
Refugees: Father Ripamonti (Centro Astalli), “the right to asylum in Europe is being eroded”

Forcibly displaced migrants are currently undertaking “increasingly dangerous routes, not least because of misguided policies that have been pursued with determination.” The Mayor of Rome, **Roberto Gualtieri**, said this in his speech on the occasion of the presentation of the 2024 Annual Report commissioned by Centro Astalli, the Italian headquarters of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS). In 2023, the Centro Astalli, with its branches in Bologna, Catania, Grumo Nevano, Vicenza, Padua, Palermo and Trento, assisted around 11,000 people in Rome and 22,000 throughout the country. Worldwide, the Mayor of Rome said, “a record 110 million people have been forcibly displaced. This is also due to the lack of legal and safe entry routes, which leads migrants to entrust themselves to human traffickers.” Not to mention “the bureaucracy that delays the processing of requests for international protection.” As a result, Gualtieri said, “in 2023 there were 8,500 deaths on migrant routes and 3,000 deaths in the Mediterranean: a tragic average of 8 deaths per day.” Gualtieri thanked Centro Astalli for its efforts “to welcome, protect and support all those fleeing crisis areas who arrive in Italy after tragic ordeals such as torture and violence that leave deep scars.” For its part, the Municipality of Rome, also in view of the Jubilee, is “stepping up its efforts to offer migrants an increasingly personalised welcome, including urban integration projects such as the One-Stop Immigration Desk, along with structured pathways to facilitate vocational training, internships and self-sufficient integration.”

“We are witnessing an erosion of the right to asylum in Europe”,

denounced Father **Camillo Ripamonti**, President of Centro Astalli. The recent Pact on Migration and Asylum, recently approved by the European Parliament, he said, “marks a retrograde step with regard to the right to asylum, because - as the facts and events of 2023 have shown - it is not through externalisation, refoulement, the absence of a genuine rescue at sea policy and of fast-track procedures at the border that the migratory phenomenon can be managed.” “Complexity is not the same as complication,” the Jesuit priest insisted: “The so-called migration problem is not solved by removing people from European soil, but by eliminating the causes of forced displacement.” According to the Centro Astalli, “we have missed an opportunity with this new European Pact”: “It is only by tackling the migratory phenomenon together, in a proactive way, that we can turn it into a resource, and not by treating it separately in each country, with a defensive approach.” As far as Italy is concerned, “2023 will be remembered as the year of the emergency decree on migration,” said Ripamonti. He denounced “a steady deterioration in reception” over the past year. Out of a total of 235 people housed by the Centro Astalli in Rome, one in six had been subjected to torture and violence, and one in six suffered some form of health vulnerability. “There are also hidden forms of vulnerability,” said the Jesuit priest, “which are often the result of unresolved traumas. For these traumas to surface and be channelled into a treatment programme, victims need time, attention and an appropriate reception plan in terms of facilities and procedures. The idea of restricting reception planning to the explicitly vulnerable condemns people with invisible vulnerabilities to their fate as vulnerable people.”

“Cooperation with institutions, not confrontation”.

This is the “path” chosen to tackle the question of “migrants in transit”, i.e. migrants who take the Balkan route to reach Italy before continuing on to neighbouring countries where they may have relatives or acquaintances. Msgr. **Enrico Trevisi**, Bishop of Trieste, the city that will host the 50th Social Week of Catholics in Italy from 3 to 7 July, is certain of this. Bishop Trevisi arrived in Trieste a

year ago. He described his current home city as “a borderland, with no real border, just a porous border of people who lived together for centuries until nationalist ideologies set them at war with each other, leading to civil wars with hitherto unimaginable consequences.” Today, the city, where Latins, Slavs and Germanic peoples coexist, is the destination on a route followed by many young people and families with children. They gather in Piazza Libertà, where the railway station is located, and where many migrants - two thirds of whom refuse to register - wait for the train that will take them to other destinations such as Germany or France. A shelter was set up for them in Piazza della Libertà, and now the diocese has opened a new night shelter, with the help of 130 volunteers who work in shifts to distribute food, clothing and basic medical care, in collaboration with other members of civil society actively volunteering in the same square. One of the most complex and controversial issues in Trieste is that of the Silos, a former gravel depot in the old Austrian port, which was once used to house refugees from Istria, Dalmatia and Fiume. “Nowadays it is a dilapidated site,” said the bishop: “When the black bora wind blows, the whole place becomes muddy and there are tents above the vaults. It's a small slum next to the city centre. Almost all the migrants living in the Silos are registered with the police: “They have the right to be included in our protection system, but since they have not disembarked from the boats, no mechanism for transferring them to other cities is in place,” the prelate denounced.

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