

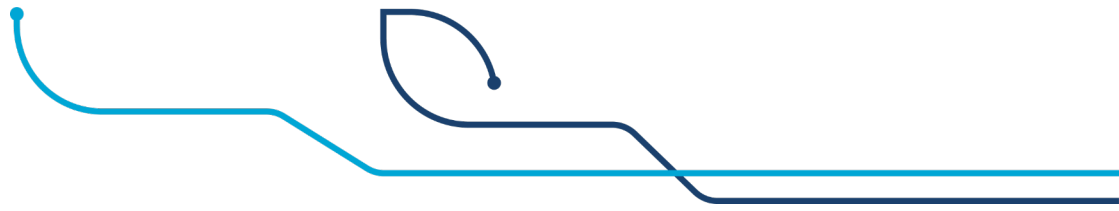
Policy Brief

Corridoi Lavorativi:

How Caritas Italiana is Using an Existing Humanitarian Corridor to Pilot a Labour Pathway to Italy

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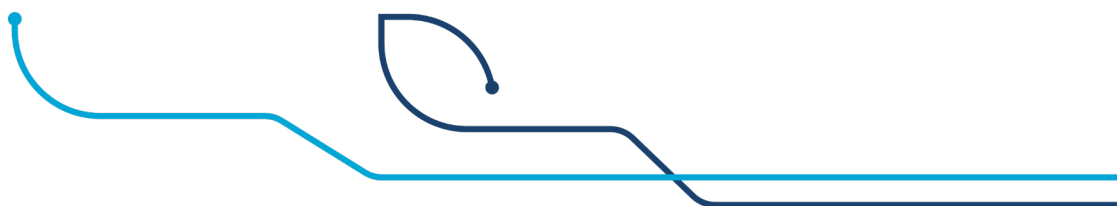
Cover photo © Caritas Italiana / Lucia Forlino. Beneficiaries of the labour pathway pilot led by Caritas Italiana upon their arrival at Rome airport in May 2023. They are accompanied by representatives of Caritas Diocesana who welcomed them at the airport.

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This policy brief is part of a series documenting specific aspects of the policy design process of skills-based pathways to Belgium, Ireland and Italy in the context of the EU-Passworld project.

EU-Passworld is a three-year (2022-2024) project funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). A multi-stakeholder consortium led by Caritas Italiana is working to design and pilot innovative education and labour pathways with a link to community sponsorship in Belgium, Ireland and Italy for at least 200 individuals in need of international protection by the end of 2024. In Italy, EU-Passworld counts with the full commitment of competent national authorities and is led by Caritas Italiana, Consorzio Communitas, Diaconia Valdese, UNHCR Italy and the University of Bologna.

Despite an initial focus on testing different policy approaches with small numbers of beneficiaries, pilots established in the context of EU-Passworld are being built in a way that will allow pathways to grow into self-sustaining programmes that work at scale. By exploring how community sponsorship can be leveraged to support the welcome and integration of education and labour pathway beneficiaries, EU-Passworld will develop evidence on when and how sponsorship leads to more sustainable, effective and efficient complementary pathway programmes, also benefitting receiving communities and societies at large. For further information, please visit the project website: <https://www.eupassworld.eu>.

I. The Humanitarian Corridors to Italy

Over the past decade, faith-based organizations have offered a safe pathway to protection and a sustainable solution to thousands of individuals in countries of first asylum thanks to so-called Humanitarian Corridors, an initiative that originated in Italy in late 2015 and has since been replicated in Andorra, Belgium, France and San Marino.

These complementary pathways are driven by the resolve of European civil society to stop migrant deaths; prevent smuggling and human trafficking; and offer a concrete alternative to vulnerable people in need of international protection who are not formally recognized as refugees or may not qualify for resettlement or other third-country solutions. 3,955 people arrived to Italy from Ethiopia, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya and Niger through this channel between 2016 and 2022,¹ and according to Caritas Italiana² this figure was already over 4,000 in September 2023.

In Italy, as in other countries, the Humanitarian Corridors operate through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between the Italian government (represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior) and several faith-based and civil society organizations. These MoUs state “the aims, procedures, tools [and] responsibilities of the parties,” creating “political and institutional responsibilities” but not “enforceable subjective rights.”³

Each protocol concerns a specific group of civil society actors and defines a one-time quota of beneficiaries; how many individuals each organization will be responsible for; one or several countries of departure; and a clear implementation timeline. Most agreements include the Community of Sant’Egidio,⁴ the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy,⁵ Tavola Valdese⁶ and the Bishops’ Conference of Italy.⁷ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)⁸ and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)⁹ are also signatories.

