UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency · Refugees Welcome Italia · CIAC · with the support of otto per mille Istituto Buddista Italiano Soka Gakkai

For more information: www.buddy.unhcr.it

LARISSA AND BENEDETTA

We build welcoming, supportive, **inclusive** *communities.*

Community Matching

Communities and Refugees together for integration

OUTCOMES 2022

2021

Bari, Turin, Rome

18 Oct Beginning the project in Rome, Bari and Turin

21 Nov Starting the first match

2022

more cities join the programme

Palermo, Milan, Naples, Parma

1 Jan Starting the project in Milan and Palermo

1 Feb Devising the Toolkit

18 Feb Adopting the Charter for the integration of refugees

12 Apr Officially launching the programme and the website https://www.buddy.unhcr.it/

20 Jun Releasing the first story for the World Refugee Day

10 Jun first **100** *matches*

1 May Starting the project in Naples

1 Jun Expanding the programme to Ukrainian refugees also in Parma

July Publishing progress report

6 Sep Soka Gakkai interviews Chiara Cardoletti, UNHCR Representative to Italy, the Holy See and San Marino

2023

more cities join the programme

Bergamo, Bologna, Padua

The Programme

The Community Matching programme (CM) was launched by UNHCR, together with CIAC and Refugees Welcome Italia, thanks to the support of the Soka Gakkai Italian Buddhist Institute through 8×1000 funds.

The aim of the CM programme is to support the integration of refugees through the establishment of social relationships between them and volunteers. By pairing refugees and volunteers (***matches***), the programme aims to facilitate the inclusion and active participation of refugees in society, as well as the development of cohesive and supportive communities.
These relationships, characterized by reciprocity, will help to overcome barriers and stereotypes, and will contribute to achieving key outcomes for the integration and quality of life of participants, such as knowledge of the language, access to housing and employment, gaining familiarity with the local context and accessing services, and strengthening one's own sense of safety and belonging.

The CM programme also strives to produce evidence and codify a model to influence public opinion and policy-makers in the development of policies and programmes for the integration of refugees in Italy.
To this end, a Toolkit has been devised providing a methodology, working tools and a set of indicators for institutions and civil society organisations to increasingly disseminate this practice.

Methodology

How does it work?

1 REGISTRATION:
Refugees and prospective volunteers interested in participating in the programme can register by filling in the form at www.buddy.unhcr.it. They will be then contacted by the project team to discuss their expectations and motivations.

2 TRAINING:
Following the first contact call, volunteers who have applied to participate in the programme will be provided simple training to learn more about the Project.

To implement these social inclusion measures, and to facilitate their replicability and scalability, the programme CM has developed, and continues to consolidate, a simple and rigorous methodology summarised in the Community Matching Toolkit.

More specifically, in 2022, a set of indicators was devised drawing on the most advanced academic research[1] to measure the impact of the programme on refugees. This system of indicators will make it possible to detect significant changes between the beginning and the end of the match process, six months later. The key methodological tool is the Individual Territorial Integration Plan (PIIT).

The development of meaningful relationships is crucial to the integration of refugees as it has a positive effect on other domains of the participants' lives: finding jobs and housing, accessing healthcare and safety measures, learning Italian, gaining familiarity with the local context and accessing services.

At the same time, the programme aims at having an impact on local communities as well. Personal and daily interactions will foster more comprehensive social change, sensitizing citizens to the values of solidarity, and respect for rights. These aspects will be investigated in 2023.

3 MATCH:
The project team will assess, together with volunteers or refugees, the match which best meets the expectations and needs of those involved.
Once the match has been formalised, participants will be free to tailor-make their own relationship as they feel appropriate. A match lasts on average 6 months and will be always accompanied by qualified caseworkers.

4 MONITORING & ASSESSMENT:
The project team will support the match relationship and assess the refugee's progress towards autonomy and integration through specific tools and indicators.

[1] *Framework of Integration (Ager &Strang, 2008); Quality of Life model (Shalock, Verdugo & Alonso, 2006); Homeoffice, UK, Indicators of integration framework*

Profiles

Refugees involved in the programme

Refugees hold 41 different nationalities, the main one being Ukrainian (120 people); most are women (55%) and more than half have some form of international protection (60%). 67% are outside the institutional reception system.

Volunteers

The volunteers involved are mainly Italian (93%), although some are also Ukrainian (2%), Malians and Russians (1%). They are mostly women and aged over 40.

