



REPORT

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

Migrant children travelling to and through Europe
2022



Save the Children

Credits

Written by Daniele Biella

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Fabio Colazzo for the video interviews

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Alessandra Garibaldi e Simone Alterisio - Diaconia Valdese (Ventimiglia)

Jacopo Colomba - WeWorld (Ventimiglia)

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Stéphanie Besson - Tous Migrants (Ventimiglia)

Martina Pasquale e Piero Gorza - MEDU (Oulx)

Don Luigi Chiampo e Luca Guglielmetti - Fondazione Talità Kum (Oulx)

Martina Cociglio - Diaconia Valdese (Oulx)

Michele Belmondo - Croce Rossa Italiana (Oulx)

Antonella Barrale e Paolo Narcisi - Rainbow for Africa (Oulx)

Michela Grassi e Sergio Serra - Duemilauno Agenzia Sociale (Trieste)

Gorazd Pučnik - Casa dello studente sloveno (Trieste)

Gianfranco Schiavone e Matej Iscra - Ics (Trieste)

Lorena Fornasir e Gian Andrea Franchi - Linea d'Ombra ODV (Trieste)

Mauro Caputo - videoreporter (Trieste)

Virginia Costa, Responsabile Servizio Centrale SAI

Monica Lanzillotto, Ufficio Minori Servizio Centrale SAI

Stefano Scarpelli, Ufficio dell'Autorità Garante per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza

TRIESTE

Paolo Pittaro, Garante regionale dei diritti della persona del Friuli Venezia Giulia

Lucio Prodam, Giudice onorario del Tribunale dei minori di Trieste

Carlo Grilli, Assessore alle Politiche Sociali del Comune di Trieste

Annunziato Vardè, Prefetto di Trieste

OULX

Andrea Terzolo, Sindaco del Comune di Oulx

Raffaele Ruberto, Prefetto di Torino

Emma Avezzù, Procuratrice della Repubblica presso il Tribunale per i Minorenni di Torino

VENTIMIGLIA

Monica Bonelli, Dirigente del Comune di Ventimiglia

Armando Nanei, Prefetto di Imperia

Tiziana Paolillo, Procuratrice della Repubblica presso il Tribunale per i Minorenni di Genova

and above all to the boys, girls and families who shared their stories, their projects, their future dreams.

We hope that they will soon find their place in this world.

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INTRODUCTION

Naweed walks with great strides under the pleasant sun of early May 2022. He is in Claviere, upper Susa Valley, Piedmont. He says he's 14, but he does not remember his date of birth and he looks younger, a colourful dot in the vastness of the surrounding semi snowy mountains. His awkward gait, combined with the context, makes the scene at least surreal: with a fisherman's hat fixed who knows where, jacket and winter boots on a tracksuit much larger than his size recovered in the warehouse of the Massi shelter in Oulx from where he travelled the night before, the boy is walking along the paved road that, two bends later, will lead him to the border crossing with the town of Mongenevre, France. He is alone, he left his homeland, Afghanistan, 8 months earlier, and he wants to reach his brother in Finland at any cost. He has with him an informal sheet indicating the minor age, to be delivered to the French border police in the hope of not being rejected, as an unaccompanied foreign minor.

He will be fine: he will not spend the night in a container before being returned to the Italian police, as happens frequently to families with very young children. The next day, in fact, we find Naweed in the picturesque Briançon, in a room of the *Les Terrasses Solidaires* shelter. He is very tired but determined to continue. He bears the marks of previous violent borders. "It is difficult to arrive alone in other countries. No father, no mother, no brother, no friend. But we have to do it, because we have a dream: we want to have a future, we want to be good people".

Between April and May 2021 we were in this same place, as well as in two other frontier areas of the Northern Border of Italy: in Ventimiglia, again leaving for France, but in Liguria and close to the sea; and in Trieste, point of entry into Italy for those who arrive through the so-called Balkan route. As Save the Children, we witnessed and then told stories of passages and rejections of people of all ages in the report "Hidden in plain sight". We have returned to these same places in the same way, just to see what has changed, if anything especially for minors alone or accompanied by their family members. Walking the paths in the woods, railways and border roads day and night, talking to operators and volunteers on the front lines and interviewing the institutions involved. In numerical terms, we have seen directly how the arrival of the good season has increased the flow of unaccompanied minors in a single month in all three monitored territories: in Trieste (from the Balkan route) from 38 passages in April to 60 in May, in Ventimiglia from 24 to 47, in Oulx even from 35 to 150, most Afghan children (both from the Balkan route and from the maritime border).

In a profoundly changed world scenario – just to mention the rise to power of the Talibans in Afghanistan and the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, in addition to the long wave of the pandemic – there are obvious traces of a two-speed European Union: ready to open arms and doors for a population fleeing mass invasion, but at the same time gloomy and brutal and willing to use unjustified force against defenceless people, "guilty" of not having valid documents for entry, in fact in the same way in need of a place to refuge.

The contrast is glaring. The Ukrainian refugees, with admirable solidarity, are welcomed at motorway crossings with donations of food, clothes and a dignified treatment that honours Europe itself, including

Italy. Instead, in the high hills of the Trieste Carso, as well as at the Passo della Morte between Ventimiglia and Menton and between the paths of the Monginevro hill, numerous clothes, documents and other abandoned objects testify to the passage of people similarly fleeing from deprivation and violations of their rights but coming from other States, forced to travel in the shadows, crossing borders in the dark in a Europe that closes its doors. In light of the significant influx of Ukrainian refugees – at the end of April 2022 it exceeded 100 thousand – the numbers of the northern border entries are fluctuating in the short term, but constant in the overall trend: the physiological winter decline is followed by a gradual summer increase, with a daily average of several dozen incoming passages, which become at least a hundred daily attempts out of Piedmont and Liguria. This is because the flow through the Balkan Route from the east is joined by the arrival of people from the Southern Border, or from the Mediterranean Sea, where the route from Turkey to the coasts of Calabria has recently resumed, a journey of several days even on apparently tourist boats that earns traffickers 9 thousand euros each, as evidenced by more people in the pages of the following report. Naweed included.

The eyes of boys like him, but also of parents and every other person "hidden in plain sight" call us to go deeper: even more than the material price to pay, what we have to deal with is the inhuman face of Fortress Europe. At least 1,911 people were rejected in the first three months of 2022 at European borders, denounces the coalition of European non-profit organisations *Protecting Rights at Borders*¹. At the external borders of Croatia and Greece, the testimonies of violent and humiliating treatment follow one another and leave dismay: "The policemen unleashed the dog on me, this pulled me and I started screaming because he had bitten my foot twice. [...]. They gathered around the fire to drink wine and made us lie naked on our backs. (...) They made us lie on the ground in the cold and laughed at us", says Javed, a 17-year-old Afghan. Even Adil, a Pakistani boy who has just turned 18, tells us that he was shot for no apparent reason. As was also mentioned in the last edition of the report, we are in the same Europe that only ten years ago, in 2012, received the Nobel Peace Prize.

