

March 2018

Perhaps it is fitting that my first blog from Italy should be sent following a general election. A high turnout at the polls yesterday Sunday to have resulted in what, for the asylum system, could be a challenging outcome. If, as many anticipate, the right wing parties combine forces, we will see a significant change in approach to the support currently provided to migrants in this country. Immigration has been a key issue in this election campaign – little wonder, perhaps, given the difficult economic conditions which many here face.

From the perspective of many migrants, however, this week will be a week like any other. Mediterranean Hope's office is within easy reach of Rome's Termini station, an area where many destitute migrants gather and, indeed, spend the night outdoors. Unusually, Metro stations were last week kept open at night to provide a little shelter for rough sleepers. This was, however, an acute response to adverse weather rather than a sign of things to come. For last week Rome suffered freezing temperatures – and even snow, which brought chaos to a city unused to such a phenomenon.

For many migrants, the reality is that life here is very tough. Over 181,000 migrants arrived here during the course of 2016. Of those asylum seekers whose claims were processed that year, over 60% were refused any form of protection – and almost 100,000 claims had yet to be processed by the end of the year.¹[\[1\]](#) The basic needs of those whose applications are pending should be met in a complex network of central, local and private accommodation but conditions in these places vary significantly and overcrowding is a constant issue.

There is no question that the Italian system is overloaded. European policy currently prevents all but a few of the many who land here but would prefer to seek asylum in other European countries from doing so. Italy (and Greece), it is felt, are shouldering a burden which properly belongs to the whole of Europe. This mix of policy and geography permits other countries a cushion not afforded to their southern neighbours.

Meantime, there is plenty of work to be done here. In the weeks and months to come, it will be good to share some of that with you and to hear your comments about these difficult issues

¹ ECRE Asylum Information Database Country Report: Italy (2016 update) file:///C:/Users/Mh%20-%20Fcei/Downloads/aida_it_2016update%20(2).pdf

which touch the lives of millions of individuals – voters and migrants – who are hoping for the best from life.

