

FACT SHEET

MEDITERRANEAN HOPE

Project of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI) funded by the “8 x 1000” system of the Waldensian Church (Union of Waldensian and Methodist Churches).

Background

The *Mediterranean Hope* (MH) project was established in 2014 from the awareness of the dramatic situation of migrants coming from countries in North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East who try to reach the coast of Sicily by sea, in particular, the southernmost point of the island of Lampedusa.

Over the years, the Mediterranean has become a giant cemetery that, according to the *Fortress Europe* Observatory, since 1988 has witnessed the deaths of nearly twenty thousand people along the route to Italy.

The institutional response to this tragedy has so far been inadequate and lacking, well below basic humanitarian standards. The sea rescue program called *Mare Nostrum* was only launched after the massacre of 3 October 2013 when 368 migrants died a few miles off the coast of Lampedusa. However, this program has now been ceased and has been replaced by other less effective methods.

The FCEI, in agreement with the Waldensian Board, felt challenged by this situation and decided to launch a humanitarian and social program engaged in the reception and integration of refugees wishing to remain in Italy.

Recognising the commitment and experience of the protestant centres, churches and brothers and sisters working in the social field, as well as the Sicilian evangelism's sensitivity to these issues, the FCEI is confident that the project can be taken on at a European level as the frontier of a new shared testimony.

Structure of the project

The *Mediterranean Hope* (MH) project aims at dealing with the flow of migrants arriving by sea. The project is divided into closely related units: one is focused on reception and one on information and the political action of denouncing human rights violations of migrants and the inadequate regulations on the right to seek asylum.

MH Observatory in Lampedusa

The Observatory is part of the “Lampedusa Solidarity” Association that provides the first reception at the wharf where the migrants land. It maintains relationships with the local, regional and national institutions, as well as the local population and associations. The Observatory also promotes the construction of national and international networks to create awareness on the issue of migration in the Mediterranean. With regards to information, it distributes a newsletter on its observatory activities: arrival of migrants, condition of first reception, integration into Italian society, employment situation, and impact of migration on the local population. The structure also hosts and coordinates the training and management of volunteers.

website: <https://mediterraneanhope.wordpress.com/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Mediterranean-hope-252231521632595/?fref=ts>

The MH House of Cultures in (RG)

The House of Cultures (Casa delle Culture) was opened in December 2014 and offers accommodation to about 40 particularly vulnerable migrants (young mothers, pregnant women, unaccompanied children) who have been sent to the facility by the Prefecture of Ragusa. In addition to reception, guidance and training activities, the House also promotes social, intercultural and integration programs open to the local population aimed at promoting a “culture of integration.” It has a team of educators, social workers, health workers and cultural mediators. To date, dozens of Italian and foreign volunteers have come and gone over the months. The House has the concrete support of the local Methodist community.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/casadelleculturemh/?fref=ts>

Humanitarian Corridors from Lebanon and Morocco

Mediterranean Hope (MH), "Humanitarian Corridors" were set up after long difficult negotiations with the relevant Italian and foreign authorities, which allow refugees in particularly vulnerable conditions to enter Italy by plane thanks to a "humanitarian visa." The project was created in collaboration with the Community of Sant'Egidio, and more recently also with the Pope John XXIII Community Association. The legal basis of this ecumenical initiative is based on article 25 of the EC Regulation no. 810/2009 of 13 July 2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas, namely the possibility to grant visas with limited territorial validity, notwithstanding the standard entry conditions provided by the Schengen Borders Code "for humanitarian reasons or national interest or due to international obligations." For this purpose, the FCEI and Sant'Egidio, together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have signed a protocol which calls for a collaboration with the Italian embassies in Morocco and Lebanon and soon also in Ethiopia.

Relocation Desk

In collaboration with other local and national associations and by taking advantage of the FCEI's relationships with various churches in Europe, the *Mediterranean Hope* (MH) project is building a network of solidarity to support integration. After the initial phase of reception, MH wants to accompany asylum seekers along their journey of integration in Italian and European society. This support network will first be guaranteed by Italian and European churches that have shown their interest and solidarity in the MH project.

A political appeal

Mediterranean Hope (MH) promotes a pressure action for the approval of national and European regulations to protect the rights and safety of asylum seekers. Aware of the need for concrete action by Europe on reception and asylum policies, the MH Project stimulates European protestant churches to promote awareness actions so that the public opinion and politicians in the various EU countries recognise the humanitarian importance of the problem and put into place adequate protection measures. The possibility for asylum seekers to move freely in Europe is an important part of this strategy.

Funding

Mediterranean Hope (MH) is a project of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI) funded largely by the 8x1000 system of the Waldensian Church (Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches). Among the supporters of the project are the Evangelical Church of Westphalia (EKvW), the Reformed Church of the United States, various protestant communities in Italy, and individual donors in Italy and abroad.

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