Liberi Tutti cooperatives, Morus monitored 15 of such placements in local enterprises. They included one agricultural enterprise operating in Cantoira and Ceres; a forest enterprise in Chialamberto; and breeding enterprises in Pessinetto and Lanzo.

The Morus association also participates in the Senza Asilo network. This civil society-led network is jointly run by citizens, social workers and organisations working with refugees, and coordinating about 100 organisations. The network pushed for Turin local authorities to increase local labour market flexibility in order to facilitate refugee workers' integration. Morus' activities were central to creating the so-called "51 File", a document providing evidence that 51 refugees in the region (of which three members of CoroMoro) had access to permanent housing and sufficient work experience to be granted clearance to work.

Morus facilitated the hiring of two refugees to support pupils learning English and French at the local Valli di Ceres second-

ary school, between November 2016 and May 2017. As well as providing short-term employment, this opportunity also provided a space for the refugee workers to share experiences from their home countries and cultures. This inter-cultural exchange received very positive feedback from both students and their families.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

At present, the Morus Association faces three main challenges. The first relates to resourcing. As a self-funded organisation, Morus activities are currently dependent on income generating activities. As activities develop, the association needs to expand its resource base. At present, Morus is planning to apply for public grants in order to support the associations less-profitable initiatives and provide resources for ongoing management and coordination efforts.

The second challenge relates to scaling up coordination between civil society-driven efforts, such as Morus Association activities, and municipal services. To date, Morus has only been successful in inviting two local municipalities - Lanzo and Balangero – to collaborate in hosting refugees. To increase their impact, Morus needs to scale up this number of local authority partnerships.

Local partnerships would also allow Morus to tackle further challenges. Local educa-

tion centres have been reluctant to provide training opportunities to refugees, who have no choice but to travel to Turin. Strengthening collaboration with local authorities would support Morus' case in this sense, given that municipalities fund education centres, and provide the necessary identity card for enrollment.

Morus' third challenge concerns its ability to host more refugees. Under the current system, asylum seekers typically spend an initial 18–24 month period living in cooperative hosting sites. After this period, however, the cooperatives are no longer mandated (or funded) to host asylum seekers. Those unable to secure housing and employment, are at risk of homelessness and destitution once leaving the housing cooperative. The Morus Association focuses on individuals facing acute difficulties in obtaining the necessary paperwork and resources to enter private-rental sector housing and, as a higher number of refugees/asylum seekers are expected to arrive in the coming months, there is an urgent need to identify both more families willing to host and support them as well as longer-term housing solutions.

LESSONS LEARNED

Morus Association is currently in the process of developing relationships with local authorities in the region. To date, emergent collaborations focusing on hosting and refugees support have been built with Lanzo and Balangero municipalities. However, there is clearly still a long way to go.

¹ <http://www.borsalavorodelpiemonte.it/>

² <http://www.senzaasilo.org/>

At present, too many local authorities fear that proactively supporting refugees and asylum seekers may trigger opposition within the local population. However, the work of organisations such as Morus shows that an alternative scenario is possible. Importantly, facilitating a smoother transition towards migrant inclusion at community level – and building relationships with local authorities – requires partnerships. Morus has, for instance, benefited from the support of associations such as Associazione Mediatori Multiculturali Italiani (AMMI, Italian Mediators Association) and Stranaidea and DallaStessaParte Cooperatives, who manage the refugee/asylum seeker hosting sites and provide mediation activities for local actors in Ciriè.

There is therefore a strong benefit to be gained from supporting the work of these civil society-led initiatives. As such, regional and local governments should consider expanding their support (and funding) of these networks within a multi-stakeholder governance framework. Beyond resources, Morus is currently exploring the possibility of appointing a dedicated civil servant to creating and securing partnerships with local and regional authorities.

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Interviews:

Two interviews with Marino Poma, Morus' president (August 2017)

Co-funded by the European Union



Co-funded by



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

**Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC**

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