If entry into Italy in and around Trieste, monitored by the police, takes place without further trauma – readmissions to Slovenia have been suspended since the beginning of 2021 and the intercepted incoming people are identified and taken to quarantine centres from where they often leave to continue their journey to other States – the problem arises again at the borders with France: the research team has collected direct evidence of differentiated treatment according to the places of transit. For example, in Claviere an unaccompanied minor is more likely to be admitted by presenting himself directly to the Police Aux Frontières (PAF), thus respecting French Law 312.5, *Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile*², while in Menton the police practice of changing the date of birth to show the person is of legal age and therefore expellable through the *refus d'entrée*, the travel order, is³ still reported. In any case, if the

¹<https://drc.ngo/our-work/resources/pushbacks/prab/> is the site where you can find the report in English.

²https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/codes/article_lc/LEGIARTI000042777201

³On 7 May 2022, the operators of Save the Children a few steps from the border point of Ponte San Luigi in Ventimiglia were able to see a *refus d'entrée* of an Afghan boy with such characteristics.

French border remains permeable - the number of attempts often depends on luck, in a sort of sliding door⁴ effect - the accesses from Italy to Switzerland and Austria remain practically insurmountable.

With this second edition of the research, Save the Children wants to attract attention to the unequal treatment and call for an end to violence along borders. In the following pages there are faces and stories of a wounded but not resigned humanity. And the conclusions aim to find a better way forward. "The desperate clinging to any hope", says Mahmoud, a Jordanian-Palestinian father whom we meet with his wife and five children after the third rejection at the border between Menton and Ventimiglia. I have been on the road for two years, to Germany. In Croatia they overcame the game - the border crossing - after 20 attempts. An absurd Snakes and Ladder. "No one felt compassion for us (...) whether we were tired, hungry or thirsty." "They shouted at us to make us leave quickly", Mariam, his wife, testifies. You, your family, Naweed and all the people on the road are now part of this Europe of ours. "The most important thing is for me to stay in a house and send my kids to school, you know, I don't want anything else." Nothing else.

⁴Title of the famous 1998 movie about the concept of being in the right place at the right time. In this case, too, the aspect of the person's economic availability - that is, how much one is willing to turn to traffickers - is overshadowed by the strong randomness of encountering a check on trains, roads or trails.

TRIESTE

CLUB
SPORTING
2011

TRIESTE

Anastasya's laughter, disruptive, release tension for a few moments. She points to the writing on her shirt and asks: "Do you know the story of the Ukrainian grandmother who shot down a Russian drone by throwing the jar of cucumbers she had prepared?". Our meeting with her, who is 14 years old and comes from a city in the south of Ukraine, takes place on a hot morning at the end of April at the Italian border check point in Ferneti, Trieste. She has just chosen a snack at the Shelter of the Civil Protection and, with her eleven-year-old sister, is spending time with Save the Children educators while the mother is having a psychological interview. Here, in partnership with Unicef - as at the Tarvisio cross-border crossing, which we visit later - Save the Children collaborates with UNHCR and other associations in the very first reception to those arriving from Ukraine by car or bus, stopping at the border for the control of documents by of the police authorities⁵. Anastasya speaks English well, she will go for a while to a relative in Romagna, from where she will continue the Ukrainian schooling thanks to distance learning. "Most of pupils have moved from their home", she explains. She is worried about her father, who has remained at the disposal of the army for a possible enlistment. We greet her when, shortly after, her mother leave with the car. Despite everything, thanks to this structured welcome she will have a good memory of entering Italy in the worst period of her life, fleeing the war.

What Anastasya will never know is that her Afghan peer, Ghulam, a few moments later, after an eight-day walk that began on the border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia 260 kilometres earlier, will emerge from the Slovenian part of the karst forest not far away and, with a group of travelling companions, he will be searched and then taken into custody by a patrol of Italian soldiers from Safe Roads Operation. After having communicated his personal details, he will be taken together with the others, divided according to the elder or minor age, in a special reception centre for the five days of Covid-19 quarantine provided for by the practices currently in use. After a further short waiting period in another facility, Ghulam will have to ask for reception in Italy as an unaccompanied foreign minor. Unless, like most of the young people who arrived alone in recent years in Trieste, he decides to leave for another country, but resumes the path of invisibility, that is, by overcoming the borders secretly - until he arrives in the chosen European country. "I've only been rejected three times in Croatia", he tells us. The average, in fact, is more

⁵ In one of the containers at the side of the border road was mounted a "Blue Dot", where the same NGO and the other associations host women and children for a moment of play and relaxation before setting off again towards their final destination. Blue Dots are multi-service protected spaces for migrants and refugees with a specific focus on children, women and people with specific needs. These include unaccompanied and separated minors, persons with disabilities, potential victims of trafficking, victims of sexual and/or gender-based violence as well as refugees from LGBTIQ+ communities. Jointly developed by UNHCR and UNICEF in collaboration with Partners and Local Authorities there, the Blue Dots guarantee one safe space in the area of border crossings for support and assistance to refugees and migrants by providing them with information and guidance about their journey. At the Ferneti Pass (Trieste) and the Ugovizza Pass - Tarvisio Pass (UD) Save the Children intervenes to protect lonely minors and families with children as part of the Blue Dots in partnership with Unicef and in collaboration with UNHCR.

than 10 attempts: it is the hardest border entering the EU, along with the one on the Evros River between Turkey on the one side, and Greece or Bulgaria on the other.