Most Humanitarian Corridors are fully funded by the participating faith-based or civil society organizations, who identify beneficiaries through referrals from local partners based in countries of first asylum. Eligibility is determined based on prima facie need of international protection, a broad understanding of vulnerability, and pragmatic considerations such as the likelihood that the beneficiary will become self-sufficient, settle in Italian society, and stay in the country in the long term.¹⁰ Beneficiaries cannot apply to be included in the programme.

After being issued a humanitarian visa by the relevant Italian diplomatic post, beneficiaries travel to Italy in flights organized by IOM and apply for asylum immediately upon arrival. Italian legislation does not include any provision regarding the issuance of humanitarian visas, but Humanitarian Corridors rely on Article 25 of EU Regulation No 810/2009 of 13 July 2009 (Visa Code),¹¹ which “provides Member States the possibility of issuing, in exceptional cases, visas with limited territorial validity for humanitarian reasons, national interest or on the grounds of international

¹ Share Network (2022), *Humanitarian Corridors in Italy: Evaluation of Caritas Italy and Consorzio Communitas Community Sponsorship Programme*, page 8. See [link](#).

² See [link](#).

³ Bianchini, K., *Humanitarian Admission to Italy through Humanitarian Visas and Corridors*, in Foblets, Marie-Claire, and Luc Leboeuf eds, (2020) *Humanitarian Admission to Europe. Schriften Zum Migrationsrecht*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, page 163. See [link](#).

⁴ See [link](#).

⁵ See [link](#).

⁶ See [link](#).

⁷ See [link](#).

⁸ See [link](#).

⁹ See [link](#).

¹⁰ Bianchini, K., op. cit., page 168-174. See [link](#).

¹¹ See [link](#).

obligations. What is meant by ‘humanitarian reasons’ has not been clearly defined, but State practice shows that these kinds of visas have been issued for health reasons or protection needs.”¹² The asylum procedure typically takes six months for Humanitarian Corridor beneficiaries, which is much shorter than the average timeline for other asylum-seekers in Italy.¹³

Once in Italy, signatory organisations coordinate post-arrival support and engage public and private local actors in welcome and integration activities, including municipal authorities, professional social workers and individual volunteers. The latter play the role of community sponsors, helping newcomers settle into their new lives by providing practical, social and personal accompaniment for 12 months (or 18 months when there are specific needs or vulnerabilities). Although each participating faith-based or civil society organization has its own approach to welcome and integration support,¹⁴ the sponsorship component is a distinctive feature of all Humanitarian Corridors.

¹² Bianchini, K., op. cit., page 162. See [link](#).

¹³ Bianchini, K., op. cit., page 174. See [link](#).

¹⁴ Share Network (2019), *Fostering Community Sponsorships Across Europe*, pages 15-18. See [link](#). “For instance, the Waldesian Church and FCEI tend to provide reception in small centres and hire external personnel, whereas the Community of Sant’Egidio and Caritas are more based on mobilizing resources within the religious community.” Bianchini, K., op. cit., page 176. See [link](#).

II. The Humanitarian Corridor for Afghan Citizens

In November 2021, Italy's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through its General Directorate for Italians Abroad and Migration Policies, Italy's Ministry of Interior, through its Department for Civil Liberties and Migration, the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy, Tavola Valdese, the Bishops' Conference of Italy, the Associazione Recreativa e Culturale Italiana (ARCI),¹⁵ the National Institute for Health, Migration and Poverty (INMP),¹⁶ UNHCR and IOM signed a MoU to offer a safe pathway to Italy to 1,200 Afghan citizens in need of international protection who fled to neighbouring countries following the fall of Kabul in August of that year.

