

BUILDING BACK BETTER

NEW PRACTICE, PARTNERSHIPS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTEGRATION IN THE COVID-19 RECOVERY

MOSAICO-ACTION FOR REFUGEES

INTRODUCTION

- Mosaico - Action for Refugees is a grassroots organisation founded in Turin, Italy, in 2006, by a group of refugees from different countries, to promote self-reliance of refugees and support their integration and active participation in the city of Turin, and Europe more broadly.
- Mosaico's overall objective is to provide a new narrative of refugees as resources that contribute to the development of host communities, while supporting protection capacities and networks for refugees and their families.

OASI PROJECT

- OASI supports people who are in transit because of their migration status and/or other situations of social hardship or vulnerability in Turin, with social and legal orientation, referral and support to access the information and services offered by the city itself.
- We aim to catch people at critical moments where they are often most at risk in the city, and where the essential information they need to make decisions to continue their integration paths is fragmented, inaccurate or not accessible to them.
- With OASI, we listen to individuals and jointly devise personalised solutions to connect them to the appropriate institutions.
- Their first contact with Mosaico's volunteer mediators may be on the street or at locations of arrival or departure to and from the city. Since 2018, we have provided orientation for refugees at the main Porta Nuova Turin city station. This has allowed us to identify protection needs early and connect people to our refugee-run helpdesk.
- Another important aspect has been using technology as part of the customised solution to connect people with the appropriate structures they need. To ensure that updated and accurate information on support services in the city is accessible to these vulnerable groups, Mosaico has rolled out an OASI 'On the Street' mapping app, with refugees central to its development.

THE CHALLENGE

- Access to housing is a big problem for everyone, since the reception centres are only for asylum seekers. After recognition as international protection holders, they only have six months to leave the reception centres so most of them then find themselves homeless; living in squats and informal housing.
- Refugees find themselves obligated to continue their migration because of their unemployment and homelessness situation.
- There are several public social services, e.g. medical care, that you can access online if you are a resident of Turin with a formally registered address.
- But as most refugees do not have a formal housing address, they are not registered in the municipal registry and cannot benefit from any kind of services, although already rare and scarce even for citizens.
- If they have lost their residence – either after leaving reception centres or losing their apartments because of lack of jobs/funds – they can't access anything, renew their health cards, etc.
- This became particularly visible during COVID-19, when there was an emergency fund for vulnerable families, but non-registered residents were not able to access this support at all, not even food packages

INNOVATION DIMENSIONS

- Working with stakeholders to create models for inclusive solutions which are not just for refugees but for all citizens – e.g. mapping app, social workers, etc. – as a gift for the city.
- E.g. working with the municipality on the launch of the app for all people in the city.
- Creating opportunities for local farmers struggling to sell their produce to deliver to abandoned housing where refugees were living, and new collaborations which have come out of that e.g. community garden project.
- *we started a collaboration with local farmers to deliver fruit and vegetables to refugees living in informal settlements; housing occupations and from that we are planning to increase our collaboration to training in farming and cultivation vegetables in small gardens.*
- Coaching model for job-seekers, building a network which will work for refugees and asylum seekers but also others in the community.
- Channel of solidarity work – making connections with national and European organisations and lawyers working in and after detention centers to follow some cases and help them find their way legally as an alternative model to detention. It's the first time in Italy working on this kind problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Organisations and cities need to continue to innovate with technology to support vulnerable groups as a core part of wider 'smart city' ambitions. Not all cities are thinking big about this and how they can include CSOs like Mosaico and other academic partners as part of that e.g. Turin is a famous university for its technology teaching/research.
- Changes in city leadership and political administration means collaboration isn't always stable – it's important to remain apolitical and non-partisan and focus on providing your unique service or support which is recognised as critically important to the city.
- Working in a culture of media and political racism: the public debates around refugee issues have been dominated by alarmist tones, if not xenophobia and racism. In these circumstances, awareness-raising campaigns and providing accurate information is critical in the struggle against fake news and to give the debate a balanced perspective, putting the affected population at its centre.
- A solution which is developed for the needs of one group can have significant benefits for others in the city as well, as has been seen with the use of the OASI On the Street app during COVID-19.

Thanks