Anastasya and Ghulam have in common the need for a safe place to stay. But if the girl can move freely in Europe with her family thanks to EU Directive 55/2001, which Italy, like other European states, has activated after the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, giving temporary protection for the citizens of that country⁶, for the Afghan boy everything is more complicated⁷. For a minor travelling alone, in addition to the risks of borders where his age-related vulnerability is not recognised (Pakistan, Iran, Turkey), the mockery is almost total: despite the fact that the European Union Court of Justice has recognised the right of unaccompanied children to seek asylum in the country where they are located – and pending the revision of the Dublin Regulation – France has long been engaging in patchy behaviour, alternating without an apparent logic border posts where the child is taken in charge, with others from which he is sent back to Italy. "I am thinking about whether to go to the mountains of Piedmont, from there to France and then to Germany", Ghulam reasoned. He will probably take the Oulx route, from there Montgenèvre: word of mouth among migrants confirms that currently at the border in Menton there is a high risk of refoulement even for minors, in Claviere instead you are able to pass. "After all, there is a double standards logic on the differential treatment between Ukrainian refugees and others", reasoned Gian Andrea Franchi, an 86-year-old former professor of philosophy and founder of Linea d'Ombra ODV, an association he created in 2019 with his wife Lorena Fornasir, psychotherapist and former Honorary Juvenile Judge in Trieste, precisely to alleviate the physical discomfort of people crossing the Balkan Route. "Who knows if something will change for everyone else, in light of what is being done for Ukrainians", hopes the woman, who every day from 4 pm⁸ onwards goes to Piazza Libertà, in the green area in front of the Trieste railway station, with her green trolley full of medicines to treat the wounds on foot and legs of people arriving from the woods of Croatia and Slovenia. When we meet them at the end of April, the couple of volunteers were still shaken by the meeting a few days earlier with a group of 20 incoming boys, mainly Afghans, who recounted a tragic accident along the river on the border with Croatia. "Two of them, both children unable to swim, fell into an area of deep water, and while one, Afghan, was recovered by the others, for the other, African, there was nothing to do." A shocking testimony of death on the border, therefore, of which, however, no trace can be found in the official registers. A further drama in an overall situation that is very precarious: often the people who pass through the square are not intercepted when they leave the woods⁹ and are in a hurry to

⁶ With the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers of the 28 March 2022, a Ukrainian citizens or foreigners residing or permanently staying in Ukraine before February 24, 2022 temporary protection is granted up to 12 months <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/04/15/22A02488/sg>

⁷ Temporary protection shall not be granted to those fleeing from other countries at humanitarian risk such as Afghanistan, Syria, Libya or Yemen: An Afghan adult, even having a passport of his country (the least "powerful" in the world, according to the *Passport Index*: www.pasportindex.org) could therefore not go in a country of your choice, but only in that where he registered his fingerprints as a first entry.

⁸ The television presenter Paolo Iannaccone dedicated to the commitment of Lorena and Gian Andrea an episode of his program "What am I doing here". It aired on April 16, 2022 under the title "In Your Hands": <https://www.raiplay.it/video/2022/04/Che-ci-faccio-qui---Nelle-tue-mani---Puntata-16042022-b32bc257-f7f9-49e1-ab64-7cc997e9b068.html>

⁹ On 2 June 2022 arrived at Piazza Libertà a group di 25 persons, among them at least 5 minors, coming from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal and India. On her Facebook page, Fornasir gives updates almost daily on the arrivals.

leave; therefore, their presence is not even officially detected except by the non-profit organisations present. "Ghosts" in full view, in fact. Scout groups, school classes, flights from all over Italy and Europe support Fornasir and Franchi one or more afternoons a week the so-called Piazza del Mondo, to help people and learn from a direct voice what happens to them along the Route. In a small way, an activity of "antennas of rights" and solidarity is being created in that place that is also being proposed on a larger scale throughout the Trieste area: an effective network of non-profit¹⁰ organisations that collaborate by exchanging good practices and information to improve the situation of migrants who pass or stop in Trieste. "What we most of all need is a change in the institutional vision in the approach towards unaccompanied minors", underlines Gianfranco Schiavone, president of ICS (Italian Solidarity Consortium) and member of Asgi. "Often they are seen only as a problem to be managed. But in fact, we don't realize that in times of low birth rates like these and an ever wider gap between the active and non-active population, they can be a good investment for society." Precisely because of what they have experienced along the way, they have a strong determination. "And, when they decide to stop here to ask acceptance, at school they are often among the best in the classroom: once they have learned the language, they have a huge thirst for learning", testifies Melania Comuzzi, a teacher in an upper school in Trieste.

In terms of numbers, compared to 2021 there is a general decline in arrivals in Trieste and along the Karst: unaccompanied foreign minors welcomed, for example, in April 2022 were 40 while last year, in the same month, 55 (majority of origins: Kosovo, Pakistan and Afghanistan, in sharp decline arrivals from Bangladesh). Even between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia the flow has slowed down, although with the arrival of summer it is rising. The interceptions of people just outside the woods (one of these, about ten people, documented this research team on the morning of 14 May 2022 thanks to the collaboration with Misericordie di Tavernelle, which that morning was in the woods to recover abandoned clothes), could also be decreased for practical reasons, since the army is busy all day at the Ferneti crossing. In addition to this, there may also be other reasons: "for sure this year it has been colder and the route remains dangerous, moreover people enter Italy also from other areas"¹¹, explains Gorazd Pučnik, director of the Slovenian Student House, a body that has come to welcome up to 40 unaccompanied minors as well as being a school centre for the Slovenian minority in Italy. At the same time last year, Pučnik, who also coordinated the distribution of people in quarantine centres, was overwhelmed with phone calls from the police force intercepting people on the street. During the interviews conducted we are told about the opening of a new route to Austria which is added to the pre-existing one. Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and then Austria or Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary and Austria, as a variant.

"Do you want to know how many of us were beaten along the Balkan Route? Three out of four", says Adil, the Pakistani boy already mentioned in the introduction of this research, while he welcomes us with three of his compatriots in the garden of the Slovenian Student House where he has lived for more than a year.

¹⁰ Amongst them Waldensian Deaconry, Cir Onlus, Strada SiCura, Doctors without Borders, Donk, Irc, Arci, save the Children itself and the reception bodies such as the Italian Solidarity Consortium (Ics), Slovenian Student House and Duemilauno Social Agency.

¹¹ The confirmation comes from the testimonies collected especially in Oulx: many people say they have entered from Gorizia and surroundings, for example.

Even Javed, seventeen years old hosted in a little municipality near Trieste, wants to stay and make his life in Italy. His story is a punch in the stomach, incredibly documented – for this reason we dedicate a special space to it – thanks to his determination. "I have to start working as soon as possible, to repay my family's debt to those who lent us the money", Javed points out. Shahis, his roommate, also wants to stay in Italy, also because the word has spread of new adults rejected by Germany and France to Bulgaria, where the first fingerprints had been detected, but also a place where both boys suffered the greatest harassment. The increase in minors remaining in the territory is confirmed by the census of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies: if on 30 April 2021 the unaccompanied foreign minors present in the bodies were 6,633, exactly one year later they were 14,025. Excluding the novelty of Ukrainian minors only (3,906), the overall figure of the remaining nationalities has however increased to 10,119 units¹².