SEX

45% men — 55% women

78% women — 22% men

AGE

29% <25 years old — 52% 26-40 years old — 19% 41+ years old

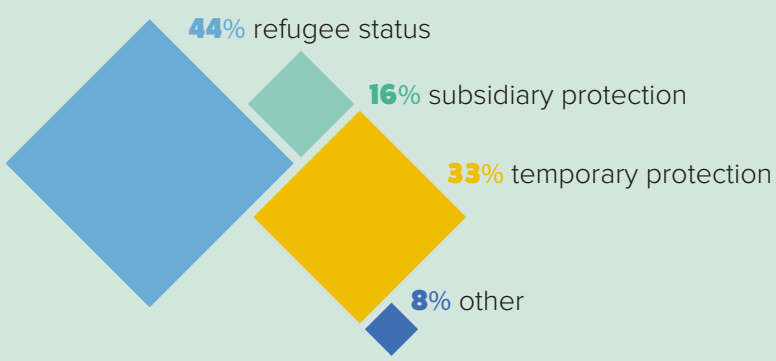
25% <25 years old — 40% 26-40 years old — 49% 41+ years old

NATIONALITY

UKRAINIAN 34%

> *I can say that today Sidi holds a bit of my world in his hands and I have a pinch of his wisdom. And my children know that they have many paths. And that meeting someone is the greatest wealth we have in the world.*
>
> A., VOLUNTEER, ROME

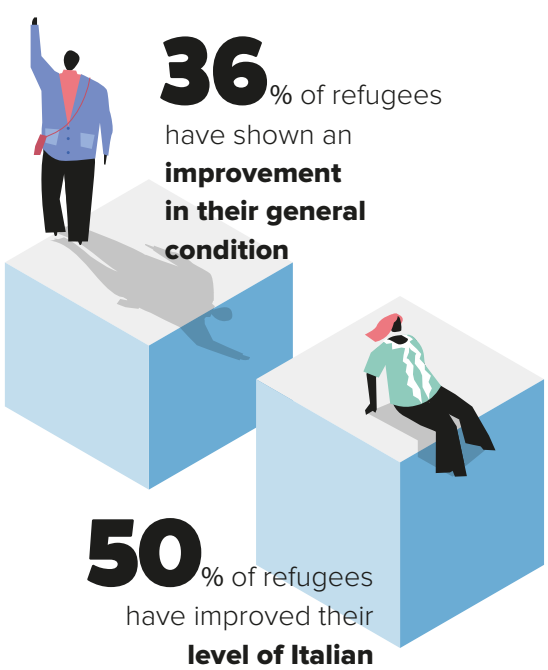
RESIDENCE PERMIT



The programme in numbers

OUTCOMES AT **6 MONTHS**

AFTER THE START OF THE MATCH

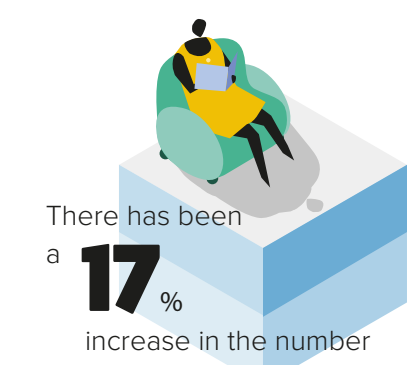


36% of refugees have shown an **improvement in their general condition**

50% of refugees have improved their **level of Italian**

86% of refugees have gained greater **familiarity with the local contexts** and improved their **ability to access services**

There has been a **25**% increase in the number of people with a **work contract** at the end of the project (from 37% to 62%)



There has been a **17**% increase in the number of people with a **house rental agreement** (from 18% to 35%)

Outcomes and impact

Data gathered here refer to a total of 115 cases (32% of the 358 matches initiated), namely the matches activated in the first half of 2022, for which indicators could be measured both at the start of the match and 6 months later.

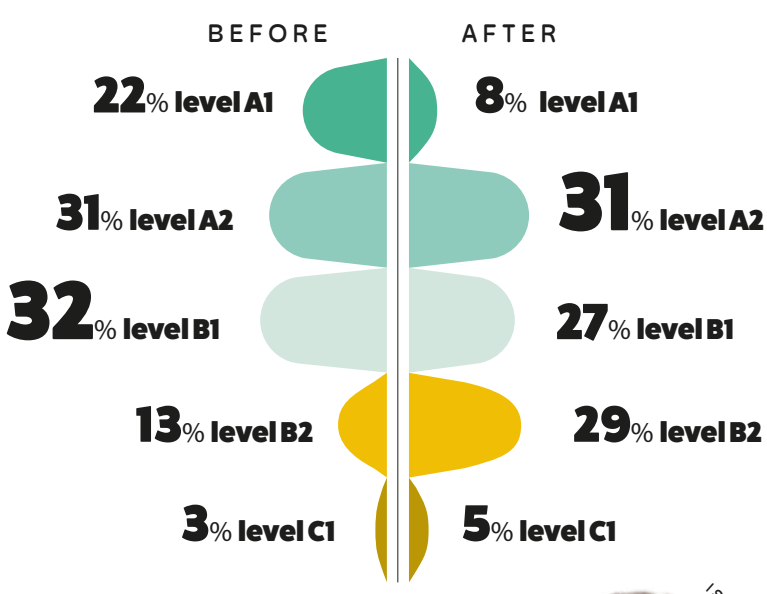
See Stephanie and Cristina's story

There is so much more to the* incredible experiences *shared by the volunteers and refugees involved in the programme than simple numbers: there are* powerful stories *and evidence of* real and meaningful change. *Let's capture them, if only in a few snapshots.

