CITTADINI DEL MONDO

Palazzo Selam: the invisible city

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Second report
June 2018

Cittadini del Mondo is an independent, non-profit, volunteer organisation, which aims to combat all forms of discrimination and social exclusion and to promote the equal treatment of first and second-generation immigrants. Since 2006 it has run a social and healthcare service desk at Palazzo Selam, an occupied building located in the south of Rome, where about 800 beneficiaries of International Protection status are living. Every Thursday evening, from 7 to 10 p.m., the volunteers of the association provide healthcare assistance and offer guidance to individuals to help them gain access to local and regional public services. In 2010, the association also created the Intercultural Library in the Quadraro area, in which the inhabitants of Selam spend a lot of time and, along with other immigrants and locals alike, take part in cultural activities. There is also a social services desk located within the library and it is also the venue for Italian language courses for foreigners, which welcome more than 100 students every year.

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Photographs by Cittadini del Mondo, Sara Cervelli and Gaetano Di Filippo.
The photographs depict Palazzo Selam and Cittadini del Mondo's volunteers and service users. The people depicted do not correspond to the protagonists of the stories included in this report.

Thanks

There are those who come and those who go; some arrive fresh off the boat, others are returning from Europe, which expels them as "Dublinates". However, many of them try to make a home here in Italy and we have been meeting with them here at Palazzo Selam for many years. We thank them all because by sharing their experiences with us, our lives are enriched every day.
We spare a thought for those who have been unable to bear the dreadful conditions in which Selam inhabitants must live, and for those who have waited in vain for their loved ones who lost their lives at sea.

Special thanks go to our volunteers, who, over the years, have worked every week and every month here and at the Intercultural Library...without them our work would have no hope of success.

We would like to thank the foundations and organisations who continue to believe in our projects and to support us.

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Preface

In the context of a country visit to Italy as Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, my team and I visited Palazzo Selam in early July 2012. I learned that Palazzo Selam means "Palace of Shame", an admonition to the Italian government to address the many challenges leading to the emergence and persistence of such migrant squats. It is an abandoned university building on the outskirts of Rome which has become a home for up to 800 individuals, mostly refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection from Africa.

This was the first migrant squat I would visit in the course of my six-year mandate as Commissioner. Unfortunately, I would find many such places in cities across Europe – desperate places with awful sanitary conditions, populated by people who had experienced trauma, illness, hunger and war, but who struggled on a daily basis to retain their dignity and wanted above all else to start a new life for themselves and their families.

In Italy, as in many European countries, new arrivals are hindered in this task by the lack of support from the local and national governments, which have not yet put in place an adequate integration framework. Many of the individuals I met in Palazzo Selam showed me documents issued by the Italian government attesting that they had been given refugee status or subsidiary protection. In other words, they were legally resident and the government had acknowledged their protection needs. However, for many, that was all the help they received; otherwise they were on their own.

Fortunately, there are Italians who want to help. An important helping hand to the people living at Palazzo Selam has been given by the Cittadini del Mondo Association, led by Dr. Donatella D'Angelo, which has been providing medical and other forms of assistance to the people at Palazzo Selam for a number of years. The activists of Cittadini del Mondo represent the best of Italy – its hospitality, its generosity in the face of need, its determination to help the poor and vulnerable who have shown up on its shores in increasing numbers in

recent years. Though individual activists and non-governmental organisations can help alleviate suffering, they cannot fully compensate for the absence of a long-term, coordinated policy.

Places such as Palazzo Selam should not exist. Ideally, every European country should have an adequately funded, long-term integration policy in place that helps refugees and other beneficiaries of international protection to make a new life for themselves in their new host countries. Provision of stable, long-term status is just one small part of integration policy. New arrivals should not have to seek accommodation on the street or in abandoned buildings, but should first live in reception centres before moving on to social or other forms of subsidised housing, until they can fend for themselves in the regular housing market. To survive and pay for one's own housing requires means of sustenance.

This means that beneficiaries of protection should receive social assistance and rapid access to the labour market, including access to apprenticeships. For many, a prerequisite to getting a job is Italian language training and other forms of education, which could open the door to fuller participation on an equal basis in social, economic and political life. Many residents of Palazzo Selam made it to Italy by themselves and left their families behind, often in danger. A long-term integration policy would see the benefit in promoting family reunification, as it is hard to integrate if you are constantly worried about the fate of your loved ones.

My meeting with the residents of Palazzo Selam was a tough one – they had seen other high-level visitors come and go and their tolerance for empty talk was quite low. I told them I would not make empty promises, but that I would raise their situation with the Italian authorities and try to garner the media's attention to their plight. I did discuss my visit to Palazzo Selam with the Italian and international media after my visit, and some journalists have continued to devote attention to the issue. I did raise the need to address the problems of Palazzo Selam in a country report on Italy and in follow-up work. Still, as Cittadini del Mondo informs me, the situation has not fundamentally changed six years later.

With this brief introduction, I seek to keep my promise to the residents of Palazzo Selam to keep reminding the world of their existence. I salute Cittadini del Mondo and Dr D'Angelo in particular for their remarkable work. I long for the day when it will become less necessary as the national and local government takes over some of the responsibility and the residents make successful new lives for themselves.

Nils Muiznieks
Council of Europe Commission for Human Rights, April 2012-March 2018

Introduction

Palazzo Selam is the largest occupied building inhabited by beneficiaries of international protection status in Rome; at the time of going to press, it is estimated that it accommodates about 700-800 people, but there have been times in the past few years where that number increased to around 1,200. The inhabitants are exclusively from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. The majority are beneficiaries of subsidiary protection, political asylum or humanitarian protection status; they are mostly men, but there are also families, women and children.

Between 2013 and 2014, the building was one of the main points in which so-called "transients" concentrated. "Transients" is the term used to refer to immigrants who, arrive in Italy but try to avoid being identified by the authorities in order to escape the "Dublin regulation" and move on to other European countries. At that time, the usual number of inhabitants at Selam increased considerably as result of an influx of hundreds of people (again exclusively Eritreans, Ethiopians, Somali and Sudanese) who were living, even if only for short periods, in particularly critical conditions in the basement of the building. After 2014, the stream of "transients" notably decreased, although it has never dried up completely, being linked to the frequency of immigrant boats arriving on Italian shores and on certain changes in reception policies at a national and European level.

Originally the site of a faculty building of the University of Tor Vergata, Palazzo Selam, which is located in the Romanina area, was occupied for the first time in 2006 by a group of about 300 asylum-seekers and refugees from the Horn of Africa. After an initial attempt at dialogue with the authorities, and following the failure of negotiations to relocate, the status of Palazzo Selam was definitively declared illegal. Following the first period of its existence as an occupied building, Palazzo Selam became independent of any external organisation or political institution. The organisation of the palace (for example, with regard to the management of cleaning or the distribution of the living spaces) is in the hands of a "committee", a group of representatives of the four nationalities present (generally two per nationality) elected periodically from among the inhabitants of the building.

The peripheral position of Selam means that it is more easily relegated to a state of isolation and abandonment by the institutions and public opinion, especially in comparison to similar occupied buildings that are more "central". There are few residential buildings in the area immediately surrounding the building, although there are a number of "places of transit", such as shopping centres, large retail outlet chains and offices.

As can easily be imagined, a building designed to house university offices and lecture rooms is not suited to provide living space for several hundreds of people. According to an estimate by Cittadini del Mondo, there is currently one toilet or squat toilet for every 19 people, and one shower for every 33, and the plumbing is inadequate to the drainage requirements of what have become the kitchens for hundreds of people. Most of the dwellings consist of single rooms, often created by subdividing larger rooms with plasterboard partitions, and for this reason without windows. Overcrowding, lack of ventilation and lack of a means to heat and cool these spaces, all render them unhealthy environments both in winter and summer. In order to heat and cool their rooms the inhabitants sometimes resort to portable air conditioners, electric heaters or similar, with consequences which at best result in poor air quality and at worst in electrical short circuits, which sometimes has serious consequences, such as the fire that in April 2016 damaged the entire first floor of the building. When Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, visited Selam in July 2013, he described conditions at the Palace as "shocking".

Ever since the building was first occupied, the Association Cittadini del Mondo has been a presence within Palazzo Selam, running a service desk offering counselling, assistance and social and healthcare guidance. Initially, this service was provided by two people, a doctor and a social worker. Over time, the service desk

developed into a larger, more organised operation, and the activities of the Association expanded in parallel. The healthcare service desk is currently open weekly inside the building, with the aim of providing assistance to people who are unable to register with the public healthcare system, monitoring emergency situations and guiding particularly vulnerable cases to the appropriate public health services. In 2010 in response to a desire expressed to Association's volunteers by parents, wishing to read stories to their children in their native languages, the Intercultural Library was opened. The Library, now located in the Quadraro area, contains books in numerous languages and fosters encounters and discussions between people of different cultures. Since 2013 it has also hosted a branch of the social services desk that had up to that point been located in Palazzo Selam. CdM's operators are thus able to offer their services to users who live outside the building, and thus also encourage the inhabitants of Selam to break away from "ghettoisation" and to experience other parts of the city.

Cittadini del Mondo's various activities have made it possible to collect the data included in the present report, which reflects the **real** state of integration of those living at Palazzo Selam. The data reported in both the social and healthcare sections was collected by means of **access cards** filled in by Cittadini del Mondo operators. These cards are designed for the collection of both personal data and information related to socio-economic integration, and conclude with a narrative section in which operators describe reasons for access and actions taken. For each service user, a single card is compiled, which is then updated in the course of any subsequent access; **the total number of cards compiled represents the number of service users supported, but significantly under-represents the number of times Cittadini del Mondo's service desks are accessed.**

This report does not include data collected with tools other than the access card. In general, the data does not cover "transients", namely those people – particularly numerous in the two-year period between 2013 and 2014 – who, in the hope of reaching another country tried to cross Italian national territory without requesting international protection, thus avoiding the effects of European legislation and the Dublin agreement. During times of greatest influx of transients when large numbers were coming to our service desks, CdM workers opted for more concise, paper-based data collection tools; this data was presented and extensively described in the previous, 2014 Report. On the other hand, we do include here information relating to people who are most likely "transient" but which has been collected through our usual access card system, and which is difficult to isolate from the rest of the data.

Section 1: Cittadini del Mondo's social services desk

Introduction to the social data

Between 2013 and February 2018, **558 people** turned at least once to the CdM social services desk asking for support, particularly for issues relating to identity papers and access to local services. Keeping in mind that **90% of them are in possession of international protection status or residence permits granted on humanitarian grounds, and that 67% have lived in Italy for more than 5 years**, it is particularly significant that over **40% were asking for information about residency and registration with the Regional Healthcare System**, information that, without mediation by Cittadini del Mondo, they would have been unable to obtain because of language barriers and bureaucratic obstacles. In addition to the simple request for information, in some especially problematic cases, it was necessary for our workers to accompany certain individuals to the appropriate office or institution. This situation is the result of a failed reception policy, which does not provide beneficiaries of international protection status with the tools they need to become aware of their rights. It is also imputable to the difficulties of accessing regional services given the absence of cultural mediators in almost all public offices and institutions, and a lack of understanding on the part of employees of the reception procedures for those with protection status. From conversations with the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam what emerges is a deep sense of mistrust and disappointment towards the Italian system. It is no surprise that nearly 30% of the people accessing our services have attempted, at least once, to settle in another European country, only to have to return to Italy under the terms of the Treaty of Dublin, which stipulates permanent residency in the European state in which the individual's fingerprints were first taken and where they had first requested political asylum.

As highlighted in the previous report, **access to employment** is still also extremely problematic. The data collected shows that 76% of Selam's inhabitants are unemployed or out of work, while only 16% have regular work and the remaining percentage finds employment in the informal sector. What is evident is that still today, in spite of the high percentage of foreigners who need to use them, the local Employment Centres do not have cultural mediation services, a lack that makes it almost impossible to compile their Curriculum Vitae and consult lists of job vacancies.

Mediation by of Cittadini del Mondo's social and healthcare operators has ensured that the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam are now constantly informed and supported with regard to the registration procedures with the town hall of the 7th district of Rome, and that currently nearly 50% of them are registered with the Lazio Region Healthcare System.

In addition to offering assistance with residency issues and access to local services, the Association aims to facilitate the integration of the inhabitants of Selam and other immigrants in the area into the social fabric of Rome, and to this end has invested its resources into creating an intercultural library and an Italian language school for foreigners in the Quadraro area. The **Intercultural Library** (**Biblioteca Interculturale)** was established in 2010 in order to help immigrants maintain bonds with their home cultures and to spread knowledge of such cultures among the population of the area. For this purpose, it has collected over 20,000 books and other media in more than 25 languages, including the languages of the home countries of the inhabitants of Selam (Tigrinya, Amharic, Somali and Arabic). The **Italian language courses** given by voluntary teachers respond to the need to compensate for another dramatic failure in the reception system, which in many cases provides insufficient language learning opportunities, or none at all. Over 60% of the inhabitants of Selam have a poor knowledge of Italian, and half of them have no knowledge whatsoever. Cittadini del Mondo operators have therefore tried to encourage them to attend language courses at the Intercultural Library by offering incentives, such as free metro tickets which allow them to commute to the school and back home.

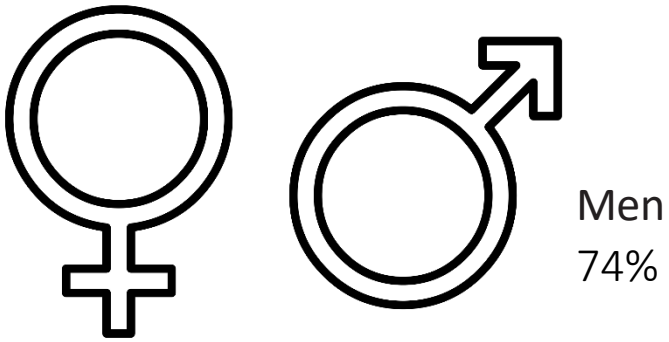
Finally, the data collected shows a **change in the percentage ratio between the ethnicities** present in the building, a change reflected in the stories told by inhabitants: since 2014 the Somali population has doubled from 10% to 19.8%.

The Population

Overall analysis of the data relating to the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam, Cittadini del Mondo's service users