As in the case of previous Humanitarian Corridors, the need to prevent irregular movements towards Europe and the risks intrinsic to smuggling and human trafficking are noted as a key rationale for the programme in the text of the agreement. Signatories also highlight their intention to pilot innovative legal pathways to the European Union and to consolidate an Italian best practice that could be adopted at European level.¹⁷ The MoU draws on a similar experience with evacuations from Libya to Italy, and is conceived as a follow-up to the emergency evacuation operation carried out in Kabul in August 2021, as well as numerous subsequent humanitarian actions aimed at Afghan citizens at risk, in particular women and children.¹⁸

The project includes two distinct actions:¹⁹ the first targeted at 400 Afghan citizens recognized as refugees by UNHCR, at least prima facie, and the second targeted at an additional 800 Afghan citizens who must meet the requirements to be granted international protection in the sense of articles 11 and 17 of the Decreto Legislativo 19 novembre 2007, n. 251.²⁰ While the first group will be identified by UNHCR and their reception and integration support financed by Italy's Ministry of Interior,²¹ the second will be identified by the signatory faith-based and civil society organizations, who will also assume the costs of their post-arrival assistance. The Bishops' Conference of Italy will be responsible for 300 individuals; the Community of Sant'Egidio for 200; the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy and Tavola Valdese for 200; and ARCI for 100.²²

Although Pakistan and Iran are explicitly mentioned as countries of first asylum where the programme will be implemented, the MoU leaves open the possibility of including other countries of first asylum or transit within the scope of the Corridor. The initial timeline is defined as two years from the day in which the first group of beneficiaries lands in Italy, although the project can be extended for an additional year if the signatories so decide.²³

¹⁵ See [link](#).

¹⁶ See [link](#).

¹⁷ Protocollo di intesa per la realizzazione del progetto Corridoi Umanitari / Evacuazioni per l'Afghanistan, November 2021, Article 2 (1)

¹⁸ See [link](#).

¹⁹ Protocollo di intesa, Article 2 (2)

²⁰ See [link](#).

²¹ Protocollo di intesa, Article 4 (4)

²² Protocollo di intesa, Article 4 (1)

²³ Protocollo di intesa, Article 5 (1)

III. The Labour Pathway Pilot

In the autumn of 2022, Caritas Italiana, the pastoral organization of the Bishops' Conference of Italy, decided to test the feasibility of developing a labour pathway within the framework of the Humanitarian Corridor for Afghan Citizens analyzed above.²⁴

This section analyses how each building block of the pathway was designed and implemented, taking as starting point the processes foreseen by the 2021 MoU and the practices established over the years through Caritas Italiana's participation in the Humanitarian Corridors to Italy since they were first launched in 2016.

1. Eligibility Criteria

The 2021 MoU states that beneficiaries who fall within the responsibility of Caritas Italiana and other Italian faith-based and civil society organizations must be Afghan citizens or their family members "in evident need of international protection," as defined by national and EU legislation.²⁵

Other additional factors that will be taken into account concern individuals with family links to Afghan citizens in Italy (including extended family); individuals particularly at risk due to the professional role or public position they held in Afghanistan; individuals who worked with the Italian military or Italian international development cooperation present in Afghanistan; individuals already referred to competent Ministries during the August 2021 evacuation; individuals in a situation of heightened personal vulnerability that cannot be addressed in the transit country where they currently are; individuals who can benefit from the hospitality of specific volunteers, churches or associations; or individuals with stable family and social ties in Italy who want to settle in the country.²⁶ Priority will be given to those in proven situations of vulnerability due their personal situation, age or health status.²⁷

The labour pathway beneficiaries who have already arrived in Italy along with their family members were in evident need of international protection. They were all hosted in safe houses in Islamabad and were in a situation of heightened vulnerability or at risk due to the type of professional role or public position they held in Afghanistan. Some worked with the United States Army for several years, while others had family members killed by the Taliban or received threats because of their participation in street demonstrations. A few beneficiaries had the firm intention to start a new life in Italy – they had engaged with Italian employers on their own initiative and had started to learn Italian online.

Additionally, eligibility for the labour pathway pilot was assessed on the basis of academic qualifications (most beneficiaries had a higher education degree), work experience, and the relevance of the professional profile and skills of each candidate for the Italian labour market.

2. Identification and Selection of Beneficiaries

According to the 2012 MoU, signatory faith-based and civil society organizations commit to identify and select beneficiaries who meet the eligibility criteria for the Corridor through their own human and financial resources, including by conducting an in-depth case-by-case assessment. As it is normally the case in all Humanitarian

²⁴ See [link](#).