Relatively good news concerns the number of volunteer guardians in Friuli Venezia Giulia: as confirmed by both the Regional Guarantor of the rights of the person and an Honorary Judge of the Juvenile Court of Trieste, whom we met in their respective offices, it has gone from 62 to 84 active guardians (out of 102 trained, or who have successfully completed the training courses) for a large number of minors present, or 744 at the end of April 2022: "an increase that is not yet enough to bring the Region to the levels of other territories, but that gives confidence", explains the Guarantor. A surge deriving from the concomitance with the arrivals from Ukraine "which bodes well: I hope that those who now want to be guardians to a Ukrainian minor will continue to do so for other nationalities", adds the Honorary Judge. In the meantime, even the type of Trieste reception has adapted to the news: at the prefectural level some Cas, such as Casa Malala (with its 100 places), have been emptied in a short time to make room for Ukrainian families, with a consequent "race of the social private to find in a short time the apartments necessary for outgoing people", as Schiavone points out. Some quarantine facilities have instead both continued to host arrivals from the route and families from Ukraine, in particular the Residence "L'albero dei Ciliegi" in Opicina, managed by Duemilauno, which welcomed mothers with children with disabilities or in need of care and, when we visited it, two Ukrainian underage sisters arrived by bus in Italy temporarily without parents. Finally, the Municipality of Trieste has created with the institutions first reception facilities for minors in which, after quarantine, the children stay for a maximum of 50 days: "A sort of preventive transit centers for entering the community", explains the City Councilor for Welfare. It is here that we meet and interview Javed, who just the next day would have gone to live in a community in the city, thus officially starting his path as a minor welcomed in Italy.

¹² Here all the data, including the regional and nationality breakdown of the child and the removals from the bodies: <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/minori-stranieri/Pagine/Dati-minori-stranieri-non-accompagnati.aspx>

The Odyssey of Javed, a teenager like many others

Javed, a 17-year-old Afghan currently housed in a community in Trieste, had a courage: during his long migratory journey he has repeatedly filmed the transfers he has met with, risking the reaction of the traffickers. You can see mountains, the desert, pick-ups full of people, bundles of money. But not only that, in a terrible transit, he also filmed the death of his traveling companion, whose body he then tried to return back to the family whose address the friend had shared only with him. Javed recorded the videos and sent them on Messenger to friends so as not to risk losing them, since the phone was the first thing that was stolen by unscrupulous marauders and traffickers.

These videos, taken in QRcode, together with the detailed, empathetic and shocking storytelling of the journey that Javed has released to us, are fundamental documents to stamp into History the absurdity of migratory journeys to which unaccompanied minors and families are subjected in the middle of the 21st century.

Here below there are some parts of his long story, which goes from Afghanistan to Italy through Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Bulgaria (there were 23 attempts to cross the Bulgarian border, that is, to entry into the European Union), Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Italy.

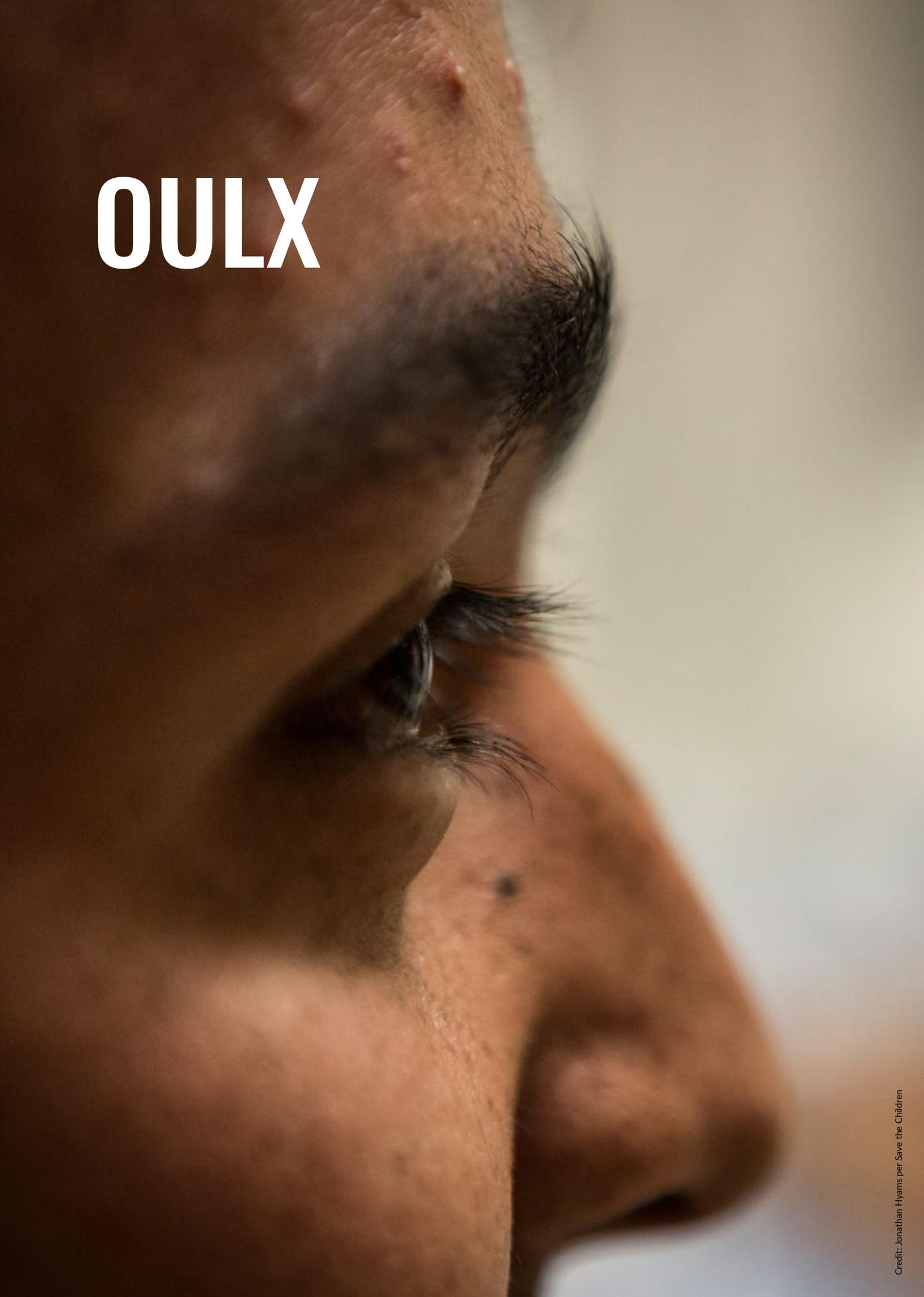
THE DEPARTURE. *Before the economic situation of our family was stable, my father was a taxi driver, I was still going to school before starting to work as a mechanic. I went to school when the situation in Afghanistan changed. I have four brothers and four sisters. Before I came here, my father was a taxi driver, but after the Taliban conquered Afghanistan, he sold the taxi. I dropped out of school and started working as a mechanic in a bicycle shop. Living in Afghanistan no longer made sense. I insisted with my father and told him that I could no longer live in Afghanistan because I could not go to school and there was no work. I asked my father to give me an opportunity to leave for Europe. My father accepted and told me: "Whatever you want". My dad talked to the trafficker and told me to get ready in a couple of days.*