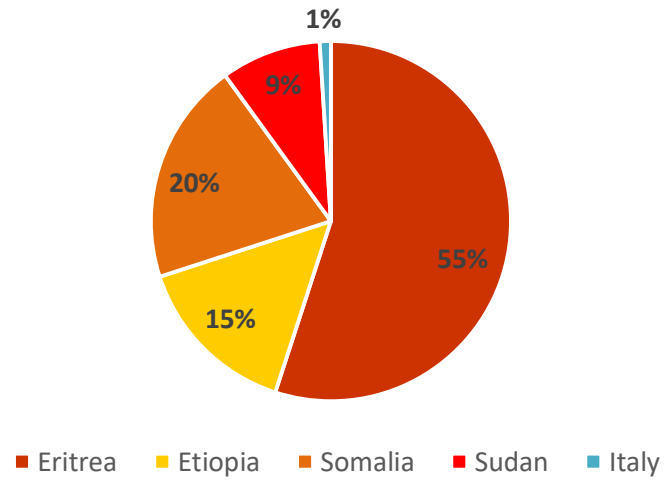
Gender

Women
26%

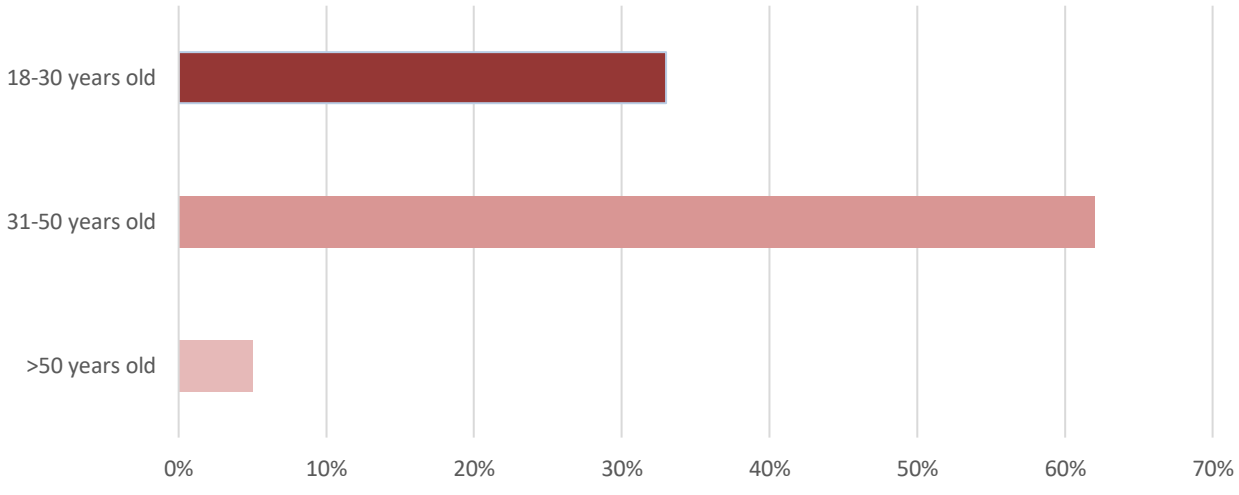


Men
74%

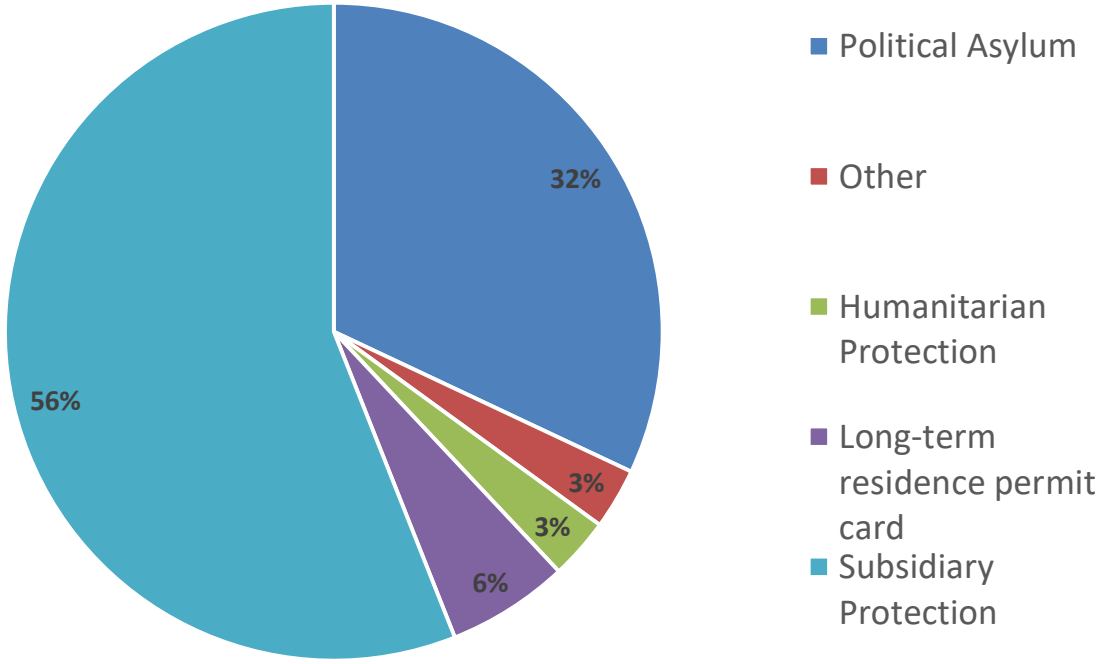
Origin



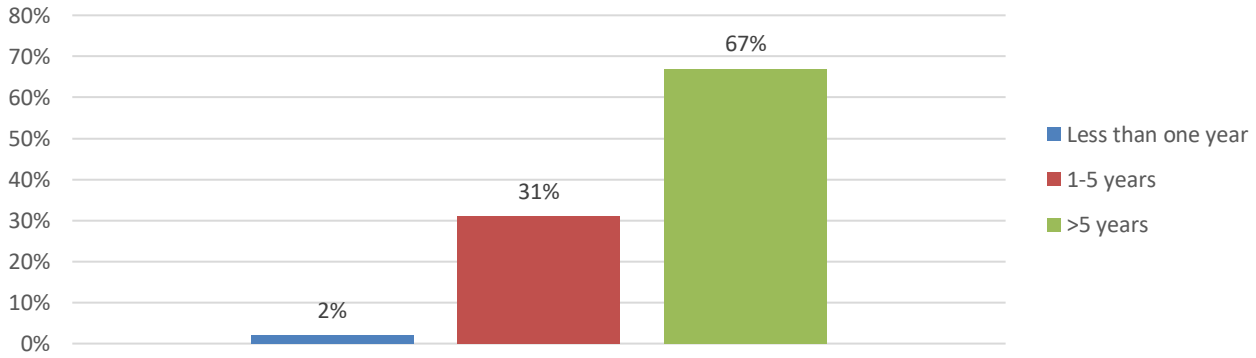
Age



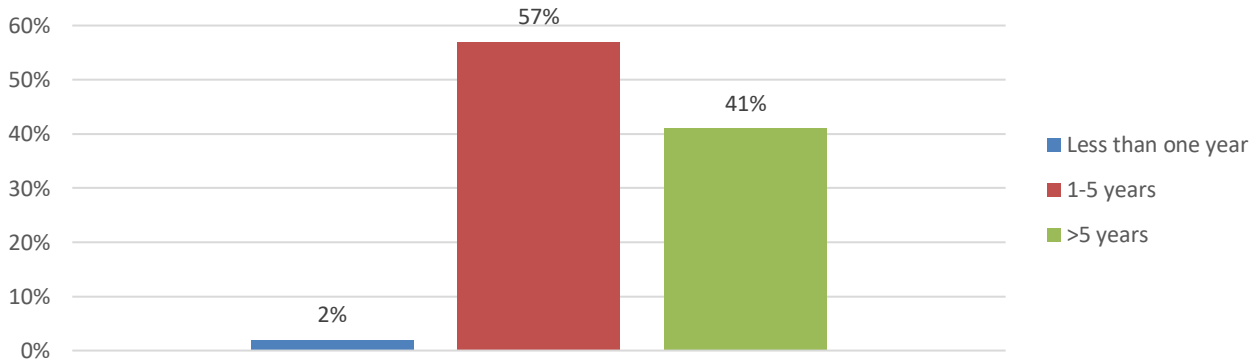
Legal status: residence permits



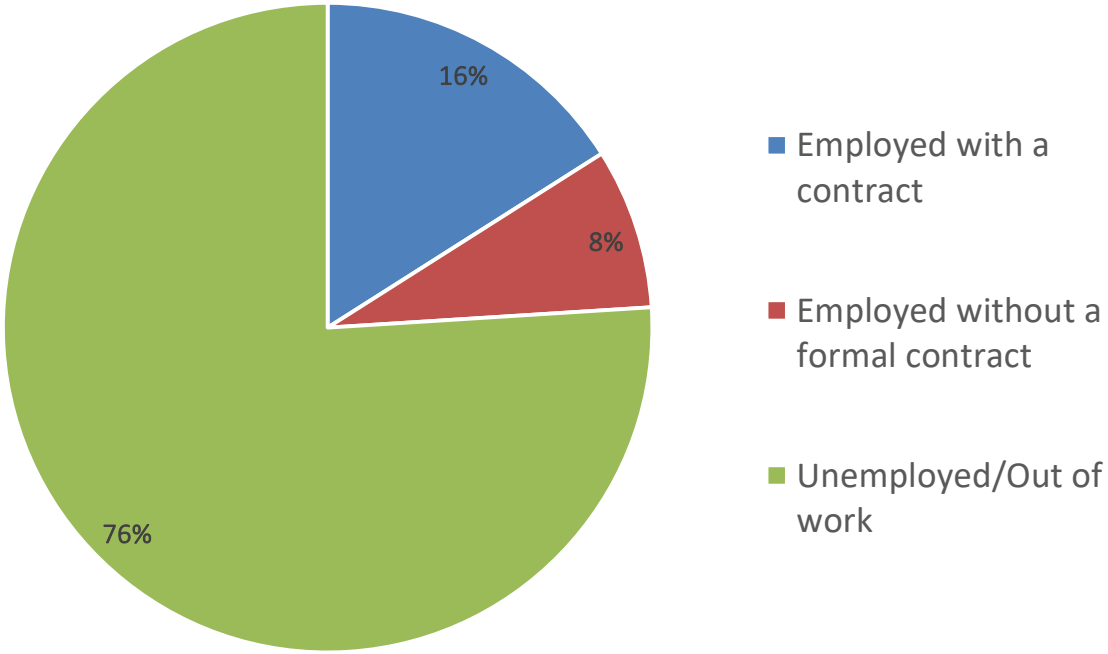
Years spent in Italy



Years spent at Palazzo Selam



Employment


16%
8%
76%
Employed with a contract
Employed without a formal contract
Unemployed/Out of work

The Story of L, a 44-year-old Somali Woman

Before I left Somalia, I was living in a waking nightmare because of the war. The war has been never-ending since the 90s. Thousands of people have died, many have fled, returned and then run away again. When I was growing up there was no war, it broke out when I was almost 20 years old, still a student. Somalia used to be a beautiful country – things were going well for my family, my brothers were working – but then the civil war broke out. In the beginning, we left Mogadishu, we moved to another city, to then return when the situation improved; we moved back and forth many times. Then in 2002, I decided to leave. My brothers and sisters, all older than me, helped me because it was not cheap. You have to pay for all the various transport costs, by car, bus, etc.

Initially, I really wanted to go to Italy because the other European countries are not well known in Somalia, while Italy is – Italy is famous. Many people talk about Italy, not least because of its fashion, which everyone loves. I left all by myself, but it was awful – I wasn't expecting it to be. I went with a van full of people from Mogadishu to Addis Ababa. I stayed there for nearly three months in order to get hold of the documents I needed for the journey to Khartoum, in Sudan. In Addis Ababa, I stayed with a Somali family with kids. When I managed to get a visa, I entered Sudan and a new nightmare began there. A group of us – forty people, including Sudanese and Ethiopians, whom I had met during my time there – looked for a way to get to Libya. Eventually, we started our journey on the back of a truck without a roof, completely exposed to the elements, seated on jerrycans full of petrol or other things. It was January 2003 and it was boiling hot. It was 16 days of agony, burnt by the sun, without water. Moreover, I couldn't eat because I was sick; I was exhausted by the whole ordeal.

Sometimes we stopped at night to sleep, on the ground, in the sand, but more often than not we continued travelling, to avoid detection, the checkpoints, and so as not to be seen by Egyptian aeroplanes that monitored and photographed the area. There were cruel, heartless men in the group. They had no scruples; they would beat us, push us around and elbow us. And if you tried to say something, they threatened to throw you off the truck. It was a terrible journey, especially for us women, terrorised by these gigantic, violent men. They also fought with each other, pulling out knives and threatening everyone, even the driver. They said to him: "If you talk, I'll kill you, I'll throw you out and drive myself". One night our truck flipped over, I was jolted upwards but fortunately, I fell back down onto my seat. I hadn't been thrown out of the vehicle, but many others had. One person broke their femur and another their shoulder.

Then, thank God, we arrived in Libya. We had to wait a long time there, too. For fear of the police, the traffickers kept us hidden in small houses outside the town centre. We had to pay more money to go to Tripoli, but I didn't have any more. I almost died of starvation. But then I met a Somali boy who had the necessary papers to bring his wife with him to Tripoli, but his wife had already arrived there before him. So, to help me and to make some money, he made me put on a burqa so that my face was covered and the guards at border control wouldn't realise I was not his wife, and so we reached Tripoli. Once I'd arrived, I had my sister's son, who lived in Norway, send me 200 dollars to pay the guy who had helped me.
When I first arrived in Tripoli, I didn't know anyone, so I went looking for someone from my tribe. I was directed towards a guy who asked me whose daughter I was. When I mentioned my father's name, he told me that he knew him. He was very nice to me, he treated me like a sister, rented a room for me, bought me some food – he had already found work. I stayed there for three months while I was waiting for my relatives to send me another thousand dollars so I could get to Italy. The journey cost 800 dollars, I used the rest to buy food and some clothes to take with me before I left.
After three months, on 28 April 2003, I left Tripoli aboard a large boat with two levels. There were one hundred and eighty people in all, from Somalia, Libya, Eritrea, etc. At night, the sea was very choppy and it was cold outside. Many people were afraid. But I was on the upper deck where it was hot, so I took off the closed shoes I was wearing. However, when the sea started getting very rough, I thought about jumping

into the water to avoid being pinned under the boat, in case it was capsized by the waves. I was afraid of drowning under the boat. I had never been on a boat and I didn't even know how to swim. There was a guy next to me, Hakim, who felt sick. He had already thrown up, I said him: "Look Hakim, I'm leaving, I want to get off this boat". He replied: "Excuse me, but where would you go? Don't move, stay here!". Fortunately, he stopped me. Eventually, that terrible night passed and the next morning the sea was calmer and, after twenty-six hours of sailing, we arrived at Lampedusa.

In Italy, the coast guard welcomed us and had us take a shower, gave us clean clothes and food. I was so happy to have arrived safe and sound. Even looking back on it today, I can still feel the warmth of the Italian people. I will never forget that day; it was the first of May. Two days later, a military plane arrived that took us to Crotone, in Calabria, to a reception centre. After eight days, they gave me a temporary residence permit for three months and 260 euro, and they told us we could leave the centre and go wherever we wanted as long as we remained in Italy. But instead, we left Italy. I went to Sweden. To get there, I took a train to France, then another to the Netherlands. One night, during the train ride, the ticket inspector arrived. I was sleeping and he woke me up, but when he realised that I didn't speak Italian, he left me alone. He asked for my papers and even though I had the temporary permit, I didn't understand what he wanted so he let it go. When I first arrived in the Netherlands, my nephew came to collect me, who had come from Norway. We arrived in Denmark, we took the boat and went to Sweden. In Sweden, I made a request for political asylum, but they found my fingerprints in the system, which had been registered in Calabria, and they discovered that my paperwork had already been processed in Italy. I lived in Sweden for a year. In the beginning, I was in a refugee camp, then I found a place to stay with a Somali family. I was comfortable there, I went to school to learn Swedish, but then the police came to see me and said that according to the Dublin Convention, I had to go back to Italy. So I ran away to Finland. After nine months in Finland, I thought the police would no longer find me, that they had forgotten about me. However, one day a police officer called me on my mobile phone. I went to the police, accompanied by a friend who spoke the language better than me and the police told him: "We have been searching for this girl for nine months, and we couldn't find her". Because of my name, they were looking for a man – they thought it was a male name – and so they hadn't been able to find me at first. They gave me an appointment for the next day, and when I arrived, there was a policewoman who was checking everyone and when she saw me she said: "It's you?! This is where you've been!". They told me I had to sign in at the station every week because they had found my data and my fingerprints in Italy. However, one morning when I went to sign in, a policewoman told me that they would not let me leave because they were organising my transfer to Italy.[1] At that point I went mad, I started yelling at her, and there was even a translator there to help! I kicked up a stink. I was bleeding. I said nasty things about Finland. At school, we had studied the war between Russia and Finland; I told the policewoman that she knew nothing about war. She said she understood me, that it wasn't her fault, but that it would be better for me to calm down. I was mad at her because she had tricked me into coming to sign in only to then trap me there until my transfer. She brought me a phone and told me to call some friends so I could have them pack a bag with my clothes and things before I left, so I wouldn't have to leave empty-handed. However, I answered her rudely, so she went away and returned in the afternoon when I had calmed down. The next morning, two policewomen took me onto a plane and I threatened to kick up a stink once I had arrived in Italy. But really, what could I do? I didn't speak Italian either.

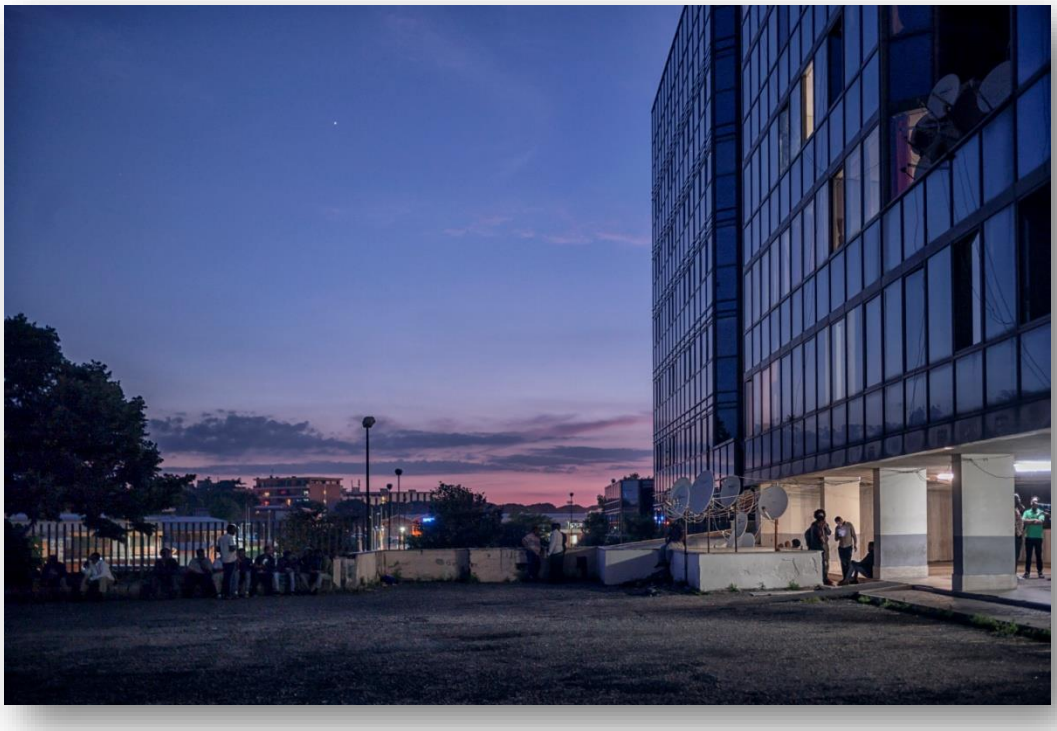
In Rome they organised my ticket to return to Crotone so I could get my papers in order, and prepare for my meeting with the Commission in Rome, which would evaluate my application for asylum. However, I was very sad and I would not eat; after thirty days in Crotone, a policeman came looking for me to give me the temporary residence permit. He was shocked by how much weight I had lost and said to me: "Take this residence permit and run away, go back to Finland where you were before".

[1] This is a practice adopted in many countries, which has been reported several times by the people we support. We at the Cittadini del Mondo Association believe that this procedure, in addition to being unfair, may represent a threat to the already precarious balance of the reception and management system of those entitled to international protection.

After I was granted political refugee status, I stayed in Rome. I didn't want to keep travelling back and forth between Rome and Crotone because one night on the train, I got robbed – they stole about 50 euro – and the ticket inspector said to me: "Come to my compartment. You are too beautiful and young, and you smell too good to stay with these other foreigners. In a little while, I'll be back to fetch you". When he left, I went with the Eritrean guys who were with me and he didn't find me again. But I was scared. I didn't want to take that train again, so I moved my residency to Rome, to the "Casa di Giorgio" reception centre on via Laurentina. I stayed there for almost three months, after which a friend got me a job for forty days in Sardinia with a family with 2 children. Not speaking a word of Italian, I had a lot of problems. When they said the word "*negozio*" (shop), I thought they were speaking badly about me and I got angry. When I got back to Rome 40 days later, no one recognised me because of how much thinner I was. I didn't eat because it seemed to me that everything the family gave me was contaminated with pork. The whole pork issue had driven me mad. And what's more, I couldn't sleep. I was afraid because there were 4 dogs and 4 cats in the house and when the family went out for dinner in the evening, the dogs barked all the time, making a lot of noise. All in all, the job was not for me, partly because Giulia, the lady of the house, didn't understand me, while Luigi, Giulia's husband understood me more. Once he got mad at her because she didn't want me to watch television, he said to her: "Your sister's children are always watching TV and she can't?! I'll bring her back to Rome this instant, because this is not a life for a human being!" Giulia's father also wasn't happy and said: "My daughter doesn't know anything about Somalia". The lady treated me badly, she even stole my wages by giving me only half of what had been agreed. I was not paid for the Sundays and the public holiday in August which I worked. I was so upset that in the end, when we had returned to Rome, at the train station, I said to Luigi in English: "Thank you, you are a good person but I would kill that woman!".
When the friend who had gotten me the job learned about everything that had happened, she called the lady and told her: "Giulia, you did what you did, we saw what condition the girl was in when she returned. You stole her money, there are 600 euro missing. But I have Italian citizenship, I know a lawyer and we will take you to court". However, it was too complicated to go ahead with the court case and it ended there. I found another job, a replacement position for three months. I felt better there. I still didn't speak Italian but I understood a little more. Even so, it was not my job – it would end shortly and I'd have to find a place to stay. At that time, some friends told me they were looking for a house.