²⁵ Protocollo di intesa, Article 3 (2)

²⁶ Protocollo di intesa, Article 3 (3)

²⁷ Protocollo di intesa, Article 2 (3)

Corridors, a list of selected beneficiaries must be shared with Italy's Ministry of Interior no later than 30 days before the planned departure for Italy.²⁸

The fall of Kabul and the subsequent exodus of Afghan citizens mobilized civil society around the world. Italian citizens were no exception, and by the time that the Humanitarian Corridor became operational in late 2021, countless communities, employers, associations, sports clubs,²⁹ civil society organizations and churches throughout the country had received thousands of referrals to individuals who had left Afghanistan on their own and were in urgent need of international protection and a sustainable solution.

Thanks to its national network of 220 local representations (Caritas Diocesana), Caritas Italiana was able to leverage Italy's community-led response to the Afghanistan crisis to identify potential beneficiaries for the Humanitarian Corridor, working with multiple trusted partners to filter thousands of referrals. Taking community sponsorship as a core principle, Caritas designed the following process to identify and select eligible beneficiaries, similarly to the *modus operandi* of previous Corridors:

- Any individual sponsor or a group of sponsors (private citizens, members of the Afghan diaspora in Italy, faith-based or civil society organizations, higher education institutions, employers, etc.) can refer an Afghan citizen in need of international protection who is in a country of first asylum (Iran, Pakistan or other State) to one of the 220 local representations of Caritas (Caritas Diocesana) or to Caritas Italiana. For the referral to be accepted, the referring individual, group or entity must commit to welcome, host and support the integration of the Afghan citizen(s) being referred.
- Caritas (Diocesana or Italiana) assesses each referral and corresponding sponsorship offer, including the availability of sufficient means of subsistence; the strength of relevant support networks; and the veracity of the data and information provided. Caritas Italiana monitors the entire process through dedicated local coordinators (*tutori territoriali*), who visit each potential sponsor group and verify that the necessary requirements to welcome one or several beneficiaries are met.
- Caritas Diocesana can also refer potential beneficiaries directly, as long as it commits to play the role of sponsor and provide welcome and integration support. In this case, Caritas Italiana also monitors the entire process.
- Caritas or UNHCR offices in countries of first asylum can refer cases in urgent need of protection and draw attention to individuals in a situation of heightened vulnerability. Caritas Italiana then assesses each of these referrals case by case, including them in the programme as it sees fit.
- On the basis of all referrals, Caritas Italiana develops a list of potential beneficiaries. These are then prioritized against a range of criteria, such as vulnerability, urgency, match to a suitable sponsorship group in Italy, documentation status, or special needs.

²⁸ Protocollo di intesa, Article 4 (1d)

²⁹ For example, a cycling team of 60 Afghan women was referred by the Italian Federation of Cyclists and brought to Italy thanks to the Humanitarian Corridor, showing the power of naming based on 'shared interests.' Share Network (2023), Honouring Community-Led Welcome, Celebrating Achievements and Looking to the Future. Share QSN Report on the First European Sponsorship Convention on 26 April 2023, page 11, see [link](#).

- Finally, Caritas Italiana conducts screening interviews in countries of first asylum to verify each case against the eligibility criteria stated in the MoU before deciding whether beneficiaries can travel to Italy through the Humanitarian Corridor or not.

Beneficiaries of the pilot labour pathway were referred to Caritas Diocesana by Caritas Italiana, who identified the potential beneficiaries in Islamabad among individuals hosted in safe houses run by the Fondazione Pangea Onlus.³⁰ Pangea is a civil society organization based in Milan with programmes focused on women's rights in 10 countries, including Afghanistan. In this case, it was Caritas Diocesana who committed or was asked to provide welcome and integration support to the individuals identified and referred by this NGO.

The first group of labour pathway beneficiaries were interviewed by Caritas Italiana in early October 2022. Although beneficiaries had been initially referred by Pangea solely because of their need of international protection and heightened vulnerability, their academic qualifications, professional experience and skills came to the fore in the course of screening interviews with Caritas Italiana staff members.

As mentioned above, the relevance of each candidate's professional profile and skills for the Italian labour market was taken into consideration during the screening process in the context of the labour pathway pilot.

3. Engagement with Candidates and Potential Employers Before Departure

The 2021 MoU commits signatory organizations to provide pre-departure orientation to Humanitarian Corridor beneficiaries, including general information about the programme; the asylum application process; the rights and duties of asylum-seekers and recognized refugees in Italy; cultural orientation; and expectation management.³¹

In the context of the labour pathway pilot, however, additional activities were implemented, as it is usually the case in this kind of complementary pathway. Consorzio Communitas,³² another EU-Passworld national project partner, led this phase of the programme, engaging with beneficiaries and potential employers on a regular basis for more than nine months.

