

## Afghan refugees arrive from Pakistan via humanitarian corridors

Twenty-five Afghan refugees from Islamabad, Pakistan, arrived at Rome's Fiumicino airport today at 1.30 p.m. via the humanitarian corridors operated by Caritas Italy on behalf of the Italian Episcopal Conference, in accordance with the protocol signed with the Italian government. It was the second flight that will bring a total of 93 people to Italy over the next few days, but one woman has remained in Pakistan for medical reasons and will arrive at a later date. Twenty-two Afghans arrived yesterday and another 45 will arrive tomorrow, 7 December. The process of resettlement in another country is always long and complex. This time, the Pakistani government had not issued exit permits until a few hours before the departure.



[“Italy is in Europe and is a member of the European Union. Italy is where the Pope lives and 90% of the population is Catholic”: on Monday 4 November, before their departure scheduled for three consecutive days, 93 asylum seekers attended a meeting in a hotel in Islamabad, with translation into Farsi. Caritas volunteers explained the logistical and bureaucratic aspects of the journey, what will happen in the coming months of their new life, while providing basic information about Italy, the climate, food, institutions, free health care and education, and the diocesan Caritas that will host them for a year.](#)

[For many, this means taking a bigger leap into the dark than their desperate flight from Afghanistan to neighbouring Pakistan.](#)

[Some only know Italy for its food, football, or because they heard about it from family or friends who arrived through previous humanitarian corridors. In any case, they only know it superficially. Learning the Italian language is the first important step, say Caritas workers. A family from Kabul with six children, destined for Assisi, had already prepared themselves during their exile in Pakistan. They all studied Italian for three hours a day and, although they still cannot speak the language, they are](#)

beginning to understand something. A yet, a 7-year-old girl, can already say in Italian: "Hello, how are you, fine, thank you."



from Caritas Italy. "All citizens are equal, there is freedom of religion, there is freedom of expression, there is freedom of protest, but always with respect for others." A sensitive issue, to which some younger women responded with a smile (the men were either silent or pensive), was that of gender equality: "We understand that you have your culture and traditions, but you have to comply with European legislation. In Europe, women are independent, they work and they have to contribute to the household budget because the cost of living is high. Talk about this in your family, because if a man prevents a woman from working, integration will be a disaster." During the briefing, the volunteers warned about the possibility that, as has happened in the past, someone may decide to refuse reception in Italy and go to Germany on their own to join family or friendship networks. "You should remember that according to European law you cannot leave the first country of asylum and you have to stay in Italy to obtain refugee status. You cannot work and live in another country, although you can travel for three months a year for tourist purposes. If you decide to leave the country you will be putting yourself at great risk and you will be subject to illegal immigration. If you intend to do this, talk to the diocesan Caritas to establish a relationship based on honesty and mutual trust."



airport at 11am to catch the 3am flight to Doha. Caritas workers labelled luggage and distributed badges with the help of International Organisation for Migration staff present at the airport to facilitate the necessary formalities. There were at least five or six checks on documents and luggage:

A whole life on a flight to Europe crammed into 25kg suitcases and trolleys. Most of them had never flown before.

There are many families with lots of children, some of them very young. And some elderly ladies who found it hard to keep up with the pace. Thirty-year-old **Nida** (these are fictitious names for security reasons) is one of the few refugees who speaks English. She is the only one who is travelling alone and the one who has been tested the hardest. Nida was a family doctor, but the Taliban's rise to power in August 2021 meant she could not continue her practice. She fled to Pakistan with her family, who remain in Islamabad. She hopes to continue her medical studies at Italian universities and be reunited with her family.



.19. He graduated from high school just before August 2021, he speaks good English and hopes to study engineering. He helps translate from English into Farsi during the long journey. "Women are no longer allowed to work or study, they have to wear burqas," says Omar. "Men have to keep long beards and are not allowed to wear jeans. There is a general feeling of unease and fear in Afghanistan. I have the impression that an internal revolt is brewing within the regime, although I don't know what the chances of success will be." The siblings have left behind eight family members in Islamabad, including two children under the age of five. The hardest part was crossing the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan a few months ago. They wanted to arrest her older brother at the border because he had served in the army under the US. Naima still gets emotional when she talks about the fear she felt at the time. They managed to get through with a ruse. "We want to successfully integrate into Italian society," they said, "and then try to bring the rest of the family over."



[in the midst of so many travellers from all over the world. The constant precaution was to count them over and over again and to make sure they walked in a single line. One elderly lady had difficulty walking and was unable to keep up. Fortunately, the Qatar Airways hostesses made the process easier. But in such a complex, procedurally demanding undertaking, there are always unforeseen events: one person in the group left a briefcase containing some documents in the restroom at Doha airport. At first it was feared that it was the passport, but it turned out to be the driving licence, which was not recovered.](#)



After a 10-hour flight and a five-hour transfer, as soon as the plane landed at Rome's Fiumicino airport, the Afghan refugees were accompanied by police officers to Terminal 5 for checks, fingerprinting and the official start of the asylum process in Italy. It took another five or six hours before they were all allowed to enter the territory of Rome,

finally in a free country, in a democracy.



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agencies involved in the reception process and other Caritas Italy volunteers. One family will be hosted by the Sisters of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Some will remain in Rome, while others will travel by car or minibus to their final destination in Savona, Belluno, Vittorio Veneto, Assisi, Piana degli Albanesi, Biella, Frosinone, Gaeta, Milan, Pordenone, Sorrento, Tricarico, Udine, Ugento and Verona. Some of the families will stay overnight in Rome to rest – not least because there are two or three very young children. They will then travel on to their respective dioceses.