BETWEEN IRAN AND TURKEY, THE DEATH OF HIS FRIEND. *Once we reached the border, soldiers or Iranians or Turks fired into the air, so we ran away to where we had come from and returned to Tabriz in Iran. Our guide was with us. They would have entrusted us to another guide after we crossed the border. The next night we tried again to cross the border in Maku, we failed again and we went back, but there were thieves on our way, who captured illegal immigrants and called the trafficker, asking him for money as ransom. These looters waited only for the illegal immigrants to capture them: it was their source of income. When the thieves (looters) arrived in front of us, we rushed back to the village and the guide was with us. The third night we moved to the Turkish border of Khoy, where there are two high mountains, one on either side, one with the Turkish flag on the top and the other with the Iranian one. We were passing through the middle of the two of them. It was not night, it was morning. Suddenly they started firing and people were running here and there. The second time they opened fire, one of my friends, who was accompanying me from Kabul, was hit by a bullet. After the shooting, no one came to us, we all got together to retrieve that poor boy, the guide was still with us. He kept bleeding and bleeding; he stayed alive for several hours and eventually died. May Allah forgive him now. On our way we met the Kurds, may Allah bless them. We did not speak their language, but our guide understood them. The guide told them the whole story of the death; the Kurds told us to leave the body with them, and that they would appeal to the Turkish government saying that a person had died. That friend of mine told me secrets while we were on the road. For example, his father's and brother's name, phone numbers were all stored in my mobile. So I wrote to his father and brother's WhatsApp number on a piece of paper, put it in his pocket, and handed the body to the Kurds. We were now in Turkish territory, in a place called Van, where the trafficker paid the fee for the arrival in Turkey.*

VIOLENCE AT THE BULGARIAN BORDER. In Edirne we got out of the car and went to the barbed wire, where some policemen told us to go back, but we did not obey. We turned around, but when the police left, we moved on. Five minutes' walk after crossing the barbed wire, the Bulgarian police arrested us. On the road with us there were people who had attempted to enter Bulgaria 7 or 8 times, but failed, while for me it was the first time. The guide was sitting in the centre of the group. I was apart from the group, as I said before I was a foreigner, here the Bulgarian police arrested us. I stayed out of the way. The police told us to turn in our mobile phones before they beat us up. No one had their mobile phone with them. Even the guide had thrown his away before attempting to cross. We told the police we didn't have any. The police unleashed the dog on me, he pulled me, and I screamed because he bit my foot twice. I got rid of the dog, but it had already bitten me a couple of times, they beat me again and finally they rejected us. Every time I tried again, there were the same beatings and problems. I worked every five or ten days, or our families sent us money from Afghanistan and so we could try the game again, every time I was expelled and, in the end, on the 23rd attempt I managed to get here. We arrived in Bulgaria, at this point they warned us that two white Corollas would come to pick us up to take us to Sofia, where they would no longer reject us. We turned ourselves in to the police, they took our fingerprints and names, and then they sent us to a detention camp. Every time, in those twenty-two previous attempts, every time we tried to cross the border, they mistreated us, ripped our shoes off and burned them along with our clothes. They gathered around the fire to drink wine and made us lie naked on our backs. Some were still wearing underwear, while others were not. They made us lie on the ground in the cold and laughed at us, until other policemen arrived. After beating and mistreating us, they loaded us into a large vehicle and took us back to Turkey across the border. We couldn't be naked, so we went back to the village. The villagers recognised us and gave us clothes.

ITALY, THE FUTURE. When we arrived in Trieste, the people who had friends or acquaintances came to pick us up, it was just me and a couple of other people, because we did not know anyone here. We walked on the side of the road; in the opposite direction was coming a police car, there were some Panjabi, also illegal, on the other side of the road. When the police stopped in front of us, our bags, our clothes and shoes were covered in mud and we were in a terrible condition. The police chased us, there was a highway, so assembled there. We didn't think the police could follow us and run us over, so we ran. The police, in fact, did not follow us and we hid again. We did not know which bus was going to Trieste. We made several attempts to get on and off several buses moving forward little by little. We started to say on all the buses we got on "Trieste", "Trieste", until they told us that the bus we were on was the one for Trieste. In Trieste we got on the last bus, which stopped near the station and there people got on dressed in green. We thought they were police, but they were asking for tickets, people without tickets had to pay a fine. When they asked us to show the tickets we said we had just arrived in Italy. They asked me for my name and I gave it to them. The bus we were travelling on was the last bus to Trieste station.

The first night we spent it in a ruined house, the next day they took us to a nice place to do the quarantine and then we came here. Here we live in cosy houses and we are happy to live here, we can go to the centres to learn everything we need. From Afghanistan to Trieste I spent Euro 9,000, of which I have already paid 7,300 and I still owe the other 1,700. I have to pay Euro 500 every month. I agreed to pay Euro 500 a month after I find a job. Here I have to work, sometimes my friends or relatives call me to tell me "You were lucky to arrive in Europe and to have given a meaning to your life". I answer Allah will not give you these joys. I have seen and faced many difficulties on this journey. They tell me they want to come here too. They are young and eager to come to Europe. They do not know how hard the journey is, a journey of life and death. I lost a friend of mine on this trip, he died, and his body was taken home. I always tell them not to make that mistake, the harassment and beatings are unforgettable. If I had known about these difficulties, if someone had told me about them, I do not think I would have taken this path. In the unfortunate event of expulsion, I would not take this trip a second time and would never advise my brothers or friends to go to Europe. I cannot think that a brother or a friend of mine would have to face those difficulties. My dream is to return to my country, to support the education of my brothers and sisters. I would never encourage any of them to go on this journey, I should rather help them and give them a good education. This is my dream: to return to a peaceful Afghanistan. The problems and difficulties that I have experienced on this journey must not be experienced by anyone else in my family. This is my dream, to return to my native country, I miss and I miss the bad memories and the beautiful ones, I grew up in my country and that is where I want to return.