3.1. Support to Beneficiaries

Between December 2022 and January 2023, individual cognitive interviews were held online with all beneficiaries. A cultural mediator and a human resources director with experience as corporate scout and expertise on labour market integration issues participated in these preliminary conversations.

Candidates also took Italian language lessons online 10 hours a week led by a teacher employed by Caritas Italiana, while also following a self-paced online course thanks to a corporate partner who financed full access to the learning platform Rosetta Stone.³³

³⁰ See [link](#).

³¹ Protocollo di intesa, Article 4 (1e)

³² See [link](#).

³³ See [link](#).

Beneficiaries also received career coaching from Consorzio Communitas. This included information about Italian work culture, as well as advice about potential next steps to fulfil their respective professional goals, including further education and training. For example, as part of one of these activities candidates had to draft a CV and cover letter imagining that they were applying for their dream job. This process was key to convey to candidates that the possibility of a new life in Italy was real, which bolstered their morale and led to a high degree of motivation and engagement in pre-departure activities. Thanks to this tailored advice, one beneficiary developed an interest in working in the IT sector, and was offered the opportunity to start an online IT training programme³⁴ organized by Fondazione Italiana Accenture.³⁵

Consorzio Communitas also brought together a team of two human resources directors, one recruiter and one corporate lawyer, asking them to become ambassadors for the pilot on a pro bono basis. This entailed developing training modules, preparing beneficiaries to interact with Italian employers during an application process, and providing an overview of the Italian labour market. Over the course of two online sessions in February and March 2023, ambassadors shared practical tips with beneficiaries, helping them to redraft their CVs and to prepare a video presentation describing their professional journey to date and sharing their dreams for the future. The team of coaches also provided personalized advice to candidates to develop a portfolio featuring their work.

A key part of the pre-departure phase was the validation of candidates' qualifications and skills (both soft and hard), a process that was very different for each beneficiary. For instance, candidates with experience in administrative roles were interviewed by an Italian CFO to evaluate their hard skills using standard tools commonly used in Europe. Seamstresses were asked to photograph their work before being interviewed by a haute-couture pattern designer and undergoing a technical skills assessment. In the case of candidates in regulated professions such as the health sector, Italy's Ministry of Health and the Academic Equivalence Mobility Information Centre (CIMEA)³⁶ were approached to request a statement of comparability and a formal recognition of qualifications.

The pre-departure phase lasted several months and was structured around tailored support and highly individualized accompaniment to each candidate at every step of the process. Project partners started by analysing labour market dynamics in Italy and identifying employer needs. Profiling, pre-selection and matching with potential employers were a key element of pre-departure activities. In addition to formal certification of previous skills and qualifications, reskilling also proved to be key, not only focusing on Italian language classes, but also on adapting or upgrading certain competences to ensure beneficiaries' employability in the Italian labour market (for instance, learning to operate standard equipment used in the high fashion industry in Italy).

³⁴ See [link](#).

³⁵ See [link](#).

³⁶ See [link](#).

3.2. Outreach to Potential Employers

In parallel to pre-departure support to candidates, Consorzio Communitas developed targeted materials to engage corporate employers in the pilot, prioritizing economic sectors with acute skill shortages such as renewables, energy-efficient construction, high fashion, IT or logistics, as well as companies already working with Caritas to include asylum-seekers and migrants in the labour market and corporate actors particularly sensitized to the plight of Afghan professionals. The wide professional networks of the team of ambassadors that coached beneficiaries pro-bono before departure were also leveraged.

Both online and in-person meetings were organized with employers to raise awareness about the pilot project, its beneficiaries, and the value added that people in need of international protection can bring to any workplace. Issues such as how to ensure the inclusion of displaced workers and how to meet their specific needs while adhering to existing labour regulations and minimum standards were also addressed.

Unlike most labour pathway programmes, employer outreach started with the candidates. Individual profiles of beneficiaries were developed (including a CV and a video presentation, as described above), and each beneficiary was presented as a skilled worker who is the right fit for a specific vacancy, not as a displaced person in need of humanitarian assistance and international protection. Employers then interviewed candidates themselves.

