



GUIDELINES FOR CONGREGATIONS HOSTING MIGRANTS IN ROME

*“May every parish, every religious community,
every monastery, every sanctuary
in Europe host a family,
starting with my diocese of Rome,”*

Pope Francis September 5, 2015

Refugees and Migrants Working Group - JPIC
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www.jpicroma.org

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This booklet is intended for congregations looking to participate in this call of Pope Francis. After these few years, congregations in Rome and elsewhere have more experience and a deeper understanding of what our response will entail. The booklet has been prepared by the Refugees and Migrants Working Group, a sponsored working group of the Joint Commission of the USG and the UISG. It follows the discussions and presentations of **congregations who have had some experience of reaching out to migrants** in response to Pope Francis' invitation. They have shared the blessings, challenges, best practices and questions of congregations who have given hospitality to migrants in the diocese of Rome. Since 2015, nearly 40 congregations have responded.

In collaboration with Migrant organizations, we have learned more about the most helpful stage at which congregations can support people in transition during their migrant journey. **This is the semi-autonomy stage.**

The semi-autonomy stage is to support refugees in the delicate moment of transition from assisted living (given by **Centro Astalli** or public organisations) to housing autonomy without any help from centres or government.

This is why it is proposed to refugees to be placed in semi-autonomous housing, distributed throughout the city, made available by religious congregations, which collaborate with the Centro Astalli to carry out the project, hosting women, men and families.

The congregations, Centro Astalli and the asylum seekers all agree on a **one-year plan of personal accompaniment**, thus overcoming the obstacle of access to housing and have the opportunity to concentrate on consolidating their personal and work autonomy path.

It is for people with refugee status and/or asylum-seekers who are at least 18 years of age, alone or with family, showing willingness and desire to participate in **processes of integration and autonomy** in the country.

"It is like having a newborn baby in the family. You have to make room. You have to be disturbed."

We hope to assist your research in the following two ways:

1) A video (link below) produced by Centro Astalli. This is a good starting point for watching the testimonies, best practices and an explanation of the different ways of helping migrants in the semi-autonomy stage. The video is in Italian but has subtitles in English: click [*here*](#)

2) This booklet 'Guidelines for Congregations hosting Migrants in Rome'.

In this booklet the following steps are suggested. They are based on the experience of congregations who have already hosted migrants

1 Initial Conversations within the Community who has the desire to welcome migrants

It is important for the community who may be accepting migrants and/or refugees to have an honest conversation about why this is something they would like to do. It is important that community members, while they may be unsure, are willing to be open to support the effort of the Congregation. It is also a time to share in community some concrete steps, for example: which key of our house are we giving to them?

During the community discussion it is advised that one or two community members are designated as the contact person for the guests and also for the partner organization.

2 Kinds of Assistance that You Can Offer

There are various ways that Congregations have helped migrants and refugees

- Offering space within a community house or Generalate house either integrated into the community life (meals,

washing machine...) or in a separate wing, floor, etc.

- Offering a separate space on the site of your community house or Generalate (house, apartment, etc.)
- Offering financial assistance to one of the migrant organizations so they can help with rent, furniture, utilities in the transition to migrants' autonomy
- Offering space for a short time that could provide small "vacation" opportunities for migrants and refugees.
- Or...

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Choosing a Partner Organization

We propose three possible partners to work with: (with whom many congregations had good experience these last years)

- **Centro Astalli** (This is the name of the Jesuit Refugee Service here in Rome) www.centroastalli.it. The contact person is Sister Maria José Rey Merodio Phone: +39 389 872 2011 email: astalli@jrs.net
- **Community of Sant'Egidio** www.santegidio.org. The contact person is: Mrs. Annarita Pescetelli Phone : +39 3925673822
- **Diocesan Caritas** in various parts of Italy: www.caritasitaliana.it

The organization will need to know:

- what space is designated for the migrants
- for how long you envision you would be able to host
- any other information that would make a difference in the people you are willing to host (men, women or families)
- the fears or constraints that you may have
- the name of the person responsible for the project, i.e. the contact person

Someone from the organization will come to make a site visit so they can ascertain who would be appropriate for the space

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and for the Congregation.

After reflection from both parts, when the decision is finalized, they will work with you to create a contract between the Congregation, the migrants and the partner organization. You will have control (with advice) on what is to be included.

Congregations who have hosted migrants have consistently said how helpful and important it is to work with the partner organization and to learn from their long experience with migrants.

"The decision (to host) mobilized the whole community. There was just one contact person but each sister was engaged."

How to Relate to the Migrants

We have collected some advice that we have learned from congregational experiences and from our partner organizations:

- Be welcoming but professional
- Be careful not to become too emotionally attached. (The goal is autonomy)
- Migrants have their own journey so accept that at times they may be silent or even express anger. Just continue to be kind and supportive.
- Remember that your house is not a "destination" but a safe place of transit from "semi autonomy to autonomy".
- Your obligation to the guest is not for clothing, food or transportation. Your assistance needs to lead to independence. Define clearly with the partner organization what kind of accompaniment is helpful and what is not.

Other Important Information

- When you accept to accommodate migrants and refugees, you are not simply acting alone. You are joining a NETWORK of assistance -- of people and congregations that are all working toward the goal of making the transition easier for those who have found themselves far from home.
- Be aware that we are also receiving from the migrants. It is good to receive their gestures of hospitality in response to yours, for example, a shared meal, a shared celebration of a special occasion, etc.
- Some reciprocal contributions can be confused with unpaid work. We cannot accept unpaid work but it is a blessing to reciprocate meals and celebrations.
- What you are doing is helping the migrants to carry out the difficult task of creating a new life. Giving hospitality is an act of goodwill on the part of congregations but it is also a concrete step on their journey.
- You will see that there is a reciprocity in relationship. Seeing them grow in independence will bring joy and satisfaction to you as well. You will know the world better and understand what so many in the world today are facing.
- It is important to know that if you break the contract with the partner organization, the Congregation assumes full responsibility. The partner organizations have expertise and experience. They know the laws of the country and they know the regulations that will lead to the best outcomes for migrants in the semi-autonomy stage.

Looking for ways to respond to our call to holiness as contemplatives in action who promote God's reign of justice, peace and love.

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*"It is a way of coming face to face with reality.
Migrants can be simply a label in the media.
When we come to know them in person,
they are no more a migrant but a name, a person.
It changes reality and stops fear,
especially when migrants share their life with you.
They are no longer alone.
You are touched by their courage, their faith, their hope.
It has taken real strength to face this journey of migration.
For the migrant it is a way of gaining
new friends in the new country."
For those offering hospitality, it can mean a conversion of heart."*

Resource Persons

The following persons are willing to be contacted for more information:

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Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation
A Joint Commission of UISG and USG

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