On 27 February 2006, I left that job. I slept with the others at the Campidoglio and on the 28th we entered Palazzo Selam. I don't remember very much, but there were more than two hundred and fifty people. At the entrance of the building, there was a custodian who was paid by the city council, who monitored the entrances 24 hours a day. Only the sixth and seventh floors were open, but the residents immediately started making a mess, drinking, and arguing with each other. There were thirty Somalis, most of the group was Eritrean, and there were also Sudanese and Ethiopians. They made a big mess; they threatened to burn everything. From the very first night I slept in what is still my room. In the beginning, there were three of us, then one left and, eventually, I was alone.
Since 2006, life has changed a lot in Palazzo Selam. In hindsight, I would say that we were wrong to occupy that building because it took away our health, it changed our character, it spoiled us. There are always new people; no one knows who is coming and going. Initially, it was better, there weren't "transients" passing through, the management committee worked, it was stronger. When the entrance was still being monitored, I had more peace of mind.
In 2007, I went to Switzerland and when I returned to Selam, they had created the restaurant; in the beginning, the rooms were divided into smaller spaces with curtains, then they started making plasterboard walls. Today life in Selam isn't that great, but it's certainly better than nothing. It's my home. Now, unfortunately, we've got used to it. I'd prefer something better, but I've been here almost half my life.
Today, I'd say there are about five hundred people living at Palazzo Selam, including Eritreans, Somalis, Sudanese and Ethiopians, who are both Christian and Muslim. Relations between the communities are quite good; there is a dialogue between the various groups but where they live is still divided up according to where they come from. People of different origins do not live in the same apartment. Somalis say that the other nationalities hate them, but I don't believe them – no one has ever said anything to me.
There are several serious problems at Palazzo Selam: there is no control over what happens, despite the

efforts of the management committee; the building is likely to collapse because of water leaking into the walls; there are gas cylinders in poor condition that could explode and cause a fire; there are lots of cars



entering and leaving the premises.
The committee is made up of representatives of the four communities. Meetings are organised to make decisions where all the inhabitants are invited to attend, but no one comes any more, no one is interested in the collective situation, everyone thinks only about themselves and they're always reporting people to the police, for any problem, even the most stupid.

There are many problems in Selam, but I'm fond of it. Plus, I have set things up nicely there. In my room, I have an electric hotplate for cooking and a small fridge; a few years ago, I built a sink in my room, which I use to wash myself and do the dishes in; I share a bathroom with four other women; when it's cold, I have an electric heater; to wash my clothes, I ask people who have a washing machine; I have a small wardrobe that is big enough for me to store the few clothes I have in.
In Selam, there are a number of common spaces, on the second, sixth and seventh floors, which are used to organise parties for birthdays, baptisms or weddings. Then there is the restaurant with the bar. Sometimes, when not in use, children go and play in these spaces, but not always. However, the women always visit each other in their own homes, in small groups of three or four people. Even the men meet up with each other at home, but in larger groups.

My day starts when I wake up at around 6.00 a.m. I have to leave home at 7.00 a.m. to arrive at work at 8.30 a.m. I'm a carer for an elderly lady and I also do the cleaning. I finish work at 4 p.m. Then, when I get home at around 5.30 - 6.00 p.m., I deal with committee business: I see if there are any situations that need to be resolved or if I need to talk to someone. If it turns out I'm free, I take care of my own room: tidy up, wash the dishes, that kind of thing. I definitely don't go around visiting to have a chat in other people's homes, perhaps because of what I have seen and experienced. I have become a loner – I like staying at home, I'm used to it now. But before I was different, when I arrived at the Palazzo they called me "L. the Somali", in the sense that I wasn't from any part of Somalia in particular, not from a specific tribe, I was simply the Somali, friend to everyone, and helpful to everyone. Then, in 2010, I had an accident on the metro. My recovery was very long and complicated, it lasted almost three years. At that moment, I realised

I was not as strong as I thought, and all the friends I thought I had proved not to be true friends – I felt very alone. It was a shock – the pain, the darkness, the solitude, without my family, without anyone. I needed a lawyer, I didn't speak Italian well and I asked for help, but nobody could tell me anything. Then, when I finally found a lawyer, he told me there was insufficient evidence in order to bring a case against Met.Ro, and so I did nothing.

This experience has left me with a sense of bitterness, loneliness and disillusion. Before it, I used to host a large number of women and girls in trouble, at my home, in my room. My home was always full of women with their bags – it felt like a reception centre. They often quarrelled and pulled each other's hair, then some of them started badmouthing me and I felt betrayed. After the accident, I was stuck in bed, unable to move and the presence of all these women in my room started to bother me, to distress me. I have developed a certain revulsion towards female chatter and gossip so, from 2013, I completely stopped welcoming people into my home with very few exceptions, when people came highly recommended.

When I recovered, I started to work as a housekeeper and caregiver and, in 2014, I decided to attend a course to become a certified family carer with the Sant'Egidio Association and then also an Italian language course, where I learned many things. Then, thanks to the certificate from the caregiver course, I found a steady job as a career.

Since I left, the situation in Somalia has worsened, because before there was the civil war but then came ISIS! As things are now, I don't want to go back, even my brothers should leave, but they are too old now and have their children there. Pretty much all my family is in Somalia. My parents are dead, but my brothers and sisters are still there. Five of my sibling's children live in Europe, one in the US, but I don't have any relatives in Italy. I hear from them often, not all of them of course, because we're a big family, but I hear from two of my sisters very frequently. I call the others every now and then.

The Story of G, a 30-year-old Somali Cultural Mediator

I arrived in Italy in 2011. Before that, I was living with my parents in Mogadishu and I had spent almost a year working as a journalist at a radio station that dealt with politics. I did an 8-month journalism course and then I attended two seminars, one in Uganda and one in Tanzania. As soon as I got back, I started working for this radio station, run by my uncle. However, my uncle wasn't living in Somalia, he had already been living in Finland for 30 years at that stage. After about a year, I had problems with Al-Shabaab, a Somali terrorist organization, like ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), which is now nearly gone, but which, at that time, was very strong – it had more power than the Somali Government itself.

From 1969 to 1991, in Somalia, there was a military government which, nevertheless, assured a certain stability. Al-Shabaab started taking power in 2005 and, by 2006, it already controlled Mogadishu and other cities. They maintained control over the country until 2011. Currently, the situation is somewhat improved because the African Union (AU) has sent 50,000 soldiers in support of the Somali Government and those fighting Al-Shabaab. Now the terrorist group no longer controls Mogadishu, but it does other cities, and sometimes they kill someone, but not blatantly. Most of Somalia is under the control of the Government backed by the African Union. Then there's Somaliland, an area composed of the northern provinces, which has had an autonomous government since 1993 and wants independence but it is not internationally recognised as such. In 2010, Al-Shabaab had a TV channel – closed by the Government only in 2012 – and it was recruiting young journalists by force because they would be able to help them with their propaganda campaigns. My choice was between working for their television channel, leaving the country or being killed. Those who didn't accept their offer and chose to continue working in their original workplace were killed. A colleague and friend of mine who had started working with me at the radio station received the same kind of "offer" from Al-Shabaab. At first, we thought it was just intimidation, that they wouldn't actually do anything, but then he was killed. From that moment, we realised that the only alternative was to flee to another country. Even my uncle's radio station had to move its centre of operations to another city, but it's still active – it's a national radio station.

The day after my friend was killed, I went to collect my things from the radio station; I knew I couldn't continue to work there. I talked to my father about it and we figured that if I quit the job maybe I would be left alone, but after a few days, I was kidnapped. It was September/October 2010, I was at the Bakara market, the largest market in Mogadishu, and three guys came up to me and showed me that they were all armed with guns and forced me to follow them. They took me to a place run by them where they told me that they didn't want to kill me, but simply to understand what I had decided. They knew I had left the radio station but they didn't care, they wanted me to go to work for them. My only alternative was to leave the country. They explained that if they left me alone, no one else would ever go and work for them.

Many people agreed to work for the Al-Shabaab television channel. They told me that the work was quite normal, but you were obliged to say what they wanted – all things that you didn't believe. You had to attack government officials, say that they were not true Muslims and that they should be killed, things like that. This would then mean you were at risk of being arrested by government soldiers. Being arrested was the best thing that could happen because all you had to do was pay some sort of bail and you'd be released. The problem is that government soldiers often shoot to kill before arresting you.
I accepted the job and asked them to give me a few days to get myself organised. When I got home, I talked to my father and we decided that the best thing was for me to get out of Somalia. It was four o'clock in the afternoon and I left the next morning at five o'clock, so that I wouldn't be seen by anybody.

My family stayed in Somalia. I have three older brothers and two younger sisters. One of my brothers is still studying at a university, another runs a grocery shop and one teaches at university. One of my sisters is

studying at university in Uganda and the other is married. My parents are no longer working. Unfortunately, there is no pension system in Somalia, but they're still doing OK.
First, I went to Kenya, which is the nearest country and can be reached by land in three days by changing bus two or three times, but I knew it was not safe to stay there because Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, was full of paramilitary groups close to Al-Shabaab. I stayed there for two days and then took a bus to Uganda where I got another which took me through what is now South Sudan and I arrived in Khartoum, Sudan, and eventually got to my best friend's house. Many Somalis go to study in Uganda so I thought that if I could not find a job, I could start studying. I stayed in Khartoum for three months and tried to find a job, but it was impossible. I didn't like the idea of asking my parents to support me when I was already 22-23 years old. So I decided to go to Libya and try to find a job there. If that went wrong, I could always try my luck in Europe.

Many people from Somalia go to Libya. I had a friend in Tripoli and knew that living there was very difficult if you didn't speak Arabic, but if you did, and especially if you were Muslim, you were OK. At that time, work was also easy to come by. In January 2011, I threw away my identification papers and I left for Libya. My Somali papers meant I was legally permitted to stay in Sudan, but I knew that the situation in Libya would be different. In the areas still controlled by the old government, I could try to get a visa by showing them my papers and paying some bribes, but in other areas, it was better not to make it known who you were and where you were from, and I didn't know which area I would arrive in.

Khartoum is full of traffickers who organise the journey to Libya and a friend of mine knew a Sudanese guy who helped me get a discount on the price. I paid 200 dollars, instead of 500. The deal was they'd take me to a small city over the Libyan border where I would find other traffickers and I would have to pay them for another "ticket" to get to Tripoli.

The journey was very arduous. We were travelling on a pickup-style Toyota truck, with an open back. In Somalia these vehicles were often used by the military and, in the rear, there are usually a maximum of eight or ten people seated on specially made wooden seats. Instead, there were twenty-seven of us on the back of the truck, all Somali, twenty-two men and five women, one of whom was six months pregnant, and we were all huddled together on the floor of the flatbed. Inside the cabin, in the front seats, sat the three armed traffickers. They weren't interested in checking up on us in the back because we had all paid up front, so if we ran away, in the desert, we were running away to our death. Rather it was us who checked on them, to make sure, when we stopped to sleep, they would not drive away again, leaving us in the middle of nowhere.
The weather was terrible, by day it was swelteringly hot and there was nothing to shield us from the sun, while at night, it was cold and the temperature dropped by several degrees. But at least we were prepared for this. Before leaving, the traffickers had given us strict instructions about what to bring: tinned tuna, dates, biscuits and other food that would keep easily, 10-15 litres of water in half-litre bottles, which could also be used as a seat, but no more because the traffickers had at least two padlocked 200-litre storage tanks of water for themselves, and then jackets, blankets and heavy trousers to sleep on the sand at night. You don't travel at night because you can't see anything and you'd get lost. But even by day, it wasn't easy. I still can't figure out how they managed to find their way in that sandy desert where everything looks the same, without roads, without a satnav, and to arrive on time. To eat, there was whatever you had brought with you and then rice or pasta, which the traffickers had brought with them, which was cooked up for everyone in the evening over a wood fire. Those who had money with them could also pay the traffickers to use their satellite telephones to call family members and so I managed to contact my own family every three or four days.

We reached the Libyan border after nineteen days and had spent the entire journey crossing the desert. In the evening, about seven o'clock, when it started to get dark, we stopped and lit the fire. At that point, we suddenly found ourselves surrounded by three hundred servicemen from the Libyan Government who rounded us up and brought us all to a prison in a small town near the border. They crammed us all together – men, women and children – in a huge room. There were hundreds of us there and we divided ourselves

up into groups according to nationality. We were there for two months, locked in there, without knowing anything, without being able to do anything. At night, when everything was dark, white lights, like those in a hospital, would suddenly be turned on and about twenty soldiers would enter the room. They had no weapons – they had left their guns outside to avoid giving anyone the opportunity of stealing them and creating problems – except their truncheons. They would take two or three people, bring them outside, beat them up, bring them back inside, then take more of us outside, and so on – every night. But never in the daytime, because they were probably afraid of being seen by Libyan UN observers, who came occasionally. In any case, the observers didn't do anything, they saw the conditions we were being kept in, listened to people who told them what went on and left again without saying a word.

At night the soldiers also took women, especially to rape them. They took them one at a time; two of them would come to take a woman away and then they'd bring her back a couple of hours later. Motionless, silent, the girls didn't even have the courage to look up. I was never beaten because they saw that I was quiet, that I didn't cause problems. Later, they made me act as a translator for those who didn't speak Arabic, so they looked out for me – the generals told them to leave me alone. I took advantage of my "privileged" position to ask them not to touch the pregnant girl, to leave her alone. They still tried to take her though. I said: "No, not her! Can't you see she's about seven or eight months pregnant?!". I don't know what happened to that girl, she got out of there before me and I haven't seen her since. After some time, a Somali boy who worked for the Embassy arrived. He was afraid that the prison would end up in the hands of anti-Gaddafi militiamen and that they would kill all the prisoners. So he proposed a deal to the soldiers who ran the place: to charge each of the more than one hundred Somali prisoners 1,000 dollars to be released at night. The deal was not official, it did not involve the Somali Embassy, and the soldiers agreed. When the Somalis started to leave, the other nationalities wanted to do the same, so we advised them to contact the guy who had arranged the deal. The second group that came to the same arrangement was the Eritreans. It worked like this: you had to go to the soldier on duty and say you were ready to pay, at this point he would phone your family and he would let you talk to them so you could ask them to send the money. But not many of the prisoners spoke Arabic, so they had me act as an interpreter, which meant I ran the risk of not being allowed to leave so I could keep working for them. When I spoke to my family, they were so worried because they hadn't heard from me in two weeks, especially my mother, I always spoke to her. When I spoke to her, I told her that everything was fine, that I was still travelling and that there were no problems. Then I asked my brother to send me the money. The other inmates advised us not to ask our mothers for money since they were more emotional and would therefore agree to pay even more than the original deal. But since I had worked as an interpreter for the military, along with six or seven other people, I was able to get a discount on the price and I paid only 300 dollars. Even the guy from the Somali Embassy made a little something from his mediation work, but he deserved it, he had risked being locked up too. When eighty people had already been let out, I asked if I could go, too, saying that I didn't feel well.

Once released from the prison, there were other traffickers waiting to get paid to take you away, and if they weren't there, you had to go and find them yourself because the jail was far away from the town and they were the only way you had to get there. I still had my luggage with me, they kept it for me because I spoke Arabic and I was Muslim, everyone claimed to be Muslim so as to be allowed to leave without problems.

I was taken with some others to a house in the city where I found many fellow prisoners. I made friends with many people during all these various relocations – I'm still in contact with many of them through Facebook. These types of experiences leave a mark and they create strong bonds between people. I made the entire journey from Khartoum to Rome with one of them. And he still lives here; he works in a hotel. We stayed in that house for about twenty days just waiting, doing nothing. We got up in the morning, we cooked – we took turns cooking once a day for everyone – we ate and then nothing. We slept on the floor, on mattresses, one next to the other. From there we had to pay more money to be taken to Tripoli. It was not easy to find a vehicle to take us there, especially in that period of civil war. There were so many checks, there was a checkpoint every three metres. In fact, I remember they only let us pass because the

traffickers, somehow, had written a fake letter that listed all of our names – made up – and that said we had been arrested and had to be taken to the Somali Embassy for repatriation.

I arrived in Tripoli in April 2011 and myself and three other guys stayed at the home of the man from the Somali Embassy who, since he had many Libyan contacts, also found me a job at a Somalia-Libya money transfer agency. At that time, everything in Libya was blocked and the banks were not working. The guy from the Embassy and another guy would set off at night for Tunisia where they withdrew the money sent from Somalia, only to return two days later. When they arrived, I took the bag with the cash, climbed into a taxi – if you travelled by taxi no one stopped you to check who you were – and I went to deliver the money to the people it had been sent to. We'd make an appointment to meet on the street, at the market or in front of a shop. It was always other immigrants who had had money sent by their family to pay the traffickers so they could get to Europe. But I always refused to bring money directly to traffickers, I was afraid of being followed by plainclothes agents and of being arrested. I did this work for three months, it was good money, because when I arrived they had also disconnected the telephone lines – you could only make calls on satellite telephones – so it was even more difficult for people to contact their family. The directors of my agency were charging a 20% commission on top of the commission that was charged by the agency in Mogadishu and 8% of this went to me. So I was able to start sending money home to my family.
However, after three months, NATO planes began night-time bombings of the areas outside Tripoli. I hadn't escaped from my own country just to get killed in Libya, so I decided to go to Europe. I paid the immigrant traffickers 1,300 dollars and on 29 July, at ten in the morning, I left. At that time there were no border checks. Our departure was delayed for three days; they said that the sea was too rough. Then, on the fourth day, we left. It was an eight-metre-wide wooden boat with about three hundred people aboard. Most people were outside, only seventy were below deck. It was as hot as hell down there; it was also hot above deck, but the engines were located down below and you couldn't even breathe. While we were in the Libyan Sea, everything was fine, but as soon as we sailed out of it, it become another world – high waves threw you from one side of the boat to the other. What's more, it was completely dark at night. You couldn't see a thing. Our boat didn't even have a masthead light, only a torch. Many boats crash against military ships at night because there are no lights.

It's important to understand that in Libya there is very strong racism towards Africans with black skin – they are referred to as *Abdi*, a derogatory term. If a black man walks into a shop, they will get dirty looks and then, when they leave, the shop owner will start spraying air freshener saying that black people stink. I was even kicked out of a grocery shop because the owners said they did not serve blacks. Remember that Libya has two or three regions with overwhelmingly black populations and there is strong racism even towards this section of the population. Of the various African ethnic groups, Libyans have a particular dislike for Nigerians, so our traffickers had allocated the worst seats on board to the group of Nigerians, below deck.