Some of the challenges faced during this initial outreach phase included lack of relevance of the academic qualifications of some beneficiaries for the Italian labour market; the relatively advanced age of some candidates; and their limited professional experience. Given the high level of awareness about the particularly difficult situation of Afghan women, employers showed interest in getting to know some of the candidates to assess if they would be the right fit. In other words, their displacement status may have been a factor in getting them invited to an interview, but they would have never received an offer if they would not have performed well during the recruitment process and showed that they can fulfil all expectations of the job in question.

4. Welcome and Integration Support Post-Arrival

A unique feature of the Humanitarian Corridor model is the active engagement of individual citizens and local communities in the provision of welcome and wrap-around integration support to programme beneficiaries. As noted above, each faith-based or civil society organization engaged in the Corridor designs and implements the post-arrival component of the programme in a slightly different way, although all of them support newcomers for at least one year after their arrival.

Caritas Diocesana leads post-arrival support to Humanitarian Corridor beneficiaries, ensuring that they have access to initial accommodation; basic supplies; cultural mediation; education (including Italian language and literacy courses for adults); healthcare (including specialized care in case of special needs or specific vulnerabilities); legal advice; support to find long-term accommodation; and labour market integration (including skills assessment, mentoring and training). This wide-ranging set of supports is provided by both professional social workers and volunteers who accompany beneficiaries “on a more personal level.”³⁷ Caritas spends an average of 30 Euros per day to support one Humanitarian Corridor beneficiary.

³⁷ Share Network (2022), Humanitarian Corridors in Italy: Evaluation of Caritas Italy and Consorzio Communitas Community Sponsorship Programme, pages 10-12. See [link](#).

On the 2021 MoU, as in the case of other Humanitarian Corridors, participating organizations committed to support the welcome and socio-cultural integration of their respective quota of beneficiaries for at least one year, including legal assistance during the asylum application phase; Italian language classes; and activities aimed at ensuring their labour market integration. The agreement is explicit about settlement assistance being key to avoid secondary movements, and states that conditions and standards should be comparable to those of Italy's public reception system for refugees and asylum-seekers.³⁸

After traveling from Islamabad to Rome on 23 May, 1 August and 1 December 2023 in flights financed by Italy's Ministry of Interior and organized by IOM,³⁹ Humanitarian Corridor beneficiaries lodged an asylum application immediately upon arrival in Italy. As asylum-seekers are only allowed to start working 60 days after formally registering their asylum application,⁴⁰ individuals participating in the labour pathway pilot were offered additional capacity development activities during this period, including Italian language courses in person 4-6 hours a week. They also received additional coaching and support to find employment.

Beneficiaries are living independently in accommodation provided by Caritas Diocesana in Firenze, Milan, Novara and Cantù, where they are being supported in different ways. This accompaniment is a key reassurance for employers, who know that the specific needs of their new employees are being addressed. The level of access to services and the suitability of the accommodation vary across locations. For instance, some workers spend more than two hours in their daily commute to work.

For beneficiaries of the labour pathway pilot who already have a salary, post-arrival support will be more flexible than for other Humanitarian Corridor beneficiaries. These individuals will be asked to cover some costs in accordance with their income and living expenses. Ongoing accompaniment, advice and support will be crucial for beneficiaries to perform as expected in their new roles. A safety net – at the moment provided by Caritas Diocesana – is also in place for those who may not succeed directly upon arrival.

Although it is too early to draw a definitive conclusion, most labour pathway pilot beneficiaries seem to be settling down well in Italy. As the individual profiles included in the following page show, they are not only ready to start a new life in Europe, but also keen on resuming their careers.

³⁸ Protocollo di intesa, Article 4 (1f)

³⁹ Protocollo di intesa, Articles 4 (3II) and 4 (4a)

⁴⁰ In Italy, the asylum application process starts with an initial registration at the competent police headquarters (questura), where the identity and nationality of the asylum-seeker are verified, fingerprints and photographs are taken, and an application form including all relevant personal information is completed. After that, the asylum-seeker is summoned to formally register the application (an act known as 'verbalization' in Italian). Timelines for this second appointment vary widely depending on the workload of each questura, and could be up to 6 months. During the verbalization, the applicant must complete a standard form with the help of questions asked by an interpreter (C3 form, Law 142/2015), and deliver a written summary of their story in any language of their choice. After this second appointment, the applicant receives a document confirming their status as asylum-seeker in Italy, which provides access to certain rights and to State assistance. See [link](#), pages 10-12.

