Community sponsorship in Italy

The majority of refugee people who reach Italy through the humanitarian corridors programme are welcomed and hosted by the community, which is how community sponsorship mostly works in Italy. A small part of the community sponsorship deals with the hosting of asylum seekers or refugees. These people have arrived in Italy by the so called illegal means and have applied or purchased asylum status once they were in the country.

The involvement of Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (Apg23) in community sponsorship is a special case. This is because Apg23 is not one of the organisations that signed the formal protocols with the government to be a partner in the humanitarian corridors programme. However, Apg23 works as partner of some of the signatory organisation, mainly of the Community of Sant'Egidio, and is specifically involved in community engagement and sponsor recruitment in Italy.

In addition, the peace civil corps voluntary programme of Apg23 in Lebanon since 2014, known as Operazione Colomba, is involved in the field activities and support of the humanitarian corridors specifically for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Therefore, the following information refers to Apg23's experience of recruiting and supporting community sponsorship, particularly with regard to Syrian refugees from Lebanon.

The recruitment mechanism

A multi-level approach was used to organise the recruitment mechanism so that the initiative could be adapted to suit the sponsor group at every stage and in line with their needs.

1. Two initial steps have been identified.
    - Once back in Italy from Lebanon, the dissemination of Operazione Colomba volunteers within their communities of origin, other organisations or local groups, mainly church-related. The possibility of becoming a sponsor group was up for discussion at the event, and further ad hoc meetings were encouraged to explore this in more detail.
    - A formal request used to be made to the Apg23 network asking them to sponsor the arrival and hosting of Syrian refugees in its foster homes or shelters.
2. A meeting was held to discuss the purpose and procedure of humanitarian corridors, the community sponsorship mechanism and the implications of welcoming Syrian refugees from Lebanon. Engagement with the training is necessary to prepare for the next stage, which is to initiate the community sponsorship programme.
3. A series of training meetings is being organised to deepen every aspect of community sponsorship. These meetings will cover all areas, from the organisational to the qualitative. This stage is more geared towards making the

ultimate decision to become a sponsor group and start allocating responsibilities within the group.

4. There are two types of meetings that the group can request:
    - specific meetings with Syrians previously hosted by a community sponsorship,
    - a session with an ethnographic psychologist.

What worked:

- The Apg23 network is already making a commitment to the care of vulnerable members of society by providing support for day-to-day living.
- Once the group gains experience, it becomes willing to engage in different activities, such as dissemination, communication, recruitment and, eventually, retention.
- Long-term commitment was more successfully upheld by church groups, as revealed.

What didn't work:

- The recruitment process and training session are both slow.
- There is a shortage of personnel with the necessary training and specialisms in the fields of recruitment and retention.
- Project funding and private fundraising are linked to economic resources.
- The absence of input from public institutions, particularly at a national level, is a cause of concern. These institutions have the potential to establish a system that could support with the recruitment process, and perhaps even provide additional resources for the community sponsorship initiative.
- The most difficult news to hear is that the humanitarian corridors from Lebanon have been suspended. This is because the sponsor group recruitment was strictly related to the opportunity to welcome refugees from this specific channel.

Content for recruitment created and developed.

- Graphic presentation of the Humanitarian Corridors programme.
- A presentation document outlining the organisation of a community sponsorship, covering both organisational and qualitative aspects.
- A comprehensive guide to community sponsorship, covering the following areas:
    - Pre-arrival preparation
    - Arrivals
    - Bureaucratic procedures
    - Coordination
    - Linguistic mediation
    - Areas of activity (home management, economic management, bureaucracy, health, school, work, community and social life)

- Fundraising campaign upon the sponsor group who tried to collect resources through several channels like community event and online fundraising campaign.

Capacity and needs to support an effective engagement strategy as part of a recruitment campaign

- When it comes to capacity, having dedicated personnel who are trained to deal with planning, ideation, realisation, follow-up and outcome of a recruitment campaign might be a strength.
- Right now, it's hard to come up with a full plan for recruitment that could be used as an example for the whole country. In any case, a good place to start might be to come up with shared content. This will provide a foundation on which to build, even if the recruitment process is initially carried out separately by the organisations.