Two young men, a Somali and a Tunisian, sailed the boat, and when the sea began to get very choppy, the Nigerians below deck began to protest, asking to be allowed to come out. The answer was no; if only four or five people came out, they said, they would run the risk of unbalancing the weight of the boat. Then, the two men sailing the boat took four guys from Ghana, two Syrians, two Somalis and an Eritrean and used their guns to force them to go below deck to beat up anyone who tried to move or get out. After a while, no more protests could be heard coming from below deck. On the morning of 31 July we arrived in Italian waters and we were joined by a helicopter from the Italian Navy, which photographed us and left. Navy ships arrived a few hours later, which brought us to Lampedusa. When we arrived at Lampedusa, they said 22 people had died below deck, nineteen Nigerians and three from Niger, while the traffickers had mixed themselves in with the immigrants and had disappeared.

At the reception centre in Lampedusa, we were checked over by the doctor, cleaned ourselves up, we were given clean clothes, we rested and had something to eat. Finally, I was safe. I had left my home and my family so I wouldn't be killed and then I had risked death so many more times. I felt fortunate, to have been able to survive in that situation.

At the reception centre, however, a war started between the Somalis and five Tunisians on the one hand, and the Nigerians on the other. The Nigerians claimed that the people who had died below deck had been killed by the Somalis and the Tunisians because it was a Somali and a Tunisian who had been sailing the boat. To prevent tensions rising, they transferred us Somalis along with the five Tunisians to another centre for minors. After four days spent in Lampedusa, they said we had to be transferred to other reception centres. We didn't know where we were being taken. They had us get on a big tourist ship, there were about a thousand people. In groups of two hundred, people gathered in the lobby of the ship and then whichever organisation was working the shift, which could have been the UNHCR, the Red Cross or the Army, sorted us into the various rooms, always divided by nationality. The refugees were given accommodation in the ship's cabins, four beds per cabin with a bathroom and hot shower. However, the deck, the bar area and the hallways were reserved for the economic immigrants, Nigerians, Egyptians, Algerians, etc. For six days, they slept on the floor, on a chair or against the wall.

Only the five Tunisians were housed in the cabins to prevent them from starting trouble again with the Nigerians. It was the year of the Arab Spring and many people had fled from those countries. It wasn't just Tunisians, Egyptians, Algerians or Libyans, there were also many people from sub-Saharan Africa, who had lived and worked in North Africa for years and had been forced to flee because of the war. I, too, had it not been for the war and the bombings, would have stayed living and working in Libya. Then Gaddafi began encouraging departures to Italy and many people left. At that time, up to five boats per day arrived at Lampedusa.
The ship we had been loaded onto would stop every day in a different port in Sardinia, Liguria and Tuscany to let people off. I got off last, after six days I arrived in Naples. But we only stayed there a couple of hours because from there we were transferred by bus to Civitavecchia and settled into an old military barracks that had been abandoned for years and only recently designated as a temporary reception centre (CAS) for the "North African Emergency". The building was run down and there was no lighting. They sent us off by ourselves to find a room, telling us to break down any doors that wouldn't open, clean things up a bit and then return to pick up our mattresses and sheets. We organised things ourselves, there were about 700 people there, half of them Pakistani, and there was a young Eritrean man, who was an electrician. We each paid 5 euro and he came to our rooms to wire them for electricity. We stayed there for August and September. In October, they moved me to Rome, to a nice, quiet CAS in the Prenestina area. In February 2012, I met with the Territorial Commission for the recognition of international protection. In October, I got a residence permit for political asylum and, in April 2013, I left the centre. In the meantime, I started studying. At the centre, there were no organised activities, there was nothing to do all day. You could play football, you ate, slept, a doctor came to visit us if we were ill, every now and then we were given a phone card to call home and those who smoked were given a packet of cigarettes. However, there was an Italian course run by a teacher who came in the morning and afternoon, Monday to Friday. I had already started attending a course back in Civitavecchia and I continued my studies in Rome. After two months, with the help of mediators who came to the centre, I started attending external Italian schools. In one of these schools, I was offered the opportunity to attend a course to become a cultural mediator. In April 2012, I did a course to become a waiter while I continued to study Italian. In September, I started studying to take the middle school exam in a provincial centre for adult education (CPIA) but, since I was a good student, they moved my exam date up to February and, in March, I started a three-month paid internship to be a mediator in the Lunghezza CAS. On 18 April 2013, however, I had to leave the centre on via Prenestina where I was staying. I was given a 500-euro leaving bonus and I found a flat at Setteville, which I shared with a Somali boy I had met playing football. Meanwhile, I finished the internship and, on 22 April, I started working as a mediator in the same centre where I had lived for the last year and a half. In June and July, I was out of work because they were emptying the centres. In August, as I returned from a successful interview for a job as a porter at Decathlon, they called to offer me another job as a mediator, which I accepted without hesitation. In December, however, my contract expired. Fortunately, immediately after that, I was hired, along with 12 other mediators who worked with me, by the cooperative for which I still work in a centre in Guidonia. Until last year, I also collaborated with the Somali online newspaper Allbanaadir.

I love my job as a mediator, I think that in order for you to do your job well, you have to do it with all your heart. If you don't like your job, it weighs on you, you get tired immediately and you do it wrong. If I didn't love my job, I'd already have quit. Whenever I act as a mediator I learn something new and I also really like talking to people; I've had lots of different experiences working as a mediator for various people and organisations. I've also thought about resuming my university studies to get a degree that would allow me to continue working in this area with better qualifications, but it is very complicated to have a course that was done in Somalia recognised, and it takes more than two years.

In 2013, I learned through my friend and colleague's partner that the Cittadini del Mondo Association was looking for a mediator who spoke Somali and Arabic. I did the interview and I started working at Palazzo Selam. I'd already heard about the building, I knew people who lived there. A friend had even suggested I go and live there to save money on rent but it only took one look at the bathrooms for me to figure out that it wasn't the place for me. I care very much about cleanliness and there, even though they take turns cleaning, a bathroom that's being used by thirty people hardly stays clean for long. Not to mention the queue in the morning! My friend told me that he has to get up an hour earlier in order to be able to use the bathroom! Once, myself and the association accompanied an engineer to do an inspection to fix the sewage system of the building: the bathrooms are locked with padlocks, if you have to go urgently, you run the risk of not getting in in time and also the drains are all clogged; on the other hand, they were not created to support such a huge number of users.

Nevertheless, the management of things in general needs to be improved in Selam. Committee members can't even agree among themselves, let alone on how they can help others. The management of the restaurant is not going well and obviously, the cleaning shifts do not work. It is not hygienic, not safe, people cannot live like this – there are also small children to consider. So, first of all, the committee should be changed. People who at least speak Italian should be a part of it. How can you solve the problems of 800 people if you can't go and talk to the relevant institutions and services?

Recently, many Somalis are coming to the building and I think they're all people who have tried going to other European countries but they were sent back to Italy, because very few boats have landed in Italy lately. I don't know what future awaits them. In my experience, Somalis never think about the future, they are eternal "transients". Although, personally, I don't think it makes sense to live like that, to be constantly moving about. Especially if they give you the option of having identity papers, of learning Italian, it's better to try to settle down and look for a job here. I've pretty much done that. In 2011, on the boat from Libya to Italy, there were about fifty of us Somalis, we all stayed in touch and currently, there are only three of us who have jobs. Many ask me for help when they are sent back to Italy, I tell them: "I'll help you but remember that we arrived together. Now I have a quiet life. Why don't you try to stop moving around and build something for yourself here, since they've now given you papers and taken your fingerprints in Italy?" In my opinion, they don't want to work. Surely, they have relatives and friends who they want to get to in other countries, but they must also understand that their loved ones can do little for them. If they keep going back and forth, they'll never settle down. They complain that they can't find work, but if you don't speak Italian, it's hard to work.

The Story of T, a 36-year-old Eritrean Cultural Mediator

I left Eritrea in 2005, at 22 years of age. Before leaving, I lived in Mendefera, a town south-west of Asmara, with my family. Mine was a simple family of eight people. I am the eldest of 6 children, 4 boys and 2 girls. At the time, I had been studying chemistry at university for a year. It worked like this: military service was compulsory, but if you passed an exam, you could stop your military service and start your studies; otherwise, you had to continue your military career for an undetermined amount of time. I had taken the exam and, during the six months I had to wait for the results, they made me start military service. When the results of the exam arrived saying I had passed, I stopped my military service and began to study chemistry. Initially, I was living at home and, to take classes and exams, I would travel to the main faculty building. At a certain point, the faculty was closed and replaced with a college and I was obliged to reside on campus. The college, however, was run by the army, which imposed a barracks-style way of life on the students: from the moment I woke up, my day was marked by the rhythms of military life, with activities that were not related to university life. I wasn't able to organise my studies how I wanted, not even to go to the library or something like that when I wanted. You had to do what they said, when they said it. When you heard the whistle, you had to stop studying and get ready to leave to do some military drill or something like that. I wasn't used to this life and the situation weighed heavily on me – I wouldn't have been able to put up with it for another three years. So I decided to leave, I wanted to go to England to study because until then, I had always studied in English. Without saying anything to my family, to prevent them from worrying, I left my papers at home and I walked away. I set off on foot, on 5 March 2005 at 10.30 at night, along with my cousin, who knew the way, and two other friends. We arrived in Sudan at around 4.30 in the morning. At that point, however, I needed money for the trip, so I learned Arabic and I stayed in Khartoum for a year working as a taxi driver. I couldn't ask my family for the money: I was the eldest, I had to set an example to my siblings and look after myself. But I was a capable young man and I saved up some money. I got in contact with some Sudanese traffickers who charged me 800 dollars to cross the desert and get to Libya. I was lucky because, apart from the arduous nature of the journey itself – the dust, the infernal heat, all crammed together with our luggage, on the back of a pickup truck without a roof – there were no major problems. There were more than twenty of us, men and women, Eritreans, Ethiopians and Sudanese. It took about ten days. But, since we didn't know how long the journey would take, we had brought enough food for a month: biscuits, fruit juice, tinned tuna, all of which keep well. I had a gigantic backpack. Then, at night, we slept on the sand. There were two or three traffickers with us, who took turns driving. One of them had a knife with which he occasionally threatened us if we didn't keep quiet or we didn't do what he said. Luckily, nothing serious ever happened; although, I too, for my own protection, had a knife hidden in my boot. Thinking back now on the journey and the experience, I wouldn't do it again, but at the time I didn't see any alternative.

At the Libyan border, they made us get out of the Sudanese traffickers' truck and get onto another one owned by Libyan traffickers. However, we did not have to pay any more money, the second transfer was included in the 800 dollars. We crossed the Kufra district and arrived in Benghazi. From there I found another car to take me to Tripoli. I was in Tripoli for twenty-eight days. I rented a house with three other people to lie low in and not be found by the police while we were looking for a boat to take us to Europe. Eventually, I left Libya on a motorboat along with thirty-four other people. The sea was really rough, I had never seen anything like it, waves as high as walls, which tossed us from side to side – I was convinced that my life was about to end. Lined up tightly, one next to the other, we tried to make a wall with our backs to prevent water from entering the boat. We didn't even have life jackets. Before our departure, we had bought them, but we had to set sail before they could be brought on board because there was a risk we might be arrested by the police. After three days of sailing in these conditions the engine had taken on too much water and had cut out, it no longer worked and the boat was half broken. We were stuck floating in the middle of nowhere for three more days. On the fifth day after our departure, one of the guys with us simply couldn't go on; his body was exhausted and he died from fatigue. He had boarded immediately after

crossing the desert, without even getting any rest.
Meanwhile, using petrol, pieces of wood that had broken off the boat and a lighter, we lit a fire. At 4.00 in the morning on the sixth day, we were spotted by a French naval vessel that was travelling from Libya towards Italy. They let us get on board, they gave us food and clothes and, after about four hours, we had arrived at Lampedusa. It was 4 July 2006. After having finally slept and recovered, I was going to run away from the reception centre they had brought us to – I wanted to go to England. However, they had already taken my fingerprints and processed the identity report, so it was no longer possible for me to seek asylum in England.

I stayed in Lampedusa for ten days, after which they took me to Crotone where my case was heard by the Territorial Commission, which issued me with a one-year residence permit for humanitarian reasons. At that point, I went to Rome because I had friends who had been living there for a couple of years. They didn't have space for me to stay with them and they pointed me towards a building on via Collatina that was occupied by refugees. But I didn't like that place, and after ten days I went to the Immigration Office on via Assisi to ask for a reception centre and, after two or three days, they found a place for me at the Ferrhotel, at Arco di Travertino. It was good, the rooms were for two people and they had everything: beds, wardrobes and bedside tables. They changed the sheets and towels every Wednesday, it was very clean, there was a washing machine and everything else, just like in a hotel. Cleanliness is very important to me. The only problem was that the centre was closed during the day, from 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. I stayed at this place for six months; in the meantime, I started studying Italian at the Caritas counselling centre for foreigners on via delle Zoccolette. I attended for two months, three days a week, and so I learned Italian. I also used an Italian-English Dictionary a lot: I had a great desire to learn. I also did a course to learn how to work in hotels and restaurants on via Assisi. It was a six-month course with an attendance fee and a certificate upon completion. After six months at Ferrhotel, they gave me a place in another centre, the Baobab. Every day I walked around looking for work and handing out my CV and after two or three months, I found a job and I left the reception centre. I started to do the cleaning in a meat-packing factory in Settecamini. I originally had a contract for four hours per day which then became six and eventually became a full-time permanent contract because they also put me to work on the packing line. As soon as I started

working, I left the reception centre and I rented a room in the area close to the factory. I stayed on at the factory from the end of 2007 until April 2013, when it went bankrupt. I was unemployed until November when, through a friend, I got a job as a social worker in a reception centre. There were many Eritreans staying at the centre and they needed someone who spoke their language. That's how I started working as a mediator, even accompanying the residents of the centre to different offices to help them with the various bureaucratic procedures they needed to do. I still work there and I like it, although I have not continued to study. Partly because I haven't had a way to do so, and partly because the idea of not being able to recover the exams I've already taken bothers me and above all, because I would not be able to study in English. The mathematical and chemical terms in Italian are very different, I would have to start all over again but it's a little too late now. It's time I started a family.

From 1 March 2017, I started working with the Cittadini del Mondo Association as a mediator at the health and social services desk, which is open in Palazzo Selam every Thursday evening. I think this building is a great help to many people who don't have a job or a family network. They have nothing and they can find support there. However, on the other hand, living in Selam does not help them grow from many points of view: mindset, study, knowledge of the language and the country in which they live. We see it every week, people who live here are often isolated, they do not know how to renew their residence permit, what they need or where to go to do so. It's as if they still lived in Africa. They speak the same language, they eat the same food, they have no friends outside the building. Their bodies are here, but their minds stayed there. My work with the association often involves translating for people who have lived in Italy for over a decade. People who may have arrived before me and still do not speak Italian. From this point of view, Palazzo Selam is detrimental for them. Perhaps the people who live there think it is convenient not to have to pay for rent, water or electricity but by staying there, they remain close-minded. Take me, for example, as soon as I received my first pay cheque, although it was only a part-time contract, an open-ended apprenticeship, I left the centre and I rented an apartment because I didn't like how things were at the reception centre – taking a shower with others, sleeping two or four to a room. It was fine as a temporary situation but then I wanted to move forward. In 2009, after a year of work, I had saved up 1,000 euro to buy a used car.
Then I was able to help two of my siblings emigrate to Germany and Norway, by buying their aeroplane tickets and saving them from the terrible journey I had had to face. I never want to relive that experience, not even in a dream – after arriving in Lampedusa, my head was spinning for a week! I had to cling on to the bed frame! I am grateful to Italy because it helped me a lot, but I have also done a lot. I have often been invited to go and live in an occupied building without having to pay for anything, but, in the end, I realised that I spend less than them. Because I have an organised life and I can afford a dinner out or to take a trip, I just need to know about it in advance so I can have time to save some money, while they never know how many people there'll be for dinner. They're all together, from the first to the eighth floor, in a forced coexistence that doesn't really allow them to choose their own relationships and friends. I do so many things: I go to the gym, I run, I compete, I go cycling, I have many real friends. I have a real life, but if I lived there, I wouldn't have got very far.
Sometimes when we work with them, even with my countrymen who live in Selam, I have a feeling that they aren't telling the truth. I know their situation, I've been there too. True, there are people who don't even have food to eat, who can't find a job, who are demoralised, like that guy who took his own life. Although, for example, they say that that guy had a job with a good salary, so maybe if he had rented a room somewhere and left Selam and tried to establish some order in his life, maybe, he would have found some balance and even saved up some money.

I think that the institutions should help many of the people who live here, but maybe by being a bit selective, because the living conditions in Selam are very bad: there are leaky pipes everywhere, bathrooms without doors shared with ten other people – how can you raise a child like that?!?!

The Story of S, a 58-year-old Ethiopian man

I arrived in Italy in 2008. Before I left, I had lived in Addis Ababa with my wife and son. In the beginning, I was a geography teacher at secondary school but I wasn't earning enough, so I stopped teaching and I started working as a shopkeeper. I don't want to talk about why I decided to leave Ethiopia but I can say that I made this decision in 2005 and I left the following year, alone. From Ethiopia, I reached Sudan in about seven days, then, from there, I went to Libya. The trip was exhausting; it lasted more than two weeks. We crossed the Sahara Desert during the rainy season. There were forty-two people divided into two trucks, two Toyota pickup trucks that didn't have any roof cover on the back, where we sat, closely packed together one next to the other. We travelled by day and slept by night. In the morning, we would set off between 5.00 and 7.00 a.m. and travel until 8.00 p.m. We had an hour to eat and then we slept. While in the desert, we travelled from Sudan to Chad, then we re-entered Sudan, we passed through a part of the Egyptian desert and eventually, we reached the Libyan part of the Sahara Desert. In Libya, they brought us to Benghazi where I waited seven months before departing for Europe. During that period, I worked as a groundskeeper on some farmland.

It was easy to find people who organised Mediterranean crossings because traffickers approached all the foreigners who had recently arrived and asked them if they were interested in going to Italy. Each of them had their own boat and their own price: 500, 600, 1,000, 1,100, 1,200 dollars. I paid almost 900 dollars. I was interested in leaving Africa. It was a very difficult time. I just wanted to leave, move on, continue studying. I wanted to learn new things. I would have liked to study chemistry upon arrival in Italy.