A close-up, profile view of a man's face, focusing on the forehead, eye, and nose. The skin on the forehead has several small, raised blemishes or pimples. The man has dark hair and is looking downwards. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

OULX

OULX

Dusk arrives early, in Oulx, beautifully set among the Alpine peaks. It is not yet 8 pm on a hot day at the end of April, when the taxi announces itself with the sound of the horn. The Afghan family, consisting of father, mother, 4 children and his uncle - who failed to bring his wife and two children with him - is ready to jump on it. They are refugees fleeing after the murder of a family member: they lived 2 years in Greece but were eventually denied asylum. They then tried 8 times the *game* between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia before being able to pass. The youngest of the group was born in Greece and is now one year old. Until just a moment before he smiled at all passers-by, now he is locked in a star-shaped jacket from which only his face can be seen. After all, he and his loved ones are raising the safe harbour of that day, or the Massi temporary refugee reception¹³, to go directly to the mountains, still covered in snow. To be precise, towards the Montgenèvre pass, which at an altitude of 1860 meters marks one of the passages between Italy and France. Their final destination is elsewhere, in Germany. But the taxi driver knows full well that he must stop before the checkpoint at the French border: he cannot cross that border with Afghan citizens on board, because he would be stained with the crime of aiding illegal immigration: since 2015, when a million people were on the Balkan route, six countries still have in force the internal border controls introduced for national security reasons. Although the Syrian refugee crisis has long since ended and the Schengen derogations should not have lasted more than two years, Germany, France, Austria, Sweden, Denmark and Norway (which although not a member of the EU is part of the Schengen area) have not ceased them. So, the passage of thousands of people in search of better living conditions than their motherland at the Italian-French border has slowed down, but not ended – at most more dangerous and traumatic. The next morning, at the Massi shelter, there is no sign of the family: it means that the mountain has been a friend and the journey between paths still partially snowy has not reserved bad surprises. The PAF did not find them and at that time they will be in their counterpart French shelter on the other side of the border or already on the train to the North. It went well for them but not so a few days later for another Afghan family: they had to try three times, before passing. Each time they were brought back to Oulx by the Red Cross, which with the MigrAlp project, of which it is the leader, and tries to make the rejections of individuals and families less cumbersome, also collaborating with the Italian Border Police. In April 2022, 287 people were reported by Claviere or Frejus, almost 10 per day, while in May 520, with an average that rises to 17 per day¹⁴. There are also those who, after seeing the mountains, understand that it is not the right way and go back on their steps: it is the case of a nucleus of two Iranian sisters with the 9-year-old son of one of the two. We talk a lot with them – having fled Fatima's suffocating arranged marriage, the boy's mother - and we find evidence of the trauma the latter is experiencing. The exhausting journey, culminating in the theft of his mobile phone, while he was huddled in the boat to get to Italy from Turkey upset him. "He says for example: but why did

¹³ <https://www.talitaonlus.it/rifugio-fraternitagrave-massi.html>

¹⁴ Source: MigrAlp project, CRI – Comitato di Susa. Since January 2022, the mobile unit has brought 1,684 people back to the Massi shelter, while since its launch in 2018 the total figure is 18,069 beneficiaries.

we come this way? He says all the time: Mom, I will not forgive you. I do not forgive you. Why did you take me away?".

For families, therefore, nothing has changed on the border compared to a year ago, when we carried out the first edition of the research "Nascosti in piena vista" (Hidden in plain sight). An operator of the Public Security authorities, met in another context, share with us the same with a the sense of discomfort for the treatment that is reserved to migrants on the other side of the border, and the scarce space and promiscuity in the container in which people are detained. After serving in so many border areas, he wonders what difference there is between the different wars that all refugees, Ukrainian or of other nationalities, whom he has encountered carry in their eyes. A question that for now remains unanswered, here as in Ventimiglia.

As for unaccompanied minors, at least here, unlike the Ventimiglia-Menton border, it seems a positive period: throughout almost all of April and May 2022, from what we have been able to detect, the French border police has followed a linear and effective practice that last year was not so much in vogue: now the child arrives by feet at the garrison of the PAF through the normal road, that is, without hiding between the paths. Minors often have with them a sheet reporting their age, name and a request to be accepted as an asylum seeker in France. In the days during which our team was present between Oulx and Claviere, in fact, no minor was rejected out of at least 30 we came across. Instead, the team met a child who was rejected by Modane, although the *refus d'entrée* recognized him as a minor, indicating his date of birth correctly. The numbers have been growing: from 2-3 daily presences in April, they have gone up to an average of at least double the passages in May, when the monthly presences reached 150 compared to 35 in April¹⁵, at least 90 percent from Afghanistan: The Northern Border is detecting a very onerous youth diaspora both economically and mentally for all these children. "They are still strong, already as an adult, especially within themselves", underlines Martina Cociglio, legal operator at the shelter on behalf of Waldensian Deaconry, who everyday interviews children and families trying to clarify any doubt from the point of view of documents.

For Michele Belmondo as well, coordinator for the Red Cross of MigrAlp¹⁶, the issue related to the rights of unaccompanied minors is improving. "But I do not know if and how long this positive phase will last", he explains. Even for Stephanie Besson, co-founder in 2015 of the French association Tous Migrants (and *Marauders*¹⁷, the people who monitor mountain trails to avoid risks for migrant people), you have to be alert. When we meet her, in Briançon, it is an opportunity to visit the new French shelter, *Les Terrasses solidaires*, which a few months ago has moved to a practical multi-storey building with about twenty rooms and a large common room where volunteers and migrants passing through cook together and spend shared time, while the legal team, here too, gives its support. The new building, worth one million euros, was paid for largely by

¹⁵ Counting by Waldensian Deaconry and Medu, Doctors for Human Rights, NGO present permanently at the shelter from January 2022 with the its Solidarity Frontier project (<https://mediciperidirittiumani.org/en/frontiera-solidale>) but in network with all the other local authorities that take care of the guests of the Massi shelter through the MigrAlp project

¹⁶ <https://www.cri-susa.it/migralp-limpegno-di-croce-rossa-al-confine-italia-francia/>

¹⁷ <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/30187/we-were-lost-kneedeep-in-snow-pauls-overnight-journey-across-the-alps>

two French foundations with the rest by the self-taxation of citizens and migrants themselves passing through. Upon arrival at the shelter, we are greeted by a surprise: we find a part of the group of 11 unaccompanied children who left the day before from Oulx, arrived in Claviere with the last available bus of the day, that of 13.05¹⁸, and then walked towards the border. "The French authorities took charge of us and assigned us to a first reception community, from which we left this morning to come here to understand how to resume the journey as soon as possible", one of them explains. A said fact: the same evening they had already left. Two of the group, however, shortly before the meeting on the border with the PAF preferred to head into the woods: they had left their footprints declaring themselves adults in Calabria - they all came from Turkey, on a journey consisting of 95 people crammed into the compartment of a sailboat, "5 days of travel in prohibitive conditions" to Crotona - because they had followed incorrect advice and were therefore afraid of being rejected. In the end, walking for hours even in the snow with the fear of wolves (we can see a video shot by one of the two), they also managed to reach the shelter in French territory.