A.H., a 30-year-old engineer, was hired by a hydraulic engineering company in Tuscany. He started his new job in September 2023 on a full-time fixed-term contract until March 2024. After this trial period, the employer is open to offer him a permanent contract. A.H. travelled to Italy with his wife and three children.

T.P., A.H.'s wife, is taking Italian language classes and focusing on getting her family and children settled (school enrolment, GP registration, access to social benefits, etc.). She will also start an online IT course in February 2024 to learn digital tools needed in the tech sector and to get to know the market and work culture in Italy.

A.N., a 30-year-old entrepreneur, is taking Italian language classes. He had a job interview with a company in Tuscany that produces and exports furniture in October 2023. A.N. travelled to Italy with his wife.

T.Y. (A.N.'s wife) is taking Italian classes. She was considering finalizing her BSc in Computer Science at Xidian University in Xi'an (Shaanxi, China), but has instead decided to enrol in an online IT course starting in February 2024 and in an online IT training programme organized by Fondazione Italiana Accenture starting in April 2024.

F.A., a 30-year-old dentist, started to work 30 hours a week in a dental clinic in September 2023. He has a fixed-term contract until March 2024. After this trial period, the employer is open to offer him a permanent contract. In the meantime, F.A. is attending a compulsory course that will allow him to register and work as a dentist in Italy, pending the official recognition of his higher education degrees and qualifications.

FT. (F.A.'s wife), a web designer, is taking Italian classes. She has a job interview in February 2024 with a Milan-based foundation for an internship focusing on social media, and is in touch with a fashion start-up which is interested in her skillset.

S.M. is a 44-year-old economics graduate with professional experience as contract controller. He is attending two courses in business management and finance at Bocconi University in Milan. The first course started in September 2023 and the second in January 2023. Once he finishes these courses, S.M. will get career advice from Bocconi University to find a job in his field of expertise.

F.S. (S.M.'s wife), is taking Italian classes and has started a tailoring workshop.

S.P. started an online IT training programme before leaving Pakistan organized by Fondazione Italiana Accenture. After completing the course in June 2023, she was offered a full-time fixed-term contract in the cybersecurity team of a multinational consulting company, where she has worked since October 2023.

F.S. and **F.J.**, two sisters who are seamstresses, will start a 6-month internship at one of Italy's most renowned haute-couture companies, and should receive a job offer after completing the internship. A third sister who arrived with them decided to leave Italy to reunite with her boyfriend in France. Their fourth sister is still a child.

M.A. and **T.A.**, who arrived in December 2023, are also applying for an online IT training programme organized by Fondazione Italiana Accenture starting in April 2024. The course ends in July 2024 and graduates will be invited to attend a speed-dating event with IT companies in September 2024. M.A. has also applied for an online IT course starting in February 2024 to learn digital tools needed in the tech sector and to get to know the market and work culture in Italy.

IV. Looking Back and Looking Forward: Preliminary Reflections and Policy Considerations

At a moment when Italy is designing a labour pathway for refugees within its existing labour migration framework, the pilot experience led by Caritas Italiana using an active Humanitarian Corridor for people in need of international protection as labour pathway offers a unique opportunity to identify the advantages and disadvantages of each policy approach.

A robust monitoring and evaluation framework should be developed to closely track the implementation of both models and determine under which circumstances it may be advisable to use a humanitarian channel instead of a labour visa. For instance, whilst the former seems better suited for beneficiaries in situations of heightened vulnerability who cannot leave extended family or elderly dependents behind, the latter is more likely to be the right choice when the policy goal is to develop a national programme that can scale relatively quickly and meet specific employer demands.