Eventually, I set off on a small boat. Once again there were forty-two of us, men and women, but no children; there were Eritreans, Sudanese and one Senegalese. It took three days to reach Lampedusa. It was cold and very windy. One night, while we were still in Libyan territorial waters, the wind was so strong that we weren't able to move forward. We met four oil tankers, we wanted to get closer to the ships to ask for help but we couldn't reach them. Every time we got a bit nearer, the wind pushed us back. The nearest ship was no more than 5 minutes away from us. We saw the people on the ship and they saw us asking for help. Then, eventually, we managed it; we caught up to the ship and we told them we wanted directions to Italy. They told us it wasn't possible, that it was too dangerous in those weather conditions. The ship was positioned in such a way as to only partly shelter us from the wind, so we probably weren't able to really judge just how serious the situation was. They threw a rope over so we could tie our boat to theirs and they begged us not to go on that night, to wait for daybreak. The crew then gave us food and drink and we slept there. The following morning things had calmed down. They showed us the route to Italy – straight ahead. The next night we arrived in Lampedusa. We entered the harbour and there was no one who could see us. We sailed around the port three times, then, when we approached the pier, everyone got off. At that point, we saw a car with the word "Police" written on it. When the police saw us, they came towards us, they welcomed us and we were taken to a reception centre. Once we got there, we thanked God because we had seen nothing but the sea for three days, not even a tree, nothing. We were at the centre for a few days. They gave us food, dry clothes, the doctors came to give us a check-up. Later, they took us by plane from Lampedusa to another centre in Crotone. We stayed in Crotone for around six months. During that time, there was nothing to do. There was an Italian course but no one went, we all wanted to leave. I had studied English in Eritrea but the staff at the centre did not speak English and if you said something to someone in English, they ignored you. At Crotone, I met with the Territorial Commission and they issued me with a one-year residence permit for political asylum. Later, they renewed it for three years and then for another five. When we received the residence permit, we were sent away from the centre with a train ticket to Rome in our hands. We knew nothing about Italy; we took the train and arrived in Rome. Here I ended up in a refugee-occupied space on via Collatina. The situation there was awful – we slept out in the open and there were no rooms for newcomers. Was this Europe? Were people really forced to live in these conditions? After three days at Collatina, I left for France along with four other people, all men. At that time the situation was better than it is now; we didn't have the money to buy a train ticket but when the ticket inspectors saw that you were a recently arrived refugee, they let you travel, and so we got to Paris. It was freezing in Paris, there was snow and ice! We had never seen snow, we were all Africans! We walked into a

bar near the station to warm ourselves up and we ordered a hot tea and a croissant. We were asked to pay five euro! In Rome, we would have paid two euro, max. We refused to pay five euro and we gave them two. The bartender protested and insisted for a while but, eventually, took the two euro and then chased us away. Outside, it was still freezing so we walked into another bar to get something to help warm us up: we asked for some whisky. The bartender looked at us in amazement: "But it's morning!". "Don't worry about that", was our reply. He went to take the glasses to pour us the whisky but we stopped him: "Bottle!", we wanted the whole bottle, but no, that wasn't possible. We started pouring glass after glass, until the bartender stopped us and told us to leave, threatening to call the police. When asked how much we had to pay, he screamed at us to get out and we left. We headed back to the train station and we bought some beer along the way. Once at the station, we waited for a train to take us to another country, anywhere else. One of the guys who was with us was tired of travelling and stayed in France. Four of us hopped on a train to Sweden. We had no idea where we were going. But that didn't matter, they let us travel without problems. When we arrived, it was even colder than in France. We had the jackets that we had been given in Crotone but they were useless, so we walked into another bar to drink more whisky. We got two bottles and we took them outside. We knocked back one shot after another. Two of us decided to stay in Sweden but I couldn't do it, it was too cold so I told them: "I want to go back to Italy, I can't live here". So two of us went back to the train station, I asked a gentleman of colour directions to get back to Rome. The man told me to take a train to Milan and then from there, another for Rome. I waited a couple of hours and then I get on the train. However, the friend who was with me didn't come; he said he didn't want to return to Italy. When I arrived at Termini station, I was really happy. I had spent a week travelling around Europe, always sleeping on the train and not even paying for a single ticket and I couldn't wait to get back to Rome.

I returned to via Collatina for a few days, then I went to the immigration centre on via Assisi to request a place to stay in a reception centre. After a few days they sent me to the Grotte Celoni centre and then to two others – in a six-month period, I moved to three different centres. During that time I also looked for a job. Initially, I worked as a street seller at a stall but it was undeclared work, I wasn't paying taxes. So I kept searching and, for about three months, I worked on a contract for a couple of companies. The last job was great; I was paid 1,500 euro a month to distribute books in the centre of Rome, to shops and bookshops. I travelled around in a van with a very nice Italian. Then the company closed down.

I had heard that there was another building occupied by African political refugees near Anagnina so I left the reception centre and went to Palazzo Selam. I arrived there in 2009 and the building was really dirty. There were so many people, it's better now, but before, despite the fact that there was a guard at the entrance, it was packed with people coming and going, making themselves at home without anyone taking any notice. When you faced the trip to come to Europe and you passed through the Arab countries of North Africa, it was like you were a prisoner, but when you arrived in Europe, a democracy, you were free to do anything. I'm not talking about criminal activity, of course, I mean the ability to choose freely whatever you want to do and where you want to go. So people went, came, drank, danced and slept everywhere but, in the end, they all wanted to go to Britain. Now, however, it's different; they take your fingerprints, they don't let you cross the border to go to France or Germany and send you back if you manage to get there. But I chose to stay in Italy, in Rome, at Palazzo Selam.

Things have improved now at Selam, there are always so many people coming and going, lots of "transients", but at least now things are monitored. Lately, people have been coming here from all over Europe, especially from the north, and many are Somalis. They come to renew their papers and they need a registered address. But getting a residence permit is complicated unless you have a place to live with a regular contract, so many come to ask for it at Palazzo Selam.
We take note of all the people living here; every day we make the rounds of the rooms to find out how many people are sleeping here. There's no problem if someone wants to host another person in their own home but they must bring a photocopy of their ID and vouch for their guest. If the guest then wants to apply for a residence permit by declaring they live here, they must wait at least two months, the time it takes to get to know them, to understand who they are, if they're a good person, if they behave well or not.

Before, there were many people sleeping in the garage without asking anybody anything. They'd get drunk, they fought, they'd start hitting each other and they'd call the police. These were mainly Somalis who had recently arrived; evidently, in Somalia, they do not have easy access to alcohol because when they get here they drink in excess. The police were coming to Selam almost every day so we decided to get everyone out and close the garage. It's not a place to live or sleep in. There are 370 rooms in the building; two or three people live in each room, sometimes more, so there are around 900 people living here, and that number is still growing. In particular, this is a problem because of the shortage of available bathrooms.

My room has everything my wife and I need to live: a gas cooker and electric hob, a fridge, a bed, a wardrobe and an electric heater. To wash our clothes, we go to the laundrette in the building, which is run by one of the inhabitants. Bath and shower facilities are outside our room, shared with 10 other people. In the morning and afternoon we keep the committee office open, from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 3 to 8 p.m. On my days off, I've sometimes visited the centre of Rome, the Colosseum, but I never go to sea, I don't want to see that ever again.

Four different nationalities live in the building, there is no friction between the various groups apart from the problem of the Somalis who had just arrived, which I mentioned earlier. When there are issues to be resolved, the committee, consisting of one representative for each nationality, calls a meeting of all the inhabitants in the big room on the ground floor and together we decide what to do. Many people attend the meetings but not everyone. On the ground floor and the seventh floor, there are larger rooms that are used to celebrate important events such as weddings – the most beautiful days. For me, weddings are the best thing about this place. They are celebrated for days, everyone together, regardless of their country of origin.

This building is a God-given shelter – if we didn't have this building, where would we be? Where would we sleep?

The Story of M, a 34-year-old Sudanese man

I left Sudan in 2005, when I was twenty-two, because, since 2001, the country had been at war. I lived in Omdurman, a fairly large town north of Khartoum, the capital. Before leaving, I had lived with my family – my parents and two brothers. One of them had already started working, while I was studying psychology at university. When I finished university, they came to try to make me join the army for three years, but I didn't want to go to war. I still can't go back to Sudan, because they would arrest me for having deserted military service. I was unable to get the stamp to validate my degree certificate because I didn't do the three years of compulsory military service, which have now been reduced to two. If I went back to Sudan now, I would have problems for this reason.

When I left, I wanted to go to Geneva, Switzerland, because people have a better life there. I left my city alone. I bought a plane ticket from Khartoum to Tripoli, in Libya. Then, after four days, I set off in a small dinghy. There were twenty-two of us, including three very young children. There were Eritreans, Sudanese and Ghanaians. After two or three days we arrived at Lampedusa; it was 19 August. In those days, many people died in the Mediterranean trying to reach Europe. The sea was very choppy, we were saved because we were rescued by a cargo ship with a Chinese crew in international waters. They brought us close to Lampedusa and they contacted the Italian Navy, which then brought us on board their boat and took us to Lampedusa. Here they filed our identity report, they took our fingerprints and, a few days later, they sent us to Crotone by plane. In Crotone we stayed in a kind of refugee camp; we were housed in containers, which were, however, supplied with electricity, water and heating. I met with the Territorial Commission and after forty-five days they issued me with a residence permit for humanitarian protection. Once I had my residence permit, I went to Rome. My idea was to stay in Rome for three or four days then go to Milan and, from there, to reach Switzerland. But, a friend immediately found me legal work, with a contract, as a construction worker in Rome. I was very lucky. I started working without even having learned a word of Italian. My colleagues would ask me to pass them tools, like a chisel, and I couldn't understand them. I worked as a builder until 2008, then I rented a license to work as a street trader. I had a market stall and I sold various things: clothes, creams and household products. I worked in different places: Torvaianica, Anagnina and Tuscolana. I went where the licence holder told me to go. I paid the rent on the license, bought the products from the wholesaler, on via dell'Omo, and then the proceeds from the sales were mine. But, after about seven years, I stopped because it wasn't possible to earn as much anymore. There was too much competition and I had costs to cover. In addition to renting the license, there was a man who worked with me and I paid him 40 euro per day to drive the van. In fact, with a Sudanese licence, you can drive in Italy only for the first three years, then it is no longer valid, that's what the law says. I would like to get an Italian driving license, but it's very expensive – I have to save up the money.

When I had just arrived in Rome, for a few months, I was a guest at the home of a friend of mine who lived on via Casilina, then, in 2006, I went to live at Palazzo Selam. Some other friends had talked about this place. They would hang around the area near Termini station and they slept in the parks near Eur Fermi metro station. We got in with the help of Action [Roman movement for the right to housing, editor's note]. At first, the building had been occupied by a group of immigrants but then the police came to send them away. Some people left but then many Italians came from housing rights movements and so everybody went inside. The activists from the movements stayed for a couple of months to give us a hand. Initially, only the first, fourth and sixth floors were occupied, then many other people arrived and they occupied all the other floors. At first, there was a person at the entrance who checked who entered the building, then evidently there were problems because that person left and there was no one left to check. At the time, however, things worked better. There was a strong committee who made sure residents abided by the rules and it was respected. Even for things like requesting residency, it worked better. In the past, many people managed to obtain residency there [at the address where Palazzo Selam is located, editor's note], now the law has changed and there are only a few left who still have residency. There are no rules any more. In recent months, many new people have arrived; I think we've gone over 1,200 inhabitants, there are no more free spaces. There are four people per room and even beneath the building, in the car park, a lot of people used to sleep there. In the last year, many people have arrived, who had to vacate the building

that was being occupied on via Curtatone. I see it in the morning and in the evening when we are all at the bus stop. There are four nationalities among us: Somalis, Eritreans, Sudanese and Ethiopian, Orthodox Christians and Muslims; we all get along quite well. But, every so often someone gets drunk and starts arguing and fighting.

For a while, I was a member of the management committee of the building but now I don't think the committee can help people very much. The people who live there are not interested in the problems of the community. They don't attend the meetings, they live as if they were still in Africa. They only speak their own language or Arabic and after more than ten years, they still don't know Italian, they don't know how the laws work and how to apply for services. They don't even go to school to learn Italian; they are holed up inside the building. I know immigrants who arrived from North Africa, Pakistan or Bangladesh who attended schools to learn Italian and, after a couple of years, they spoke it quite well and found work, but the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam don't. I attended the Italian school organised by the Cittadini del Mondo Association and many people came for a while, then they stopped, then maybe they came back, but that's no good. The mindset of the people living there is difficult to change. Take me for example, I read books and watch television in Italian to improve my language skills.

We also have many structural problems, especially with the water and sewage systems. There's water leaking from the ceilings. Years ago, we repaired the electricity system, but it's not a building that was built for habitation.

There are also some common areas, large rooms that are used to celebrate special occasions, like baptisms, weddings or funerals. To use these spaces, you just have to make a request to the committee. However, there are no spaces for children. Some time ago, I recommended that a young woman who had a child request accommodation in a reception centre because Selam is not a place to raise children in; it's not possible to host birthday parties or invite classmates over to play.

My home in Palazzo Selam is a studio apartment that is about twenty square metres. I built the walls out of plasterboard. To cook, I use two electric hot plates, I have a fridge and an electric heater for the winter. I put in a sink and a shower with a water heater. However, the toilet is outside my apartment, it is shared with seven or eight other people, both men and women.

I don't really like living there, of course, but I feel at home. However, it was better before, not least because of the fact that many of the friends I had are now gone. I'm on good terms with everyone but I can only consider one person there my friend, they all have their problems. Anyway, now I don't have any alternative when it comes to living arrangements. If I could, I'd rent but I no longer have a steady job. I have a contract, but I only work for a few days a week. I do the cleaning in a hotel; they call me when they need me.

In the morning, I always wake up before eight. If I have to go to work, I get up at six o'clock unless I have the night shift. It takes me an hour to reach my workplace. I take the bus and then the metro. On my way back I sometimes stop to go shopping at the supermarket but I prefer the market in Piazza Vittorio. It costs less and I find more things there. Sometimes I cook and eat with friends, at other times I'm alone.

I would like to bring my wife here. I tried to ask for reunification but it wasn't granted. I'll try again as soon as I get the chance. She lives in Sudan but we meet up in Egypt because I can't go back to my country. I need a visa to go to Egypt, but my wife doesn't – it's not required for women. When I go, we rent a house for three or four months, we visit a few cities, we do a bit of tourism. We would like to have children.

We even celebrated our wedding in Egypt, in 2014; my whole family came. I haven't seen them since then, but I hear from them every day by phone. One of my brothers has also left Sudan. He is now attending university in India; he is about to graduate, while my cousin lives in Sweden. My dad is around sixty and no longer works. In a few months, he should begin drawing his pension, but it's very low. When I can, I send him some money because the situation in Sudan has not changed after thirteen years; indeed, it's worsened. It would be dangerous for me to be there because when I was at university, I was against that government and I talked to people about my opinion, so I can't go back, at least, as long as the government remains the same. When I was a kid, we had a good life there, the problems started in 1999/2000 with the war in Darfur and then with Eritrea. Even today, many people are killed in Darfur. Even in my city, which is far away from Darfur, people are killed. If students protest, they are beaten, arrested and sometimes killed. Last week, they arrested several people.

The Story of C, a 35-year-old Eritrean man

As a child, I lived near the city of Keren, in a country town, with my father and mother and my brothers and sisters. Before the outbreak of war, Eritrea was an Italian colony, from 1890 until 1942, when the Ethiopian occupation started, which lasted nearly thirty years. In 1991, the Ethiopians were driven out and in 1998 another war started against Ethiopia, which ended in 2001. During the first war against Ethiopian occupation, in 1989, my father, mother, sister and I decided to leave the country to go to Sudan. My other brothers and sisters remained in Eritrea with our relatives. My eldest sister decided to stay in Eritrea in a quieter area. We didn't stay with her because there were Ethiopian soldiers who wouldn't let us pass.
After my mother died in a road accident, I stayed in Sudan with my sister and father. He worked as a farmer while my 10-year-old sister and I went to school. We stayed in Sudan until 1991, when I was around 8 years old, and we decided to return to my hometown in Eritrea, where, however, things were not good, because of the war and the numerous conflicts. So my older brother, my sister and I returned to Sudan, while my father decided to stay there. Later, in 1996, my sister returned to Eritrea, but I stayed there for another five years. I finished school and didn't return until 2001, to help my father. But he didn't want me to stay because he believed that if I had stayed, I would have been forced to enlist as a soldier. So, at the age of 23, I returned to Sudan where I graduated and started working. However, the situation was not tenable. I had to help my family but I wasn't earning enough to support them all. So, in 2006, I decided to leave for Italy and possibly try to reach England.

I paid the traffickers 1,700 dollars to take me to Lybia. We left on 6 June. There were forty of us, all crammed together, one on top of the other, inside a truck. The journey was terrible, it was hot and they didn't give us anything to drink. Some people were very ill. We had brought some water but it wasn't enough for the journey and the traffickers didn't give us enough. We took the wrong road and that was why the trip took more than two weeks, five days longer than planned. Once I had arrived at Tripoli, I paid 900 dollars for the journey to Italy. They wanted 1,500 but I managed to bargain with them. I was locked in a house for ten days, waiting for sea conditions that would allow us to depart. The boat was very small, 3 metres long, but there were about thirty people on board. The immigrant traffickers didn't care if anyone died. On 24 June 2006, we managed to arrive at Lampedusa, all alive, fortunately. As soon as we arrived, they rescued us and brought us to various hospitals because we were all sick and riddled with skin infections. I had scabies for at least two months, I couldn't get it to heal. They treated me and gave me new clothes. Then they took me by plane to Crotone where I stayed for forty days and where I managed to obtain a residence permit for subsidiary protection. It was August 2006 when, with only 40 euro, I arrived in Rome and went directly to Palazzo Selam.
I didn't like Selam. It was an ugly place; there were more than 1,000 people there and all the floors were occupied. Men would get drunk and there were fights and quarrels at night. Action [a struggle movement for housing rights, editor's note] managed who was allowed in and out of the occupied building and they granted me access immediately. I often went to the Caritas centre to eat. I stayed for two weeks at Selam until I went to a reception centre on via Casalotti where they offered me a place to sleep for six months. After six months at the centre, I went back to Selam. In the meantime, I tried to find a job even though I didn't speak much Italian. I got a job as a labourer, for five years, until I was temporarily laid off for another year and a half and then that too ended. I started to work "under the table" at a market stall run by other people and also at Palazzo Selam, where I had a small grocery shop.
I went to Sweden for a week, to find a job but couldn't find anything and I didn't like the country, it was too cold and even though it was summer, there was very little sun. I also tried going to France for a week in 2009 but I came back because it wasn't for me.