Even at the institutional level, moreover, in Piedmont the situation is quite clear: the Prefect of Turin also highlights the fact that there is a very high flow of passage, considering that the number of minors who stay in reception is already on the rise. We learn that the voluntary jurisdictions opened in the Juvenile Court at the end of April 2022 had already almost reached the figure of the whole of 2021, or 293 against 296. The Prefecture also confirms that in the shortest possible time they will be assigned to the Oulx shelter - open to all migrants in transit, including therefore families with minors - the money requested after the change of headquarters in December 2021, to which the Diocese of Susa and the Magnetto Foundation contributed. "We have reached 70 seats, with much more suitable and less promiscuous spaces than before. We have created a valuable reception that however has higher costs, in terms of personnel, with 8 hired operators, and utilities that reach 20,000 euros a month", explains Father Luigi Chiampo, who with the Talità Kum Foundation opened the doors of the first shelter in 2018. The mayor of Oulx is also on the same wavelength, when he receives us: "The network is excellent, it has been put up in an exceptional way over years and years, it is a valid model to export but it needs public funding to work. It is no longer just a place to sleep, there are rooms suitable for families, there is the medical clinic, the ultrasound, the mediation service".

Talità Kum, Waldensian Deaconry, Medu (which monitors aspects related to health) and Rainbow for Africa (which guarantees nurses and medical care), together with several municipalities in the area including Oulx, Claviere and Bardonecchia, are waiting the allocation of 600,000 euros from the Interior Ministry as requested for what, at a closer inspection, is a virtuous practice of transitory reception of people who do not want to stay in Italy, because they have ties, or simply dreams of a better life, elsewhere. In the shelter, in fact, people can rest, take a shower, find suitable material for crossing the mountains, calmly call distant family members via WhatsApp, meet other people: it is a matter of regaining their dignity lost during the *game*, after all.

¹⁸ This bus is cancelled when there is no school, with the 10.40 trip only remaining, given that since the end of last year the French transport line that came to Italy has canceled the evening trip of 19.45

"This type of journey is a sign of struggle, of claiming one's own identity", explains Piero Gorza, anthropologist and Medu referent in Piedmont who lives in Oulx. There are those who, unfortunately, lost their lives along these roads: the last in order of time, among other unaccompanied minors, was a 15-year-old Afghan boy named Ullah. His existence ended up under the rails of a train last January. But there are also those who manage, despite everything, to overcome the traumas of violence at the borders: "Since I have faced many difficulties and sadness, my heart has become hard as a rock. (...) My only dream and thought is always the desire that Afghanistan be rebuilt and that we can go back", says Mehran, also 15, with an even greater determination than the already solid ones of many other lonely children. At the time when I was studying, in the books there were photos ... Those who built and those who carried out engineering... I had so much enthusiasm. I always dreamed... I saw pictures of people in books and wondered if there would come a day when I could also see my picture up there... I thought that one day, somewhere, I would stand next to a building and proudly say that that building had been built with my own hands." Even Naweed, whose story opened this report, daydreams of becoming a pilot, but first he knows that he must conquer a safe place to add experience to his 14 years of life. He arrived with neglected skin and with some injuries as signs of the journey, few beatings, but so much humiliation on the part of the Turkish police forces: "They said: 'Get up', and they told us (to do) like the donkey, like the cow, anything. 'Be like different animals, behave like an animal.' That is". Another 16-year-old Afghan boy shows us signs of lacerations on his shoulder and arms, reporting beatings received on the Evros River. "In addition to measuring the signs of violence along the road, they have a lot of pain in their limbs and blisters under their feet", explains Antonella Barrale, coordinator of Rainbow for Africa's work at the shelter. "At this stage of life, they are in difficulty and ask for help", underlines Martina Pasqualetto, researcher in anthropology who lives and works in Oulx. "They do not need a good Samaritan because they are not rejected by society: maybe in two or three years they will have a higher social position than mine. Many of those I have known have that potential".

VENTIMIGLIA

VENTIMIGLIA

"It's nice here, we're fine. But it's not our place. And the thoughts in my head do not let me sleep."

Mahmoud, a father of five children aged 15 to 3, no longer knows what to do. The son of Palestinian refugees, he left Jordan more than two years ago and spent a long time in Bosnia and Herzegovina, from where he tried to cross the border with Croatia 20 times. While talking to us, from a park in the upper and historical part of Ventimiglia where we are, disconsolate looks at the sea and France a stone's throw away. The temporary accommodation provided by Caritas Intemelia, which manages the first reception of people in transit in collaboration with Waldensian Deaconry, WeWorld and Save the Children, is comfortable but must be released soon: it is designed to stay one or two nights at most, but Mahmoud's family is already on the third rejection from France in five days. Ali, the second son who is 14 years old and speaks excellent English, is also tired. The last rejection, the day before, was mocking: having passed the first two checks by the French police, a third check by the Gendarmerie near Nice identified them without valid documents to remain in the territory and then deported to Italy which now seems done, or closer to the final destination to seek asylum, Germany.

"There are days when the rejections, both of individuals and families, concern several dozen people", explains Silvia Donato, legal operator of Save the Children in Ventimiglia. That same day, on 6 May 2022, we saw at least 30 of them with our own eyes returning on foot from the border point of Ponte San Luigi until the first useful bus stop towards the city: people who, with a now known practice, are often summarily rejected without going into the specific situations, as reported in their timely reports by French associations such as Anafé and the CAFI project network¹⁹. In the monitoring of 27 and 28 January 2022, for example, they witnessed the rejection of 106 people, including 7 children, and a time of issue of the Refus d'entrée often very fast, up to 3 minutes per person. Among the people who are rejected the next day, on 7 May, there were three Afghan boys who declared themselves minors and the night before we saw them boarding the last train in Ventimiglia in the direction of France. They made us read the official documents of the rejection: the dates entered by the PAF indicate as the date of completion of the age of majority the day before, 8 May 2022. But the document that we read on the mobile of one of the boys seems to refer to an alleged minor. The next day, the three try again: two are accepted and subsequently taken to one of the neighbouring communities for minors, while the third, Abdul, reported that he was rejected in a bad way. "I have a document that certifies that I am a minor. They did not accept me [shows picture of document on mobile]. They said, "You are an adult." And that my date of birth was different. I've had a lot of arguments and I've been rejected several times at the border. There was one of the interpreters who treated me very badly", he said, and then decided to stay for a while in Italy to figure out what to do (in the following days he decided to leave again, managing to get to France). Like last year, it may happen that in the most striking

¹⁹ At first the name of the network was CAFFIM, and was composed of Amnesty International France, La Cimade, MDM (Médecins du monde), MSF (Doctors Without Borders), Secours Catholique Caritas-France. Website: <https://projet-cafi.com>

cases of mystified age it may be the same associations or the Italian Police that bring the boy back from the PAF to ask to take charge.