While such a framework is developed, Caritas Italiana's experience points to several features of humanitarian channels as labour pathways that it would be worth further documenting and analyzing, so they can be taken into account in future iterations of the programme or in different country contexts:

- Whenever a humanitarian channel is used as the framework for a labour pathway, any quota allocated on the basis of the qualifications and skills of potential beneficiaries must be additional to previously agreed quotas accessed on the basis of vulnerability or other humanitarian criteria.
- Humanitarian channels offer a significant degree of sustainability from the perspective of beneficiary workers, including security of legal status (through an application for international protection before or immediately upon arrival that generally leads to refugee status); the ability to preserve family unity; and entitlement to State supports.
- The eligibility criteria of any labour pathway must be transparent and based on qualifications and skills, even when access does not happen autonomously or through an open application process but through identification, referral and matching, as it is the case in most humanitarian channels. This does not preclude that such criteria also take into account protection, vulnerability or other special needs of potential beneficiaries.
- A train-to-hire model where candidates follow a short but intensive online training to get reskilled in areas with acute labour shortages seems very promising to ensure the employability of displaced workers who access a third country through a labour pathway built around a humanitarian channel. When this is the case, candidates should be screened for specific soft skills rather than prior higher education qualifications. Sectors where this approach has great potential include IT; tourism and hospitality; and the automotive industry.
- Post-arrival support should be framed and designed as a continuation of pre-departure activities, particularly if having a job offer is not a premise to travel to the destination country because a humanitarian channel is being used. In addition to language classes, providing a few months of 'breathing space' to candidates to reassess where they want to go next in their career is important, particularly when there are children whose wellbeing and smooth adaptation to their new homes must be prioritized.

Broader lessons learned from the corridoi lavorativi pilot that are relevant to the development of a labour pathway under any policy framework include:

- Expectation management of candidates is crucial. In order to find a job at destination, they may need up- or reskilling through targeted training opportunities or access to higher education. Even if beneficiaries have a higher education degree and decades of professional experience, it is likely that their next job will be very different to their last one. It is also important to bear in mind what is the level of language skills required in certain sectors and types of jobs, and what roles can be performed in English, at least initially.
- Candidate profiling and targeted matching can be very effective, provided that the starting point of the pathway are employer needs; there is a competitive recruitment and application process; employers receive a shortlist of candidates to interview and choose from; and timelines are not too long. Scale will be elusive until a labour pathway is truly demand-driven, allowing employers to fill vacancies in a matter of weeks, not months. Once the needs of employers are met, they are likely to advocate upon government stakeholders and other relevant decision-makers to ensure that the pathway not only continues to exist, but also grows.
- While employers engaged in the labour market integration of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants who are already in the country of destination are an obvious starting point to launch and pilot a labour pathway – and should thus remain a target audience for stakeholders interested in facilitating this type of channel – these actors must be made aware that the countries of origin, personal stories, professional profiles, academic qualifications, and soft and hard skills of potential candidates are quite different to those of migrant and displaced workers who are already in the country.
- Pre-departure is a crucial building block of any labour pathway, more than in the case of complementary pathways that are accessed based on vulnerability criteria, or than in the case of skilled-based pathways for students. Labour pathway candidates must typically go through several rounds of interviews, learn a new language, follow a specific training, and have their skills verified. This requires not only time, but also a reliable internet connection, a stable place of residence, as well as month-long engagement with professional recruiters or human resources experts. This resource-intensive model of highly individualized expert support can only be sustainable if the employer covers a sizable part of pre-arrival costs – which companies in sectors with dire labour shortages may be open to consider, as well as employers with previous experience of recruiting individuals in situations of vulnerability, including asylum-seekers and migrants already present in the national territory.
- In the post-arrival phase, accommodation near the workplace is a fundamental piece of sustainability for beneficiaries – one that employers could contribute to by providing funding to civil society and faith-based organizations who are deeply embedded at the local level and can leverage their volunteer and community networks for this purpose. An additional programmatic component that enhances sustainability is ongoing support by professional social workers and volunteers alike – which can act as safety net if things don't go as planned, also addressing the specific needs of family members so they become self-sufficient. Engaging employers in shaping the integration journey of their new hires and investing in their long-term personal, social and professional success and wellbeing is also key. Community sponsorship is a versatile tool that can deliver all of the above programme components.

Ultimately, the holistic approach of this pilot project led by Caritas Italiana, which understands vulnerability and ability as two sides of the same coin, could be adopted in any complementary pathway. Furthermore, most of the pre-departure and post-arrival activities developed in the context of this experience could be offered to the majority of Humanitarian Corridor beneficiaries in the future, and would likely contribute to prevent secondary movements.

Lastly, what also seems evident is that whether labour pathways are built around humanitarian or labour migration frameworks, they can only be sustainable if they are based on broad multi-stakeholder partnerships, as it is the case in virtually all programmes around the world that offer a pathway to protection and opportunity for displaced individuals.



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