In 2011, I took part in two marathons in Rome, a 20-km race in February and 40-km race in March; both times I placed well.
Every morning I wake up at 6, I read the newspaper, the one they hand out on the metro, and I go to look

for work. I would like to work in a bakery or as a labourer. I'm a good crane operator! Recently I have started attending an Italian language school, I also learn the language by watching television or using courses on YouTube. Currently, I'm not working and I still live at Selam along with over 600 people from four different nationalities: Eritrea, Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia. The religions are Muslim and Christian. It is mostly men, and there are around 30 children but we have no spaces for them to play in. Every nationality is represented by a member of the committee that is responsible for managing relationships between the people from the different countries. There should be twelve people on the committee, three representatives from each country. But now there are only four of us, the others have left for work-related reasons. To decide important things, we hold meetings with the people living in the building. The meetings are held in the large room on the ground floor in front of the clinic and around 200 people attend.

Today Selam has changed. The atmosphere is calmer, there are more people who work and who know the law. Now, compared to before, the situation has improved but it is still very difficult to live here. There is one bathroom for ten people with only one washing machine in it, and this often causes arguments. The rooms are very small and each accommodates at least three people. I live with a guy but now he works outside of Rome and when he comes back, we try to help each other. In the room, I have a sink that I use to wash my hands and do the dishes and to cook, I use a gas cylinder and a small gas cooker. At first, I used an electric hotplate but it caused the switch to trip too often so I got rid of it.
There is a restaurant and a grocery shop in the building. With the proceeds from the restaurant, they buy things to do the cleaning; someone is paid to do it.
There are spaces that we use to get together and to celebrate weddings or funerals. I feel at home when I'm at Selam but what we really want is a council house and a job. In particular, I would like to find a room to rent. I know that Italians are not doing very well these days but we foreigners are much worse off. At present, things in Eritrea are not great, there is no just government and they have never held elections, and you have to be very careful so as not to go to jail, because if you go in, you won't come back out again. If the situation were better, I'd go back immediately – today even! My father died in 2015, but I often hear from my family. My brother is in South Arabia, another is in Calabria and my three sisters, all married, are in Eritrea. We speak more than once a week, even if the phone line isn't great. Before, when I was working, I also sent them some money but I can't afford to do so anymore.

Registered Residence and Fictitious Residence: The Legal and Historical Context

This section is a revised version of a chapter published in the Thirteenth Report of the "Roman Observatory on Migration", IDOS Study and Research Centre (Rome, October 2018).

According to the Italian Civil Code, a person's residence is the place of his or her habitual abode and distinct from both a "*dimora*" [another abode, but one that the person does not live in, or perhaps a temporary residence, translator's note] and a "*domicilio*" [an official place of domicile that the person has registered as their main address for personal interests or business purposes, translator's note] - (art. 43 CC). A registered residence is established by registering with the public population registry office of a municipal town hall – Law No.1228, 24 December 1954, and is listed on an individual's identity papers – e.g. identity card.
Having a registered residence is the essential precondition for an individual to avail him or herself of certain fundamental rights, including access to social and healthcare assistance. It is also, for example, a prerequisite for identifying which schools, nursery schools, *ASL* [local health authorities] or local public healthcare services – mental health centres, clinics, services for drug addiction (Ser. T) or pathological addiction (Ser. D) – are available, and determines the individual's choice of a general practitioner, as all of these are tied to the catchment area within which the person's registered address falls. As can easily be imagined, accessibility and usability of local social and healthcare services are particularly sensitive issues for people living in conditions of marginalization, socio-economic distress or fragility; and it is precisely these people who, if their housing tenure is also precarious, find it difficult to register their places of residence.
In an attempt to work around this issue, the referred to above (Law no. 1228, 24 December 1954 – as amended byL. n. 94/2009), made it possible for individuals "of no fixed abode" to register an official address with the registry office of the municipal district in which they had established their domicile.
The law in question, together with the Approval of the New Regulation for the Registration of Residents, Presidential Decree n. 223 of 1989, stipulates that each municipality or town hall district should open a registered location for homeless people by assigning them a fictitious address, "*via della casa comunale*" being historically the most frequently used. Not all municipalities, however, have conformed to this legislation, and there have always been disparities across the country as regards the assigning of "fictitious residences", disparities that have had a serious impact on the protection of fundamental rights.

Fictitious residences in Rome

In Rome, since 1995 (Circulars No. 19120 of the Department of Social Policies and the Department of Demographic Policies of the Municipality of Rome of 14 February 1994, and no. 54478 of the Department of Demographic Policies of 17 May 1995), and until a few months ago, certain private social organisations were authorised to issue fictitious residences in order to make it easier for public services responsible for integration and protection to take on individual cases.
Over time, this mandate has led to a complete transfer of jurisdiction regarding residence from public institutions to private social organisations, resulting in a lack of uniformity in the practice of assigning fictitious addresses as each private social organisation developed its own rules and requirements for the assignment of residency. Discrepancies between procedures established by the various organisations for granting a registered address, and confusion between a public institution, such as the Public Residence Registry and private social organisations, has ultimately exacerbated an already confused national picture of as regards fictitious residences. In addition, lack of regulation on the part of public institutions, which in effect have washed their hands of the matter, has led over time to the spread of certain illegal practices which have been exposed on television, [2] such as the selling of addresses registered as fictitious residences to persons or companies who use them for criminal purposes.

[2] R. Valesini, "Roman Paradises", Television Programme, *Report*, Rai 3, 19 April 2015.

Another problem related to the use of fictitious residences is linked to the location of virtual addresses. The private social organisations delegated to issue them are situated in the 1st Municipal District of Rome, and as a result, over time, an enormous number of people have registered their residences in this District even though their actual places of abode were located elsewhere, generally in more suburban areas. In several respects, the practice of issuing fictitious residences negatively affects the ability of the local public authorities to grant the individual access to services in the area he or she actually inhabits, makes it impossible for healthcare services to provide professional medical care which is appropriate, effective and based on the specific needs of the person. Moreover, the gap that is thus created between the individual and the healthcare services does not facilitate access, usability and the long-term continuity of the care provided. Finally, because the location of a registered residence determines the catchment area and thus which local authority is responsible for providing the individual with healthcare, residence is an essential tool for ensuring that local institutions deal with the problems of their area. From this follow important consequences for the allocation of resources among municipal districts and among the various *ASL* [local health authorities], resources which are supposed to be distributed in proportion according to the specific needs of each area.
In 2002 the Capitoline Council established the default address for the registration of fictitious residences by all the municipalities of Rome as "*via Modesta Valenti*"[3] . Although the resolution seemed to take a step towards restoring the "principle of proximity" (each individual could register using the address "via Modesta Valenti" at the town hall where he or she actually lives), the issuing procedure did not become a universally established practice, but met with some resistance from the municipalities. Moreover, most of the fictitious residences in Rome continued to be issued by private social organisations.

Recent Changes

On March 3, 2017, the Capitoline Council approved a resolution establishing 15 decentralised sections of the "via Modesta Valenti" registered address, each corresponding to one of the 15 municipalities of Rome. The profound novelty of this Resolution lay in the fact that it revoked the right of private social organisations to issue registered residences. Such addresses must now be requested from the individual municipalities, whose jurisdictional authority is divided between the public registry offices and the social secretariats.
The Resolution immediately aroused numerous uncertainties among public service users, private social organisation workers and many of the employees of the public registry offices and social secretariats. It laid down that over a period of 60 days the old fictitious residences issued by private social organisations be annulled, and at the same time established a procedure for the assignment of new residences which was far from simple. In fact, it dictated that the assignment of residences was subject to an examination by the Social Services of the municipality, which was to verify, on a case-by-case basis, "the subjective condition of disadvantage" of the person concerned. Only after verification by the Social Services can the Registry Office take over jurisdiction of the procedure for issuing a registered address.

Dialogue with the institutions and the census

Following the Resolution, Cittadini del Mondo facilitated a dialogue between the town hall of the 7th Municipal District (formerly the 10th) and the occupants of Palazzo Selam, represented by the Committee. Right from the start, great difficulties emerged on both sides. The inhabitants of the building found it hard to understand the steps necessary to obtain a new registered residence, and from public service employees were unable to cope with the high number of applications presented.
The Municipality, represented by the President, the Councillor for Social Policies and the Directors of the Public Registry Office and the Social Secretariat, proved extremely collaborative, responding willingly to requests to find a solution to make the procedures as streamlined and transparent as possible. These

[3] The address takes its name from Modesta Valenti, a homeless woman who died in 1983 due to the lack of medical assistance from an ambulance.

negotiations led to exemplary synergy between service users, private social organisations and institutions, with the structuring of an action plan composed of three phases:

- A census of the inhabitants of the building. In order to verify their status regarding registration with the registry office and the validity of their identity papers. Cittadini del Mondo's operators and the building Committee undertook to collect the relevant data on the occupants of the building, a task that at the time of going to press (January 2018), was almost complete.
- Scheduling of appointments. On the basis of the data collected, it was possible to draw up a schedule of appointments agreed with representatives from the Registry Office and the Social Secretariat, thus on the one hand avoiding confusion about the procedure, and on the other preventing the build-up of a backlog in terms of access to services.
- Updates to and monitoring of the schedule taking into consideration specific circumstances. Some occupants are temporarily away on seasonal work, and others initially had difficulties in obtaining letters from the associations through which they had previously acquired fictitious residences. Operators from Cittadini del Mondo and Committee members check up on the progress of the procedure on a daily basis. Once again we must stress that each phase of this process has been carried out in a climate of close collaboration and dialogue among the three parties involved. The public institutions have shown an unprecedented degree of interest in the issue; the members of the Committee have been working tirelessly to ensure that each of the inhabitants is informed and advised in the best possible way, and they have played a fundamental role in mediation processes, personally accompanying groups of applicants requesting registration of their official residence to the registry office of the municipal town hall; the volunteers from Cittadini del Mondo have put all their energy and resources into streamlining the work involved in the procedure, making the circulation of information possible, intervening on critical issues and making sure that the individual steps in the procedure are completed successfully.

(Some) On-going Problems

The collaboration that has developed between Cittadini del Mondo, the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam and the town hall of the 7th District of Rome following the Resolution is certainly not the definitive solution to the problem of registered residences for the inhabitants of the building. Other obstacles have emerged, such as that of traceability,[4] which leads some public institutions and authorities to refuse to recognise the address at "Via Modesta Valenti" as legitimate.

The situation is also aggravated by lack of communication between the Immigration Office of the *Questura* [police headquarters] of Rome and the municipal offices. This affects, for example, the many cases of people who requesting renewal of their residence permits after the expiry date of the previous permit: the *Questura* requires that these individuals provide them with an officially registered address, but municipalities are unable to assign addresses in the absence of a valid document (residence permit); such applicants are thus trapped in a bureaucratic catch-22 situation. Once again, the means by which individuals can extricate themselves from such a bureaucratic jungle and remedy institutional shortcomings is to turn to associations that offer social guidance or free legal advice.

In addition, and despite the fact that individual employees may be motivated by the best of intentions, the staff of the social secretariats of the various municipalities found themselves, struggling to deal – especially during this first phase of the implementation of the Resolution - with an unprecedented influx of users, and often had not received adequate instruction in dealing with specific issues, such as those experienced by beneficiaries of international protection status. Such problems derive directly from the fact that resolution was not designed to cope with the peculiarities of the issue in question. Following the Resolution, the Cittadini del Mondo Association took care to point out to the appropriate authorities of the Municipality in which it operates, the 7th District, the fact that the text does not mention categories such as those in

[4] Here "traceability" means the possibility of tracing the person back to the address indicated. Naturally, the fictitious residence at the address on "via Modesta Valenti" does not correspond to a real place, and therefore, does not guarantee the traceability of the individual.

possession of international protection status, people who have needs different from those of other types of homeless people; one of these is the fundamental problem that renewal of papers is so closely linked to the registration of an official address with the Public Registry Office.
Moreover, the Resolution was not accompanied by adequate support in relation to staffing issues at municipalities, or by adequate professional training. As a result we find disparities among the various municipalities both in terms of what is required for its implementation and regarding the procedures to be carried out. To date, more than a year after the publication of the Resolution, the procedures for change of residence have not been drawn up and certain parts of the process have not yet been made clear.

In conclusion

The collaboration between Cittadini del Mondo, the town hall of the 7th District of Rome and the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam is, in the opinion of those who have worked to make it possible, an example of reciprocal dedication and dialogue between public institutions, citizens and private social organisations. It required a lot of hard work and commitment on all sides to make it succeed, and it certainly does not represent a definitive solution; the process of updating procedures is still underway, and consists largely of an exhausting succession of setbacks followed by resolution of setbacks. This dialogue, moreover, was created in a context in which relationships between the public institutions and the inhabitants were particularly difficult, where there is a strong sense of distrust on the part of the inhabitants (the problems of Palazzo Selam are numerous and acknowledgement and support from the institutions have been rare in the past) and where, on the part of the institutions, one seems to detect a sense of impotence.
This collaboration is, moreover, just one example of good local practice within a broader landscape that continues to be characterised by disparity and an inability on the part of the institutions to deal with situations of special vulnerability as regards citizenship.
The policies implemented by the Italian Ministry of the Interior continue to leave the process of integrating refugees blocked at the initial reception phase, and are unresponsive to the extreme difficulties these people meet with in their attempts to provide themselves with a legitimate and permanent housing solution, difficulties both economic and deriving from distrust - widespread in Italy - of renting to foreigners. Given this premise, the very concept of virtual residence still represents an insurmountable obstacle to real integration. In the particular case of beneficiaries of international protection status, having to resort to a fictitious residence merely highlights the weaknesses of a failed reception system, a system unable to cope with precarious housing issues or protect the fundamental rights that this status should guarantee. From this perspective, the practice of virtual residences legitimises the existence of situations such as those found at Palazzo Selam and other occupied buildings in the Lazio region, which are emblematic of this failure.

Section 2: Cittadini del Mondo's healthcare service desk

Introduction to the section related to the healthcare service desk

Cittadini del Mondo's healthcare desk, which has always operated in parallel to and in close collaboration with the social services desk, is another mainstay of the Association's work at Palazzo Selam. Since 2006 it has been open to the inhabitants of Selam **every Thursday evening.**

The goal of the healthcare service desk is to assist its most vulnerable users, those who cannot or are unable to access public health services, and trying, whenever possible, to rebuild connections between these services and our users. As described in other sections of this report, the majority of the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam have been recognised as having the right to some form of international or humanitarian protection status. They therefore belong to the category of foreign nationals eligible for free registration with the National Health System, and in theory can access public health services in the same way as any Italian citizen. In practice, however, registration is dependent on certain bureaucratic requirements, such as a valid residence permit or the possession of an officially registered residence. The work carried out by the healthcare service desk, therefore, often **runs parallel to that of the social services desk**: the two work together on both fronts to remove barriers to access to public health services and to take action on the causes and consequences of illnesses.

Once barriers to registration with the National Health System have been removed, the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam can choose a general practitioner, and often choose Dr D'Angelo, President of the Association and volunteer doctor at the healthcare desk, through which over time, they have formed a relationship based on trust. Their health issues are therefore, usually addressed at her general practice surgery, while they often continue to be supported by the social services desk at Palazzo Selam. For this reason the present report includes healthcare data related to the inhabitants of Selam but which has been collected at Dr D'Angelo's general practice surgery.

As stated in the previous report, in our experience the factor that has the most significant effect on the genesis and exacerbation of illnesses affecting the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam is not biological but by the so-called "**social determinants of health**". As is well known, these consist of all those determinants (political, cultural, availability of resources, employment status, level of education, housing conditions, etc.) which cause uneven distribution of states of health and illness in the population and cause it to persist. In practical terms, the social determinants of health are the theoretical equivalents of the simple concept that "those who are poor are worse off than those who are rich". As is evident from the stories and the data reported below, the illnesses and problems Cittadini del Mondo's service users bring to us are not very different from those encountered in any general practice medical surgery. What is really different, however, is the individual's ability to confront and resolve these issues, given, for example, their lack of financial means, their inability to comprehend what a healthcare employee is saying and the impossibility of accessing health services and obtaining treatment in time and on an ongoing basis. What is different is the way in which health issues that are not addressed become exacerbated and start to fester, leading, in turn, to a worsening of the individual's social condition, and setting off a continuous vicious circle.

We have chosen to let the people affected by these and other issues speak for themselves; from their stories it will be evident why our work is needed.

The Story of Stachys

Stachys is a young Ethiopian woman who has lived in Palazzo Selam for 10 years, and has been living in Italy even longer. In April 2016, she was two months pregnant; during an awareness-raising day about arterial hypertension organised by Cittadini del Mondo, her blood pressure happened to be checked. Her systolic pressure – the "maximum pressure" – fluctuated between 170 and 190. **Hypertension during pregnancy** can become extremely dangerous, and the volunteers were alarmed; Cittadini del Mondo's doctors tried to find out more about her personal history and they discovered that Stachys had previously had a miscarriage.

From that moment on, CdM's team began their attempt to grant Stachys access to a public healthcare programme for **at-risk pregnancies**. Despite contacting the institutions in question and accompanying Stachys to healthcare service centres, and despite the fact that Stachys began to experience minor blood loss, the attempt failed. She was admitted to the gynaecology department at a large Roman hospital for a check-up and there she was prescribed ultrasounds to check her condition, but no specific appointment was set for them. Her blood pressure continued to be high and, despite the specifics of the case in question – a pregnant woman, a previous history of miscarriage, in precarious social and economic conditions – CdM's doctor was forced to begin antihypertensive treatment on Stachys herself.

Thanks to the treatment, the alarm caused by Stachys' hypertension seemed to have passed, but a few months later, she developed **gestational diabetes** – this condition is also especially dangerous for women during pregnancy and is often associated with the condition of arterial hypertension. In the meantime, Stachys' family condition declined; her partner left her to start looking for a job, without assuring her he would acknowledge the little girl as his own.

