

Humanitarian Channels for people in need of international protection. Planning a "good practice"

Based on a common assessment of the dramatic situation of various countries of North and sub-Saharan Africa that pushes thousands of migrants to cross the Mediterranean sea boarding overcrowded barges, and on the commitment for the reception of migrants and asylum seekers spent over the years, the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy, the Waldensian Board, and the Community of Sant'Egidio signed a Cooperation Agreement for the implementation of an intervention provisionally defined as "Humanitarian Channels".

The intervention consists of 1) asking the Italian Government to adopt a "good practice" which ensures a small number of vulnerable people and in need of humanitarian protection a visa to enter Italy, that could be issued by the Embassy or the Embassies which will be involved in the initiative; 2) opening in the chosen country or in the future in countries selected a "Humanitarian Desk", that will be managed by FCEI-MH and Sant'Egidio. This Desk will help people in need of humanitarian protection to prepare their application and then send it to the diplomatic entities according to the standard procedure.

The initiative is based on Article 25 of Regulation (EC) #810/2009 of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas, namely the possibility of granting visas with limited territorial validity, notwithstanding the standard entry conditions provided by the Schengen Borders Code. These terms are set out "for humanitarian reasons or national interest or due to international obligations"; visa may also have validity not limited to the issuing country if other states will allow it.

In implementing this provision, as provided by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, one or more diplomatic missions would be authorized to issue a predetermined number of visas for "humanitarian reasons". This FCEI-MH-Sant'Egidio's project will be tested in Morocco; this country has been selected due to the political stability and the relationship of cooperation that has been established with Italy.

The project would be a limited time test conceived to issue a predetermined number of cases, **about 1,000 units in a year**. It means to apply a "good practice" in the hope that it might also be extended to other European countries.

This testing aims to show that, even without changing the current legislative framework, it is possible to activate a humanitarian channel that allows potential asylum seekers to obtain an entry visa to Europe in order to prevent the illegal transport by smugglers from North Africa to Europe.

The role of FCEI-MH-Sant'Egidio would be to open a Desk with two offices, Rabat (the capital, the seat of the Italian Embassy, the offices of the government and the UNHCR) and Tangier (area with high concentration of sub-Saharan migrants). This Desk would be constantly in contact with the Italian agencies authorized to issue visas.

The Desk would operate as an association collecting and preparing visa applications for humanitarian protection.

The desks would come into contact with potential asylum seekers through partnerships with organizations already operating on the ground (as the Evangelical Church of Morocco and the Diocese of Tangiers, Caritas, UNHCR) and promoting social programs in areas where migrants are living.

Once the applicants obtains a visa, they will be able to board a regular flight, possibly with financial support from the Desk FCEI-MH-SE). Upon arrival in Italy, they could enter the national "system of reception" (SPRAR or other) and also use the MH Relocation Desk that will support their migration project.

All this intervention, totally financed by those who have advanced it, is submitted to the Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs, hoping to sign in a short time a memorandum of understanding and achieve the objectives pursued.