



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



# What we do in Italy

**UNHCR Italy**  
[unhcr.org/it](http://unhcr.org/it)

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for refugees. Refugees are people who were forced to flee their homes because of conflict or persecution. They cross an international border to find safety in another country and they usually go through a process known as refugee status determination to establish whether their individual circumstances make them a refugee in the country of arrival. Having refugee status recognized is an important step in helping people who fled to access essential services, such as education and medical care. We work with governments and we partner with other UN entities, non-governmental and civil society organizations to uphold the basic human rights of people forced to flee, and to improve laws and national systems so refugees stay safe, get documents, can go to school, work and exercise other rights<sup>1</sup>. UNHCR also has the international mandate for reducing and preventing statelessness. Statelessness occurs when a person is not recognized by any state as a citizen under its laws. In Italy, we have staff working from our office in Rome and from locations across the country. This is what we do<sup>2</sup>.

## Assist refugees on borders and in cities

Many refugees reach locations in southern Italy, travelling by sea often in overcrowded, unseaworthy vessels. Many are intercepted or rescued at sea under the coordination of national authorities. UNHCR works to ensure that those seeking international protection are able to find it. Our staff, including cultural mediators, attends key phases of disembarkation procedures providing new arrivals with information on their rights and on relevant procedures. Refugees also reach northern Italy by land, most commonly travelling through South-East Europe. We work with refugees arriving by land and living or transiting in the north of the country. On borders and in cities, our teams and our partner organizations talk with refugees to find out about the conditions they are fleeing, their experiences on the journey and their current circumstances.

Throughout the country, UNHCR, together with its partner organizations, works to ensure that refugees have full and reliable information on their rights and obligations and the services available to meet their needs. For example, in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, our partner [CIR - Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati](#) provides new arrivals crossing the Italy-Slovenia border with accurate information on their rights. In partnership with [ARCI](#), UNHCR supports a national toll-free number providing refugees with free legal counseling and information, as well as [Juma Map](#), an open source map of services and resources available for refugees across Italy. In Rome, UNHCR runs a drop-in service, providing refugees with information through individual, confidential counseling.



UNHCR is present at disembarkation to provide information and support to new sea arrivals. Photo © UNHCR/Alessio Mamo.

<sup>1</sup> Information on UNHCR partnerships in Italy can be found at <https://www.unhcr.org/it/cosa-facciamo/partner/progetti/>

<sup>2</sup> Version 1.4 (as of September 2020). For further information on relevant developments and activities in Italy, please visit the UNHCR Italy website at [www.unhcr.org/it](http://www.unhcr.org/it) or the UNHCR data portal at <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5205>

## Prevent refugees from being returned to danger

Making sure refugees can actually get into a country and are not pushed back across a border or returned to situations where their life and freedom are at risk is central to our work. In areas of arrivals, our staff monitors border procedures, working with authorities to ensure that refugees are allowed to access the national territory and are not unlawfully pushed back or returned to unsafe countries. Where we identify issues, we raise them with the appropriate authorities and advocate for refugees' care and protection.

## Identify people with specific needs

At disembarkation points, in reception facilities and wherever we conduct activities entailing direct contact with refugees, we support the authorities in identifying people – such as children travelling alone, survivors of torture or sexual and gender-based violence – who need extra protection and help. Fleeing their countries of origin, refugee children can get separated from their parents or the people who normally take care of them. When people flee their homes, they are often at greater risk of physical, sexual and psychological violence. Anyone – women, girls, men and boys – can fall victim to violence simply because of their sex or gender. Examples of gender-based violence are rape, sexual assault, forced early marriage, genital mutilation, and human trafficking. Liaising with relevant authorities, UNHCR works to ensure that people who need extra protection are promptly referred for follow-up to appropriate services – including healthcare and psychosocial counselling – and receive prioritized access to refugee status determination procedures. In Rome, our partner [MEDU - Medici per i diritti umani](#) provides healthcare and psychological support to refugees, including those living in informal settlements, with a focus on torture survivors and women with children. Our teams also work to prevent gender-based violence against refugees, improving educational opportunities and helping survivors find a safe space and receive medical assistance, legal help, and psychosocial counselling. In Sicily, our partner [LILA - Lega Italiana Lotta AIDS](#) reaches out to refugees living in reception facilities, as well as in cities and informal settlements to provide information on and access to sexual and reproductive health services.



A UNHCR staff member talks with a vulnerable refugee evacuated from Libya to Italy. Photo © UNHCR/Alessandro Penso.

## Keep children on their own safe

Our teams are particularly attentive to children travelling on their own and to keeping them safe from exploitation, violence and abuse. We do so by developing child-friendly materials to be delivered at arrival points and in dedicated facilities, explaining children's rights and the navigation of relevant procedures, such as refugee status determination. We also regularly train authorities and frontline personnel working with children to enable them to identify and respond to children and their needs. In partnership with [CIR – Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati](#), we support efforts to train and assist guardians, that is, the adult volunteers appointed by authorities to ensure that children on their own receive the care, accommodation, education, healthcare and other services they require. UNHCR also works through partner [CIDAS](#) to ensure that children on their own can be reunited with their family members in other European countries, including by following up on selected individual cases and identifying good practices across Italy.



A UNHCR staff member entertains an Eritrean child after she arrived in Italy on an evacuation flight from Niger. Photo © UNHCR/Alessandro Penso.