Stachys continued to have difficulty in being admitted to a specialised prenatal care programme, difficulties due on the one hand to **linguistic and cultural barriers, on the other** to the inability of the public healthcare services to take her under their care. Stachys, like many of the patients that CdM's doctors meet, is a "difficult" patient for public service institutions. She has greater difficulty in expressing herself and making herself understood, thus demanding more time and attention; and furthermore, an approach devised with the "average" Italian patient in mind, a patient who is more familiar with concepts of illness, diagnosis, prevention, treatment, follow-up, as well as GP referrals, booking medical examinations, *ticket* [fee for medical appointments or prescription charges, translators note], the *CUP* [the central, online booking centre for medical appointments, translators note], head nurses and so on. – may not be enough to ensure so-called "compliance".

Nevertheless, and albeit with ultrasound scans booked at the last minute and with CdM workers hastily accompanying her for routine examinations, Stachys' pregnancy proceeded smoothly, and she gave birth to a beautiful and healthy baby girl.

By the time of going to press, her blood sugar levels had stabilised, but her hypertension had not been resolves. From time to time Stachys' doctor has to give her a prod, measure her blood pressure for her and remind her of the importance of continuous treatment. CdM operators frequently encounter problems with the **management of chronic illness**; many patients consider an illness to be a "momentary" event that regresses after treatment, so that a given therapy can be suspended once blood pressure, blood glucose or lipid levels have returned to normal.

Despite the numerous problems experienced by Stachys - as a refugee, as a single woman with a small child, living in precarious housing conditions and with a partner that is almost always working away – she and her daughter continue to face up to daily life, supported as much as possible by CdM volunteers and their friends at Selam, who in any case make them feel at home.

The story of many male workers

Most of the men who live at Selam make their living from casual labour. Those who **work in "logistics"** can be considered a separate group: warehouse workers and hauliers on behalf of transport agencies, factories, airports, shops and the like. They often sleep by day and work at night, and the volunteers of the Cittadini del Mondo Association see them heading off to work when they open their evening service desk. They tell them about harsh working conditions, tensions, about the fact that their rights are often infringed upon. Their plight is reminiscent of foreign workers in the north of Italy whose strikes are reported by the media, or the farm workers in the south, yet despite being just a stone's throw from the capital, their situation remains unknown to most people.

Among these young workers **musculoskeletal disorders** are extremely common, especially in the area of the spine; even more so among those who live in Palazzo Selam, who, in some cases, are sleeping on mattresses without a bed base, on damaged beds or makeshift bedding that would cause anyone to have back pain. Some of them speak of problems that had already arisen during childhood and adolescence in their home country; postural problems at a young age usually relate to osteoarticular lesions, such as scoliosis, kyphosis, flatfoot or malocclusion (temporomandibular joint dysfunction). As these conditions do not relate to the musculature, which is still plastic and adaptable, many of these issues do not develop into serious problems for adults with adequate treatment. For a worker in the logistics sector, musculoskeletal problems, ranging from lower back pain right up to a herniated disk, are extremely debilitating and difficult to deal with. They make it much harder to work, which in turn worsens the symptoms and the underlying pathology; on the other hand, however, it is difficult to be absent from work due to illness in certain contexts. The employer has no interest in keeping an employee who is often absent; the **precariousness of contracts** makes workers even more vulnerable. Naturally, this situation is also true for Italian workers, but it can be worsened by the loneliness and poor social integration that affects the patients of Cittadini del Mondo; not to mention the fact that foreigners who have residence permits conditional on work are easily blackmailed.

A warehouse worker suffering from a disorder of the spine presents a doctor with a serious challenge. The most obvious recommendations, such as that the patient "change jobs" or "get some rest", are rarely heeded. Doctors try to alleviate the condition by means of anti-inflammatory medication and sick leave certificates, and prescribe tests and examinations of which they often never see the results. They try to refer the patient to a physiotherapist, and look for *ticket* exemptions [reductions in the cost of medical examinations or medication, translator's note], and explain which movements to avoid when moving heavy loads. Many patients get into the bad habit of constantly requesting medical certificates for sick leave. In proportion to the time and effort put in by doctors and volunteers, the results are generally meagre. Sometimes a gym is suggested as a possible solution, but this advice is almost never followed, mainly because of the cost. Finally, doctors sometimes recommend swimming, a suggestion generally accepted by Italians but to which many of our patients have given a reply that leaves us with a bitter taste in the mouth: "…I've had more than enough of water".

The Story of Agapanthus

Agapanthus is a 49-year-old Eritrean man who lived in the squat on via Curtatone near Piazza Indipendenza from the time it was occupied, in 2013, until it was cleared in 2017. The Cittadini del Mondo Association occasionally offers him support with bureaucratic problems, and continuously with his severe health issues. Agapanthus suffers from diabetes mellitus, arterial hypertension and dyslipidemia with a constantly unhealthy cholesterol balance, pathologies that have led to serious complications. Since 2012 he has suffered from chronic renal insufficiency, for which he undergoes dialysis. As is well known, dialysis, is a very arduous therapy requiring three sessions per week in a specialised medical centre where the patient must stay for several hours while the blood is cleaned of the toxic substances that are no longer being eliminated by kidney filtration, as they would normally. This treatment must be accompanied by changes in eating habits and it onerous from a physical point of view. For a patient without work or family to give support, does not speak Italian and is without a home suitable for one in his condition, it is even more complicated.

In 2015 Agapanthus's invalidity status was recognised, and he began to receive an invalidity allowance. This small sum, along with some cleaning work he managed to find and the fact that he pays no rent or utilities, allowed him to live reasonably well for a few years. Things improved and as his test results and clinical conditions tended to stabilise there was even talk of a possible kidney transplant.

But when the building on via Curtatone was cleared in the summer of 2017 the lives of many beneficiaries of international protection status, including Agapanthus, most vulnerable of the vulnerable, were totally disrupted. While his housemates were simply left to their own resources and forced to find hospitality at various locations around Rome, Agapanthus' particular physical condition made it possible for him to be transferred to a reception centre on the outskirts of the city. This, however, was considered only temporary; for him, as for many others, there was no specific plan of action, and after a few months, the centre scheduled his departure. Given the context, Agapanthus may be considered one of the "lucky ones": his small monthly cheque, though insufficient to cover the cost of his basic essentials, rent and medical treatments, is considered a tidy sum compared to what his housemates received, namely nothing.

The vicissitudes to which Agapanthus has been subject have clearly had an impact on his health, and it has become much more difficult to correct his blood glucose and blood pressure levels. He has again lost the physical characteristics needed for him to be placed on the waiting list for a kidney transplant, his precarious social condition and the fact that his most pressing medical issues must first be dealt with on a daily basis prevent him being considered for the moment. As asked to by the centre, , he is looking for a home in the hope that the social welfare institutions will help him pay for utilities, but this search has been ongoing for months now and there are no glimmers of hope on the horizon. His Italian is improving, he has many friends and we continue to support him in his plight.

The Story of Azalea

"She's a bit confused", "she's unreliable", these are the words that stand out when reading the reports made by volunteers from Cittadini del Mondo during their first meetings with Azalea, in 2014. As one continues to peruse, there are a number of references to her "not showing up for the appointment" written in red ink, alternating with detailed reports in black that describe the succession of bureaucratic problems that Azalea and the volunteers of Cittadini del Mondo have had to face. Issues that are evidently accentuated by what at first, from a cursory reading, might seem to be the woman's "absent-mindedness" but which in the end turn out to be clear manifestations of serious psychiatric distress.

Over time, Azalea, a 40-year-old Ethiopian woman, has turned to the Cittadini del Mondo service desk for a number of reasons, mostly linked to social welfare issues. Firstly, due to an unclearly motivated dismissal from her job, coupled with delays on her employer's part in paying arrears and a failure to receive severance pay. After that, problems arose with her residency status, something which is common to many of our users. Azalea had a "fictitious address" listed with the town hall and her registered residence paperwork had expired, she was therefore unable to renew her residence permit for humanitarian protection, which had also expired. Without this paperwork, she could not register with the National Healthcare System either. This impasse lasted for some time until she started having health problems; in order to receive treatment she was forced to obtain an *STP* code [temporarily present foreign citizen in Italian territory], which acts as a substitute for the Italian tax code and with which foreigners without a residence permit can be granted access to certain public health services. Clearly, this was unlawful (Azalea is not temporarily present in Italy, indeed she is a beneficiary of humanitarian protection status, albeit expired!), but what else could have been done to ensure she received adequate care?

Taking on Azalea's case for the volunteers of Cittadini del Mondo meant calling her constantly to remind her of appointments; accompanying her in person to the central police station, the *ASL* [Local Health Authority], the Astalli Centre, INPS [National Social Insurance Agency], the post office and hospitals - and being continually frustrated by the impossibility of communicating with her and figuring out her complex situation. In early 2016, the issue of residency seemed to have been resolved: her residence permit was renewed and she was registered with the National Healthcare System. But it also became clearer that her communication difficulties stemmed partly from severe psychiatric malaise. As a result in the summer of that year, she started following once more a course of therapy with a psychiatrist at San Gallicano hospital, of which we had not been informed previously. She was diagnosed with paranoid delusional syndrome; Azalea has ideas "of reference" (misinterpretations of random events) and of persecution, as well as auditory hallucinations.

Azalea is regularly accompanied and supported by volunteers from Cittadini del Mondo because, as is often the case with psychiatric patients, it is difficult for her to follow a course of treatment consistently. If Azalea stops taking her medication, her psychiatric disorders will gain the upper hand and her physical condition will also worsen. During one of these periods, in the spring of 2017, she began to complain of a general malaise, coughing, dizziness, widespread pains; symptoms that worsened significantly and rapidly until, of her own accord, she went to the Accident and Emergency room of a large hospital in Rome, where she was admitted. The only pathological symptoms found appeared to be caused by "eosinophilic" bronchopneumonia; once the radiological and clinical tests indicated that this had been resolved, she was discharged. However, her symptoms persisted and while her contacts with us become fewer and further between, her visits to A&E became more frequent. She was hospitalised multiple times, with no clear diagnosis, some doctors speculating that her symptoms were psychogenic. In May, she was once again diagnosed with pneumonia, and discharged after two weeks of treatment. However, it was not until August that, after being admitted to hospital yet again, she received a definitive diagnosis: she was HIV positive and her symptoms and pathologies are related to severe immunosuppression. She has interstitial pneumonia, Pneumocystis carinii, a Cytomegalovirus infection with duodenal localisation, duodenal parasites, oral

thrush, latent syphilis, as well as hypovitaminosis aggravated by her psychiatric disorders. Even to a non-medical eye, it was clear that her physical condition was extremely compromised.

As one might imagine, this diagnosis did not mean an end to her story. Rather, it was the beginning of a new chapter, this too full of unexpected events and obstacles. HIV infection requires continuous therapy, which Azalea has found difficult to pursue with consistency; it also requires visits to the doctor, medicines, time and attention. The way the Italian healthcare system is organised provides for patients to be "exempt from the cost of medical care by disease" and "exempt from the cost of medical care by income", but in order to obtain this exemption one must follow clearly defined procedures, retrieve specific documents, make appointments with the employment centre and the Local Health Authorities, all things which are not easy for a person with significant psychiatric problems, such as Azalea.

Azalea has expressed a desire to return to her home country; the volunteers of Cittadini del Mondo have endeavoured to help her take part in the programme of "assisted voluntary return and reintegration" organised by the IOM (International Organisation for Migration). Repatriation, however, is dependent on the possibility of accommodation and settlement in her home country, but her relatives, who were initially open to the idea, backed out once they fully understood her health conditions. To live with a family member suffering from psychiatric disorders and chronic diseases (such as HIV) requires significant financial, practical and emotional commitment, and would also require strong support from local health services; these requirements can be even more difficult to satisfy in so-called "developing countries".

What we believe important to highlight in this story is that we realised that at a certain point the patient's medical history and her treatment had skipped fundamental steps not only in terms of medical practice, but also as regards human contact. We knew nothing about her, about her past, nothing that could clarify to us how she ended up with the pathologies affecting her and, above all, we did not know – and it is unlikely that we will ever know – whether her psychiatric disorder started before or after her somatic problems. Immunodepression is extremely widespread in Africa and more importantly, it often goes untreated, but what emerges from this story is that in Italy the same mistakes are easily made too. Azalea now lives in Selam, her world is Selam, her family members are the inhabitants of Selam and we too are her new friends.

The Story of Anthurium

There are several similarities between Azalea's story and Anthurium's story, which will be told here. In this case, too, the protagonist is a person suffering from **psychiatric disorders**, and, once again, numerous private social organisations have been actively involved. Anthurium, a thirty-five-year-old Eritrean man, is obviously fragile and he has been assisted by **several diverse organisations**, each with a different mandate and programme, many of them overlapping, but which failed to act together so as to find a common solution to his problems, Unfortunately, resulted in getting him access to services provided by the regional or local public healthcare system, which should be the primary source of care when it comes to such serious issues. Anthurium's psychiatric diagnosis is complicated, cumbersome and difficult to understand for those who are not experts in the field: a borderline personality disorder, with an impulse control disorder, alcohol abuse, recurrent paranoid and persecutory delusions, hypochondriac ideations, thought disorder and emotional disintegration. Some of these features are related to so-called "post-traumatic stress disorder": Anthurium was a soldier for five years in Eritrea, a country subject to one of the most ferocious dictatorships of the present day. Even without going into detail on delicate issues concerning the epistemology of psychiatric diagnoses, it would require considerable time and space to explain what this particular diagnosis entails. In the experience of Cittadini del Mondo's healthcare operators, Anthurium is a service user who is difficult to support: he finds it difficult to understand the information he is given – and not just because of the language barrier – and vice versa, he has communication difficulties, he says things that are "incoherent", which our operators find hard to decipher; and even if they succeed in communicating one day, on the next Anthurium will come back and say the same things all over again. He often thinks that the people around him are angry with him, he flies off the handle easily and he is prone to furious outbursts. All this is made worse by his alcohol abuse, loneliness and the social and economic difficulties he experiences. Anthurium is unable to keep a job long. Before arriving at Palazzo Selam he had slept on the streets for several years, so that some of the people from the building took pity on him and often invited him to share a meal with them.

Anthurium has several other health problems. Due to his "hypochondriac ideations", it is difficult for the CdM doctor to distinguish between a psychiatric and a physical pathology. For example, he complains of a strong itch that he scratches intensely, scarring the skin, which then gets infected. The urological problem that has troubled him for a long time could also be linked to his psychiatric problems, but it is very difficult to say. For a doctor trying to reconstruct his long, ramified medical history, it is almost impossible to find a way through the jungle of symptoms he complains of, his accounts of specialist examinations, paperwork and medical reports which seem to say everything and the opposite of everything.

In 2015, Anthurium began applications to **allow his wife and daughter to join him**. Situations like these are extremely delicate; some associations believe that it is not a good idea to encourage patients with serious psychiatric disorders to seek family reunification, as this may contribute to a worsening of the economic, social and physical condition of the service user, and also place the relatives who come to join them in difficult situations. Cittadini del Mondo remains steadfast in upholding their users' rights to self-determination, and has never intended to take over decisions that relate to the emotional-relational sphere. We also believe that reunification can lead to an improvement in the lives of its service users by fostering personal fulfilment and strengthening emotional connections. CdM volunteers therefore devoted considerable time and energy to helping Anthurium with the procedure, dealing with bureaucratic obstacles – the embassies of Eritrea, Uganda and Kenya were all involved in the case – and the problem related to the fact that he has no registered address or place to live.

After more than a year the process reached its conclusion: Anthurium's wife and daughter were to come told Italy. Time passed, and there was no more news of the pair; CdM operators speculated that, faced with Anthurium's seriously Impaired psychiatric condition, the woman had chosen to distance herself from him. At the same time they tried to help him with an application for a **civil invalidity allowance** on health grounds.

After an initial period in which the seriousness of Anthurium's condition was underestimated and after a long bureaucratic rigmarole lasting more than a year, he managed to obtain recognition of the level of invalidity needed to get the allowance. However, in order for this to be issued, he needed his wife's tax code, and she was nowhere to be found. After these two huge human and economic losses, Anthurium's mental health condition deteriorated. Then he told us that he had been in touch with his wife and that the problem with the tax code could be resolved. In early 2017, he arrived at the service desk with a head wound – it was not the first time that he had been severely beaten – some of the inhabitants of the building had reported him drunk on a daily basis. Sometime later he lost all his documents. After a while, Anthurium no longer came to the service desk and was unreachable. A few months ago, CdM workers learned that he had been in jail since June 2017. He seems to be receiving adequate psychiatric care, although he has complained about not being treated for his urological problems. It was thanks to other organisations that, in various capacities, work with prisoners and who contacted our volunteers that they came to know about Anthurium, who had told them that he was being supported by CdM. The Association also established a direct channel of communication with Anthurium's court-appointed barrister to follow his progress during his trial; latest update received leaves some hope that the appeal hearing, to be held on 13 June, may lead to his release from jail. The barrister has also shown great willingness to help Anthurium to overcome the obstacle of his wife's tax code and reopen the procedure for obtaining and invalidity allowance.

What we now hope for is that Anthurium will be accepted into a social inclusion programme set up with the help of the various organisations that have taken an interest in his case so far, so that release from prison will not mark the beginning of an inevitable going in and out of jail, but a real possibility for change. However, we cannot but remark that the time he has spent in jail was the end result – although hopefully not a long-lasting one – of a situation which, had it been dealt with earlier, could have been avoided. Monitoring psychiatric patients can present difficulties, difficulties which for beneficiaries of international protection status often become insurmountable. Constant administration of psychiatric medication and appropriate psychological support to reduce substance abuse would, in our opinion, have saved Anthurium from ending up in jail. As we wait for him to come out of prison, we would like to remember Anthurium as he was when he attended Italian-with-music classes in our Library. The workshop, did not last very long, but it was very enjoyable and helpful. As we sang together, his "bizarre" laughter and "inappropriate" behaviour blended in with the sound of the music, and we all had a great time.

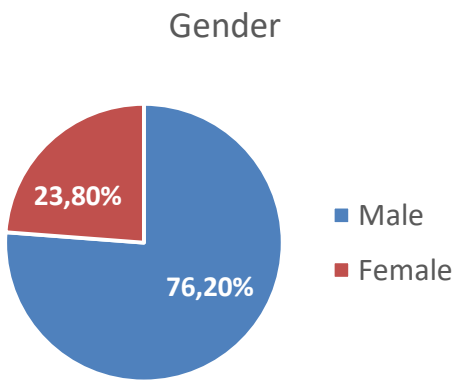
Data related to the healthcare service desk

The following data relates to the health issues encountered by Cittadini del Mondo's service users and addressed by volunteer doctors mainly during the weekly operations of the healthcare service desk at Palazzo Selam or at the **general practice medical surgery** of Dr Donatella D'Angelo, President of the association (see chart: "Site of first admission") between 2013 and February 2018.