Knowledge of Italian

The refugees' knowledge of Italian is one of the aspects the CM project has had the greatest impact on, as it has provided participants the opportunity to have more frequent and meaningful interactions not only with the volunteer but also with a wider network of Italian people. 50% of the refugees involved have improved their level of Italian. **66% have reached an intermediate/advanced level of Italian at the end of the match.**

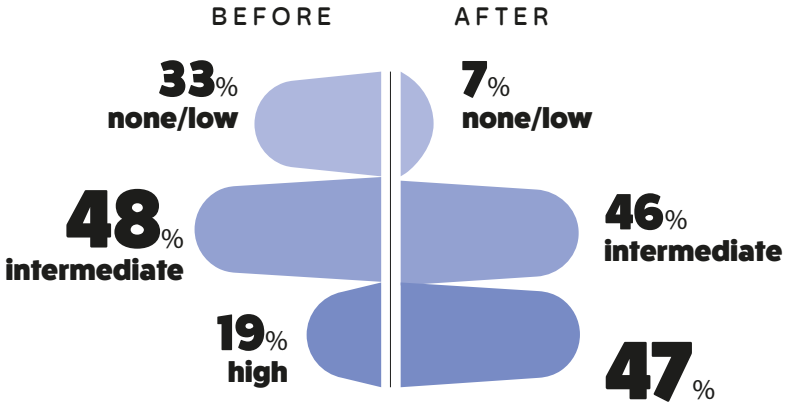
LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE OF ITALIAN

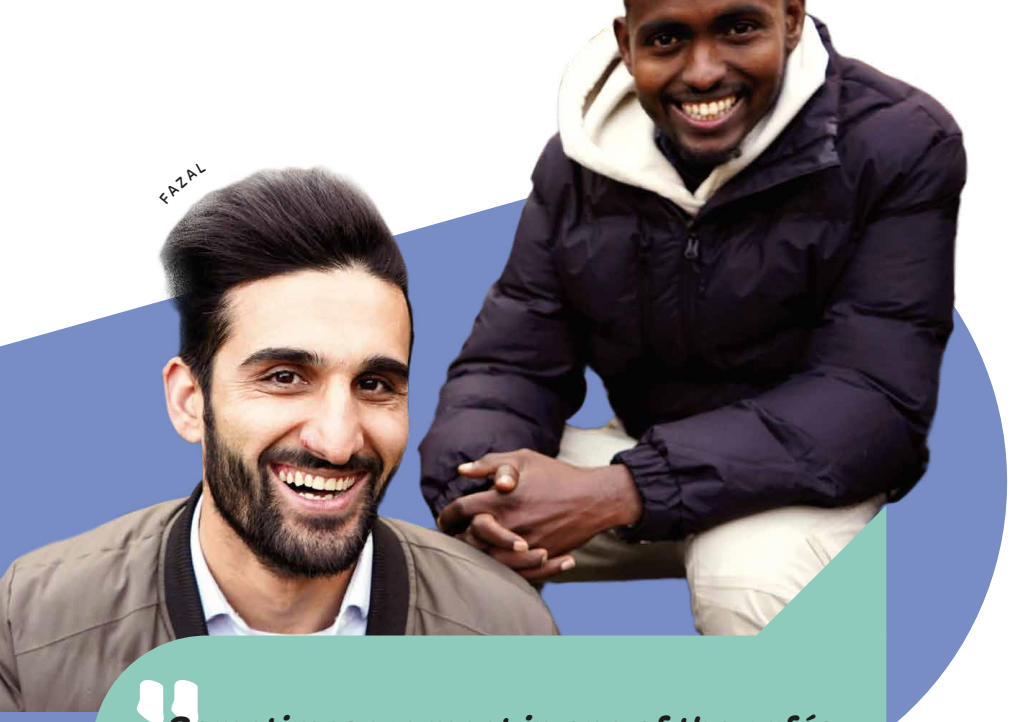


Familiarity with the local context and access to services

This indicator aims to measure knowledge of the main services enabling refugees to enjoy the rights they are entitled to, which however they often struggle to access as they lack knowledge of Italian bureaucracy and public administration, among other things. Net of those who already had great familiarity with local regions (10 out of 10, i.e., knowledge of all useful services, including who to contact to obtain information on general practitioners, Italian courses, residence permit, the ISEE-Indicator of the Equivalent Economic Situation, tax code, etc.), the vast majority of refugees have shown notable improvement.
As many as 86% have increased their familiarity with the local context and their ability to access services. While at the beginning of the process only 43% scored positive (between 6 and 10), at the end the percentage rose to 76% (+33% compared to the beginning).

LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE OF SERVICES





Sometimes we meet in one of the cafés in the centre to have a cup of coffee; my buddy also helps me study Italian. Soon we will fix a date to drink coffee the way it is prepared in Sudan, my native country.

S., SUDANESE REFUGEE, PARMA

The most important thing for me was to give my son the opportunity to socialize; the change for him was more difficult. In my buddy I found a friend, a kind-hearted person; she sensed my concern for my son and we went straight to the cinema. Then, she took me to all the best ice-cream shops in town: my son loves ice-cream, and we eventually found his favourite. When she heard that my son was a theatre lover, she immediately organised a guided tour to the S. Carlo theatre in English. I am 150% satisfied.

O., UKRAINIAN REFUGEE, NAPLES

at the end
of the match
50%
without reception and without a house rental agreement

Social networks

Data show an overall strengthening and expansion of social networks, calculated through the number of significant relationships that refugees have developed in their own social network.
Rated on a scale of 1 to 4, the personal network has been changing, for example, level 4 has increased from 6% to 38% and level 3 from 36% to 45%.

Housing & Employment

While it is clear that success/failure in these areas depends on a variety of complex and structural factors, it is likewise important to try to detect any changes occurred regarding housing and employment, without however seeking to establish causal correlations.
The number of people who declared to have a work contract at the end of the project is equal to 62% (+25% compared to the beginning of the matching process).
The number of people who declared to have a house rental agreement has doubled.
17% of the people who were within reception centres at the start of the programme, found a house to rent 6 months later.
A significant fact remains to consider further, suggesting how difficult it is to access the housing market in Italy: at the end of the match, 50% of refugees are both without reception and a house rental agreement.

How has my life changed since Paola became my buddy? Now I have a person who I know is there for me. I have a house and a safe place, people to talk to and who understand me. I have improved my knowledge of Italian. I have been able to express my creativity again. I have started to believe again that in life there are not only needs but also desires and dreams.

Y., LIBYAN REFUGEE, ROME

Building communities

1,446 PEOPLE BECAME AWARE OF AND INTERESTED IN THE PROGRAMME

including **681 volunteers**
565 refugees

People with whom an individual interview was conducted to get to know them, to gather information and to investigate availability.

250 STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

including institutional actors (municipalities, healthcare centres, volunteer support centres, libraries, museums, universities, schools of all types and at all levels, Prefectures, Police Headquarters, health authorities, trade unions), private actors (foundations, large and small companies) and third-sector bodies (cultural and sports centres, associations and cooperatives involved in reception or in other activities, protection bodies, churches, parishes and other religious groups, Caritas, scout groups, informal groups, international organisations and NGOs), as well as refugee associations.

84 SOCIAL EVENTS

group activities, parties, pre-dinner aperitifs, workshops, trips, small and large events: all this has given the participants in the programme and the wider community a deeper understanding of the scope of the project, which goes far beyond the fundamental one-to-one relationship of the individual match.

Looking ahead

Although the CM programme was primarily devised to support the integration of refugees upon leaving the reception system, in 2022 it proved to be flexible and effective also for refugees already residing in Italy and newly arrived Ukrainian citizens. In 2023, the programme will continue in **10 cities** with a view to becoming part of the integration system and of national and local funding programmes. Continuing its work in and with communities, the CM programme aims to: foster the adoption of the programme in other municipalities and promote the Toolkit, develop a specific methodology to measure the impact on the local community, and engage an increasing number of refugees, volunteers, and local actors.

Do you want to contribute? Visit the website:
www.buddy.unhcr.it

Social relationships between refugees and local communities are key to integration processes. They increase the sense of belonging, improve the quality of life and enhance the ability to contribute to society. This is why programmes like Community Matching deserve to be supported and placed at the heart of policies and public discourse on asylum and integration.

We would like to thank all the refugees and volunteers who participated in the programme, investing their personal resources and contributing to building more welcoming and cohesive communities.

COORDINATION TEAM

UNHCR
Ana De Vega:
vegaa@unhcr.org
Jasmine Mittendorff:
mittendo@unhcr.org

RWI
Fabiana Musicco:
fabiana.musicco@refugees-welcome.it
Giorgio Baracco:
giorgio.baracco@refugees-welcome.it

CIAC
Chiara Marchetti:
chiara.marchetti@ciaconlus.org
Michele Rossi:
michele.rossi@ciaconlus.org