## Promote safe and appropriate accommodation

One of the most immediate needs a displaced person has upon arrival is safe, suitable accommodation. In Italy, persons who apply for refugee status are entitled to accommodation in reception facilities provided by the government. UNHCR staff conduct visits to reception facilities across the country, liaising with relevant authorities to ensure that safe, dignified accommodation conditions are provided. UNHCR also visits pre-removal centres to make sure they meet adequate standards and that detainees can access refugee status determination procedures. Over the years, UNHCR has provided technical support to the authorities in establishing monitoring and quality control mechanisms to promote adequate accommodation standards across facilities in Italy.

## Support refugee status determination

In Italy, refugee status determination procedures are carried out by the Ministry of the Interior through Territorial Commissions located in various cities across the country. UNHCR staff participate in the work of the Territorial Commissions, providing advice on both the procedures and criteria relied upon to determine whether individuals can be recognized as refugees. In close cooperation with the National Asylum Commission, we also monitor the quality of refugee status determination procedures and promote guidelines ensuring that applicants who are potential victims of human trafficking are referred to appropriate services.

## Engage with refugees

In everything we do, we treat refugees as partners, not people for whom we make decisions. At the planning stage of our activities, we sit with representative groups to make sure all voices are heard. In partnership with [Intersos](#), we promote the capacity development of refugee-led and community-based organizations through the [PartecipAzione](#) programme, which provides small grants, tailored coaching and training on a range of subjects, including project management, fundraising, and public speaking.



Representatives of refugee-led organisations attend a networking event supported by UNHCR. Photo © UNHCR/Cristiano Minichiello.

## Conduct advocacy

We safeguard refugees' fundamental human rights by monitoring and suggesting improvements to national asylum laws, practice and institutions. We provide legal commentary on proposed laws and we advocate with the authorities to help refugees access their rights and engage in decisions affecting their lives. We endeavor to ensure that proposed laws and policies adequately respond to the circumstances of refugees with specific needs, such as children on their own, the elderly and differently abled. UNHCR provides training to professionals working with refugees in Italy, including the police, reception staff, social workers, caseworkers assessing applications for refugee status, lawyers and judges. With partner organizations, we deliver training on a variety of topics, including refugee status determination, the protection of children, the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and the reduction and prevention of statelessness. With [D.i.RE - Donne in Rete contro la violenza](#), for example, we provide training to female cultural mediators working in centres accommodating survivors of gender-based violence. Better laws, efficient institutions and skilled and knowledgeable caseworkers all contribute to improved rights for refugees.

## Build better futures for refugees in Italy

Recognized refugees enjoy many of the same rights as citizens – freedom of movement, access to jobs, education, health care and other social services. There are numerous barriers however to the realization of these rights. To help refugees thrive in Italy and allow them to fully contribute to the economic, cultural and social life of the country, UNHCR supports implementation of the Government’s national integration plan. Our staff also engage with the private sector to promote refugees’ employment. Through [Welcome](#), UNHCR supports a logo award programme for companies providing employment to refugees. In partnership with [Fondazione Adecco per le Pari Opportunità](#), UNHCR provides training on career guidance for refugees to reception staff. UNHCR also supports implementation of a [Manifesto](#) through which Italian universities commit to providing access to higher education to refugees through scholarships and tutoring programmes as well as active participation in academic life and the recognition of foreign educational qualifications.



A refugee from Afghanistan studies in the library of the University he attends in Italy. Photo © UNHCR/Alessandro Penso.

## Promote resettlement and other safe pathways

Resettlement protects refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health or other fundamental rights are at risk in the country where they have sought refuge, by moving them to a secure third country. Since 2014, Italy has resettled refugees from countries in Africa and the Middle East, demonstrating solidarity with countries of first asylum by sharing responsibility for people forced to flee. UNHCR staff supports implementation of Italy’s resettlement programme by providing technical assistance to the authorities responsible for receiving resettled refugees and advocating for adequate reception conditions and social inclusion. Our teams also advocate for complementary safe and regular admission schemes, such as humanitarian corridors and emergency humanitarian evacuations. Italy is a world leader in this regard. Since 2019, UNHCR has supported the [University Corridors for Refugees – UNICORE](#) project, offering refugee students the opportunity to enter Italy to attend a master’s degree programme at an Italian university.



Refugee students are welcomed by UNHCR upon their arrival in Italy under the UNICORE project. Photo © UNHCR/Alessandro Penso.

## Protect stateless persons

Our staff work to protect people without nationality in Italy so they can exercise basic rights to education, employment, healthcare and free movement. Since 2018, UNHCR has coordinated the [Tavolo Apolidia](#) network of Italian civil society organizations jointly advocating with the authorities to prevent people being born without nationality and to strengthen statelessness determination procedures.



Nedzed, 24 years old, says that being stateless is like being "an empty shell". Photo © UNHCR/Francesco Malavolta.

## Raise public awareness

UNHCR advocates for improved rights and opportunities for refugees through public events and awareness-raising initiatives and campaigns. Communication activities make strong use of digital content for media and social media and of celebrity supporters to reach the widest possible audience. Our staff work closely with journalists, providing information and training, including through our partnership with [Carta di Roma](#). We support instruction about refugees in schools and universities and provide teachers and students with tools to raise awareness of refugee issues, such as the [teachers' toolkit](#) and the [Viaggi da Imparare](#) platform.



Celebrity supporter Lino Guanciale helps to raise funds for education for refugee children. Photo © UNHCR/Alessandro Penso.

## Raise funds

We work continually to raise the money we need to fund our work. Almost all UNHCR's funding is provided by voluntary contributions by governments and an ever increasing proportion is provided by the private sector, including corporations, foundations and individual donors. These funds allow us to reliably plan our protection and assistance activities, especially in places where the needs are less known. Our fundraisers and our private donors increase public understanding of the reasons people flee and are indispensable in mobilizing the will and resources to respond.



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