Only data relating to users who live, or have lived, continuously or temporarily, at Palazzo Selam have been taken into account. This includes so-called "transients", i.e. those individuals who, after their arrival in Italy, chose not to apply for international protection in Italy but to continue their journey to another European country.

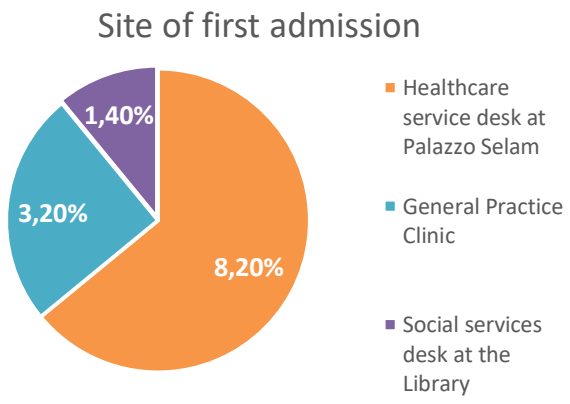
Of the 558 clients that have been supported by the association to date, **341 (61%) reported at least one health issue as the reason why they turned to the services offered by Cittadini del Mondo.**

112 patients (31% of patients who accessed our services for health reasons), were not registered with the public healthcare system when they first accessed our services. This figure is highly indicative of both the difficulties encountered by our service users in trying to unravel the complexities of the Italian social system, and of the failure of the reception system. Impeded from accessing services offered by the National Health System (NHS), people who have been granted international protection status (as is the case with most of the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam) and who develop health problem are often forced to turn to private social organisation. Reason for non-registration with the NHS can be tied to lack of knowledge of how these services operate in Italy; more often, it is related to bureaucratic issues, such as not having a valid registered address or the failure to renew a residence permit. In both cases, however, the individual's right to healthcare is adversely affected, and this represents a significant public health issue.



201 patients (59% of patients who accessed our services for health reasons) first accessed Cittadini del Mondo's healthcare services in or after 2014, when the previous report on the work carried out by Cittadini del Mondo was published.

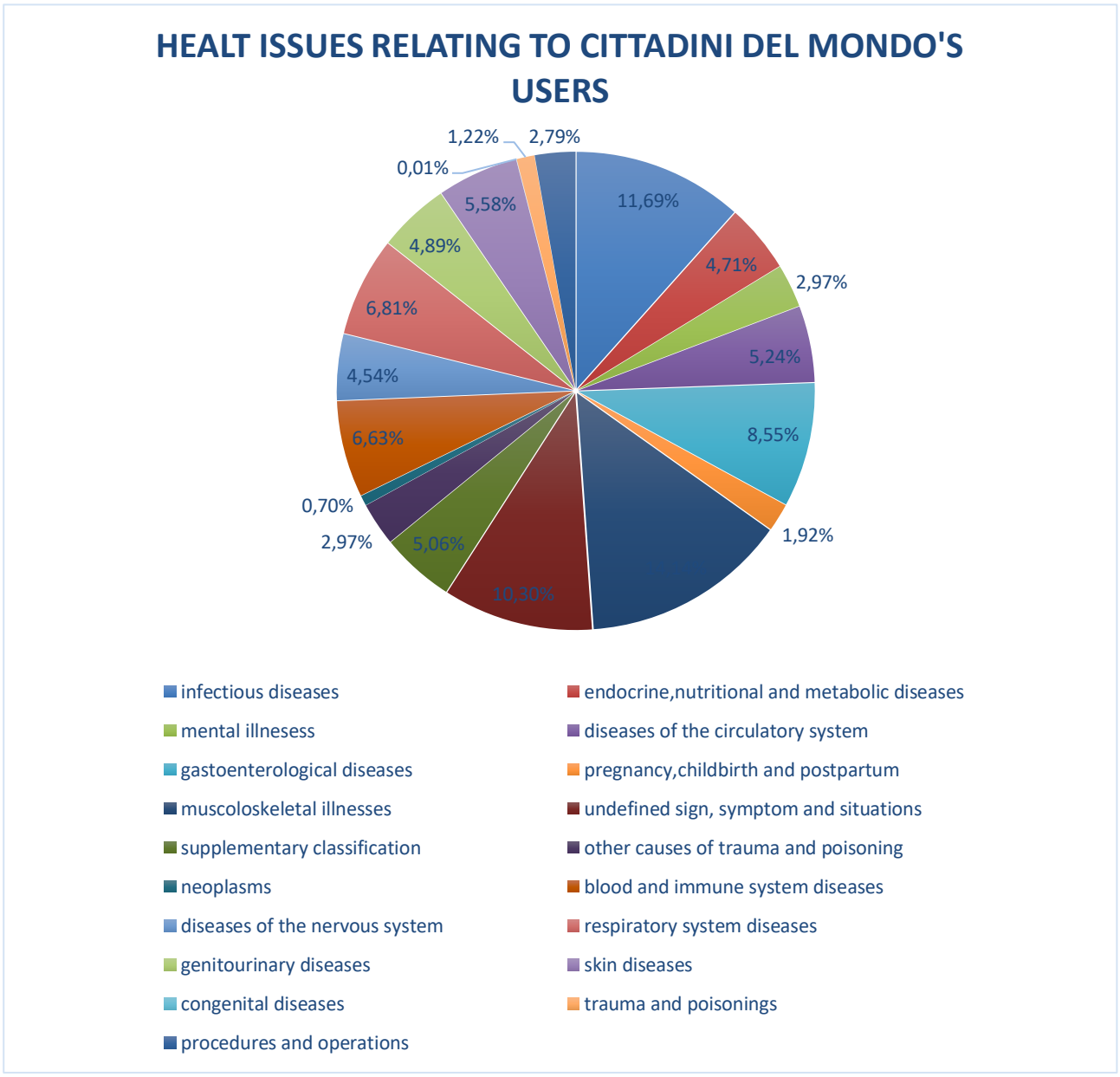
Most of the people (84% of the patients about whom the data in question was collected) who availed themselves of Cittadini del Mondo's services for health reasons turned to the healthcare desk at Palazzo Selam as their first point of access; admission to the general practice medical surgery , is likely to take place only after this first visit to the healthcare service desk, when the user has already received information regarding registration with the public healthcare system or when, after contact with the healthcare service desk, they have overcome bureaucratic issues impeding their registration.



155 patients (45% of the users who accessed our services for health reasons and 27% of all users) reported more than one health issue. In total, we encountered 573 different health problems; these have been classified through the use of the ICD9-CM system.

As shown in the pie chart, the health problems that led users to avail themselves of Cittadini del Mondo's

services are related in a fairly uniform manner to various systems and apparatuses. The largest number of problems (14%) relate to the musculoskeletal system; half of them are due to unspecified pains (or, at least, to pain whose cause could not be determined during medical examination), while the other half are related to actual pathological changes (e.g., changes in the curvature of the spine or diseases of the intervertebral disc). Musculoskeletal disorders are a particularly debilitating problem for workers (see "The story of many male workers").



Another large category (12%) consists of **infectious and parasitic diseases**. It is important to bear in mind that almost half (45% of infectious diseases, 5% of all problems) of all such cases were due to **scabies**, a dermatological disease caused by a parasite, one which is easily treatable (when treatment is available) without sequelae, and which is often found in overcrowded and poor housing conditions. Almost all of the "scabies problems" were reported by "transient" service users, who did not permanently reside in the building. "**Transients**", who were particularly numerous in Palazzo Selam in 2013 and 2014, faced very harsh living conditions in Rome; they were accommodated within the building in the underground garage, where they slept on makeshift bedding, and in most cases, had no resources whatsoever. They consisted mostly of young men who were, generally speaking, in good health, albeit exhausted as a result of the difficult journey they had undergone faced; they requested assistance from Cittadini del Mondo's healthcare service desk primarily for issues related to scabies, fatigue, malnutrition and stress.

In addition to scabies, within the category of infectious diseases fungal skin diseases stand out (24% of infectious diseases). 10 instances of this kind (in this case, corresponding to 10 different patients) have been traced back to **tuberculosis**. In 4 cases, these were atypical forms (osseous, lymph-nodal, digestive-tract). In several cases, the volunteers of Cittadini del Mondo experienced difficulties in helping patients obtain access to **integrated treatment programmes for tuberculosis**, especially for the atypical forms, for which the exemption from medical fees is more limited than it is for pulmonary tuberculosis. It is also worth mentioning the problems associated with the use of **vitamin B complex**, which is fundamental preventing the neurological side effects frequently associated with antituberculosis therapy, and which is not covered by the exemption for treatment of tubercular diseases.

Other categories of problems that were frequently encountered were related to "ill-defined signs and symptoms" (10%, including ailments such as cough and fever, or symptoms that at the time of medical examination were not possible to trace to a specific illness) and **gastroenterological illnesses** (8.6%). The latter includes **dental diseases** (42% of gastroenterological diseases, 4% of total illnesses), which are often particularly incapacitating for Cittadini del Mondo's service users (and for all those who find themselves in financial difficulties) since they are not covered the free of charge National Health System. Within this category, there were also frequent occurrences (30% of gastroenterological disorders) of stomach disorders (gastritis, dyspepsia, ulcers), often due to stress or irregular eating patterns (frequent fasting because of very long shifts, or lack of resources, compounded by the absence of a family network to eat meals with and by the choice of fatty foods or carbonated drinks).

This summary description of our access data can certainly be considered an important starting point for understanding the health problems reported by Cittadini del Mondo's service users, but is not enough to understand their significance. Certain diseases, though less frequent than others, are particularly difficult for our patients to deal with and can become debilitating. Chronic diseases, for example, that require constant treatment and care, things that are often impossible in precarious conditions; this is also true of mental health issues, which are almost impossible to resolve without emotional, economic and social stability. These conditions can easily become deep-rooted and lead to further deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of the individual. All these aspects cannot be explained by the data alone, which is why we decided to let these issues emerge from our users' stories themselves.

One last story...

Cittadini del Mondo's appointment at Selam: every Thursday, from seven to ten, since 2006

We were first called to Palazzo Selam in 2006 for a medical emergency. The city council, then under the direction of Mayor Veltroni, "relocated" many beneficiaries of international protection status to two floors of the building at Romanina; they had been protesting for two weeks, sleeping in tents at the Campidoglio. A woman who was nine-months pregnant, with two small children, had fainted. That was the first time we set foot in Selam and it was then that our weekly visits started. For a long time, we would receive patients in the courtyard outside the building, the inhabitants would come downstairs to see us and others would come to chat while we worked. We checked x-rays, tended to wounds, performed medical examinations outdoors, without gloves or privacy, in situations that were sometimes surreal. Gradually, the inhabitants of the building opened up their homes, their sinks, their kitchens, their sofas and their spaces to us. It was a slow, gradual process that led to friendship, collaboration, trust, quarrels, laughs and much more. In the courtyard, someone provided us with a chair, a small table, then we moved into the hallway and here we spent many other Thursdays. The "hallway" was, in fact, the main entrance of the building, which had the great advantage of making our presence visible to all the inhabitants, but it was fully exposed to the wind and very cold, very inhospitable. More and more often, some of the inhabitants would help us with those crazy conversations. Four or five languages were mixed together and it often seemed like we were playing a game of Chinese whispers! As doctors, we learnt to intuitively recognise the signs and symptoms of disease from looks and expressions, from pure semiotics. Words themselves were often not a possible language of communication and we had to rely on other ways to make a diagnosis. For the last few years, we have had

the consistent assistance of two cultural mediators who help us to understand our patients.

After some time, the Association decided, after much deliberation, that we should open the service desk on a weekly basis, in the evening. This decision was made after months of observing that it was only after 8 p.m. that most of the inhabitants of the building came home. While we met with the inhabitants, we collected their stories and understood more about how many of them spent an average day. They would leave in the morning to look for work, to submit paperwork, to eat – migrating from one soup kitchen to the next in Rome – and, in the evening, they would return home on the only bus available in the area. We thought it would be nice for them to find someone who could welcome them home in some way and to whom they could communicate their difficulties.

Our work at Selam has always been marked by moments when a lot of people suddenly show up at the service desk in waves. For this reason, the closing time of the service desk is variable and depends on the circumstances of each day. All too often, we find ourselves, at a certain point in the evening, being forced to stop receiving patients and end up having to close the desk and leave. We were decked out in coats, gloves, hats and heavy boots for years as we saw patients. Our feet were always the first thing to freeze. Our source of light came from the small, dim light bulbs we managed to find, which flickered on and off, and we often had to work by candlelight. To solve this problem, we experimented with various types of electrical connections, with exposed wires, often handled with bare hands, which gave us our first electric shocks, until we received a generator as a gift.

At some point, the "office" was opened, a small room that we shared for years with the management committee of the building. We received patients surrounded by cans of paint, bags of cement and piles of paperwork in a small, indoor storeroom, but which was nevertheless located at the entrance of the building. The building has many floors and people often called us for home visits, which certainly kept us fit as we climbed up and down the stairs. Now, we have got the inhabitants used to the idea of coming down to see us, which they almost always do. The elevators have not been used since the early months of the building's occupation, especially given the precarious nature of the electricity and lighting and the lack of maintenance. This leads the inhabitants, especially those who have rooms on the seventh or eighth floor, to take supplies, beds, fridges and anything else they need up on foot, staircase after staircase; the worst thing about this situation is that they have to carry hundreds of plastic water bottles up the stairs, because of the impossibility of having drinking water in the building (with the subsequent presence of plastic to recycle).
In 2014, the exorbitant presence of "transients" led the inhabitants of the building to open up the room for "parties" and meetings. This huge space, which also had precarious lighting and meant we were occasionally forced to use the light from our mobile phones, allowed us to have a greater number of doctors and healthcare workers working at the same time. We saw hundreds of people a week, until we decide to violate the "sacred law" of Thursday appointments and, for a time, we went to Selam more than once a week. Every move we made inside the building, every space we occupied and our presence there was carefully considered and evaluated over the years by the representatives of the committee in office at that time, leading to repeated and frequent meetings that were sometimes animated and sometimes placid, depending on the moment. The two years in which the building was a place of reception for thousands of "transients" was a very difficult time for everyone. The tensions caused by the critical circumstances of the moment (and it was not just for a moment, since this lasted for nearly two years) led to internal conflicts between the permanent residents and the "transients", including some serious altercations. Cohabitation, for example, meant having to share the few bathrooms or showers in the building and the increased number of people living in the basements almost brought about the collapse of the building and our association. The help we asked from other healthcare organisations present in the area of Rome had many positive outcomes, but they were hard to manage, especially with the inhabitants of the building. After a few months of crisis, during which we did not visit Selam, our weekly presence resumed its evening schedule, and we ended up with a bigger, cleaner clinic, with more light and even a sink! Things change, but unfortunately the presence of new arrivals, the return of the "Dublinates" who travel incessantly around Europe, and who are almost always sent back to the country of their first arrival as

dictated by European laws, the flight and immigration of the population from the Horn of Africa, which never seems to end, do not allow us to believe that we will be able to bring our intervention at Selam to an end.

Every Thursday we are at Selam and we are never alone.

We continue to exchange information, medicine, laughter, tension, friendship and problems.
Our team, which initially consisted of two people, now employs two doctors, a social worker, an “almost qualified” social worker, two cultural mediators, one who speaks Somali and Arabic and one who speaks Amharic and Tigrinya, and two caseworkers.

In conclusion

The data presented in this report was processed based on the information obtained from the access cards of the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam at Cittadini del Mondo's social and healthcare service desk from 2013 to February 2018. As already highlighted in the previous report, what continues to be a cause for alarm is the fact that the service users who need the support of the association are almost all beneficiaries of international protection status and that a high percentage of them have been living in Italy for a long period of time. This reflects the **crisis of a reception system** that does not provide refugees with the necessary tools to orient themselves within and integrate themselves into the social fabric of Italy. The first obstacle that is created because of this is the inability to communicate and make themselves understood: on the one hand, many reception centres are unable to dedicate a suitable space for Italian language learning, which unfortunately represents a black hole within the system and this gap is bridged by the efforts of associations and other private social organisations; at the same time, we still observe that the regional public services have not taken steps to facilitate access by immigrants: the absence of linguistic mediation in most public offices makes any form of communication extremely complicated, added to which, there is a lack of training on the part of the public service employees in relation to the particular problems related to immigrants and refugees.
In this context, it is unsurprising that a high percentage of people, who are disappointed by this state of affairs, try to look for opportunities in other European countries, despite being aware, as happens in many cases, of the possibility that they will be repatriated to their first country of arrival due to the **Dublin Regulation**. And in the same way, it is not surprising that for the inhabitants of Selam, the building continues to represent the only community in which they feel truly welcome and understood by people who share not only their provenance or cultural heritage, but also the difficulties they face on a daily basis.

To obviate the problem of being closed off and the ghettoization that this attitude engenders, Cittadini del Mondo, while continuing to ensure its presence inside the building with the social and healthcare service desk every Thursday evening, has dedicated its efforts to **enhancing** the social services desk that is open twice a week within the Intercultural Library which, thanks to the extension of the premises, can now avail of a space that has been made specially available both for the service desk itself and its related back-office activities, which take place during the week The activities of the healthcare services desk have also been enhanced; the presence of a new doctor from the Cittadini del Mondo Association within the general medicine clinic which many of the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam go to (see the section on the healthcare service desk) allows them to receive dedicated assistance throughout the week.
In addition, the library itself, in order to facilitate the integration process of immigrants and refugees, hosts, 5 times a week, free Italian courses, divided into various levels that, in the last year alone, have welcomed more than 100 students of various nationalities, including those of the inhabitants of Palazzo Selam. The library also promotes various types of initiatives to foster meetings and exchanges between different cultures.
Finally, we would like to highlight, as has already been discussed in depth in the chapter dedicated to residency, that the collaboration between **Cittadini del Mondo and the town hall of the 7th Municipal District of Rome** has made it possible to make important advances in the procedure required for the inhabitants of Selam to gain access to regional public services. Now we hope that, once the presence and number of refugees in the region has been acknowledged, policies will be put in place to ensure real integration and that the regional public services will adjust to the new composition of their users, adopting measures that make it possible for everyone to access and avail of these services.

Being aware of the fact that Palazzo Selam is just one of the many, multifaceted and complex organisations which, in the city of Rome, are home to immigrants and refugees, we cannot but extend this hope to each of the municipal districts of the capital, in the hope that Rome City Council will implement a secondary reception plan that is capable of establishing steps towards integration throughout the area of Rome.

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