The border in Ventimiglia continues to be what it has been for years: one of the worst places for a migrant, a shadow cone of human rights and, at the same time, a liquid area where human trafficking does its business on the skin of the most desperate. The associations present there do everything to make minimum sustainability from the unsustainable: every day a strong mix of patience and stubbornness is needed by the legal operators of the Waldensian Deaconry and the NGO WeWorld, by Caritas Intemelia operators and volunteers who distribute clothes and meals at the headquarters not far from the station, by the Save the Children team who always have a Child Friendly Space in the same place where families and children find a little comfort, intervention carried out also thanks to the support of Swiss Solidarity. The numbers during the two months of our monitoring²⁰ speak of 35 families (58 children, 55 adults) welcomed in April and 27 (41 children, 52 adults) in May, of which 18 are Kurdish-Iranian, the largest nationality present. With regard to unaccompanied minors, 24 in April, 47 in May, with Sudanese nationality, followed from Afghanistan and Eritrea.

Patience and stubbornness: because personal situations are often extreme, with cases of enormous psycho-physical stress due to months, if not years, of migration, harassment, deprivation of liberty, risks, in Libya as in the sea, or at any other point of the migratory journey. Added to this is the frustration of rejection at the border, which here can be much more frequent than on the Val di Susa mountains. Operators can be seen running to the border of Ponte San Luigi to do outreach activities²¹ with the people just rejected, to look for minors and vulnerable families to gather information for the reception even in the jungle that was created along the river under the bridge of the highway and in the square in front of the cemetery when, towards evening, Italian and French volunteers of some associations such as Médecins du Monde and 20K offer migrants a hot meal and the opportunity to recharge their phones. "A further problem, both for individuals and for families, is the lengthening of the wait to enter the system once political asylum has been requested", underlines Simone Alterisio, coordinator of the Waldensian Deaconry. "A house is not immediately assigned at the time of applying for protection and therefore people are, while waiting, sleeping for long periods on the street". For families, we try to buffer the situation with the apartments available for emergency reception, "but several times it has happened that we no longer have free places", adds Jacopo Colomba, WeWorld's on-site contact person and legal consultant for the projects of the SAI²²Minori of Ventimiglia, whose implementing bodies are the Somaschi Fathers and the Jobel Cooperative. The SAI (Reception and Integration System) here has 18 places for minors, while nationally, there are 6,644 places funded, of which a thousand are under activation. As for the numbers of unaccompanied children present in May, it's obvious the city needs a reception centre that replace the Roja Camp, dismantled at the beginning of the pandemic: since then in Ventimiglia there is nothing institutional for the very first reception (like the

²⁰ Source: Waldensian Deaconry

²¹ Interventions conducted by a multidisciplinary team on the road and/or other informal contexts of parking or transit of migrants aimed at first contact and support.

²² Reception and integration system, the former Sprar or Siproimi.

Massi shelter in Oulx, for example) of those who pass through here to go to France. The Prosecutor at the Juvenile Court of Genoa tells us that she is concerned about the precarious situation of minors who pass through Ventimiglia and their treatment at the French border ("where the Zampa law does not exist", she points out), while she is aware that the situation of those who stop is well managed by the collaboration between municipalities and associations. Voluntary guardians, even in Liguria, as in Friuli, are difficult to increase. "We will do everything to increase them in every area where they are lacking", says the representative of Agia, the National Authority for Children and Adolescents.

In Ventimiglia there is another alarm that remains untracked but that should instead be dealt with vigorously: trafficking. Often African girls, sometimes pregnant, "who go from the Caritas headquarters for a meal and a shower but then 'disappear' at the end of track 1 of the station", reports Colomba of WeWorld. "If there is no complaint, nothing can be done", he adds disconsolate. But the phenomenon is there, we can also see it directly near the border: during an outreach intervention, the Save the Children operator meets a very young adult girl, pregnant, just rejected. He talks to her about the possibility of sleeping overnight in reception, the anti-trafficking service. She seems interested, makes a phone call, the person who answers passes her to the operator: "she is not interested in coming with you, she is fine", says the female voice on the phone, closing every possibility. Whoever she is, she has that girl's life in her hands. She had tried to pass by with the train, just as a man with crutches and a blind woman had tried, both of African origin and also rejected. The stories of French police identifications reserved for black people follow one another, in the reports of the associations as well as in the narratives of ordinary people. Like a lady we meet outside the station: "I saw scenes that I never thought could exist", she reveals. We also decide to go on the train to France, to see closely the moments of the potential rejections: on the way to France, at the first stop across the border, the French police go up and in this case they only check the lower part of the carriages. No one is getting off. But as soon as we at the station in Ventimiglia, an African boy is dropped off by another French train by the Transalpine Border Police. We wonder if it is a legitimate practice, since they should not reject it on Italian territory. "Agreements between cross-border police forces have never been made public", however, we are told by legal operators. What appears to be the lack of official guidelines applicable to all border territories actually makes practices very different from border to border.

In the face of continuous rejections, traffickers are the masters in orienting people on the various ways to cross the border: advising the least controlled trains, organising the walk along the Passo della Morte, taxis in the mountain streets, hidden in the trucks that depart from the rest areas of the Ligurian coast such as Albenga, Bordighera, Andora. The passeurs, who are of various types - sometimes even people who have not been able to pass are improvising smugglers and "selling" information such as the entrance to the path for 50 Euros²³ - move shrewdly even in the city, and depending on the price that one is willing to pay offer the range of proposals. No one has the certainty of being immediately successful, sometimes the person is deceived and pays for a "service" that does not correspond to what was agreed, but there are rare cases in which one cannot really pass. In addition, unfortunately, to the tragic events that occur with a certain

²³ This and other detailed information are reported in the recently published book "Respinti. Le sporche frontiere d'Europa, dai Balcani al Mediterraneo" (Rejected. The dirty borders of Europe, from the Balkans to the Mediterranean) written by Duccio Facchini and Luca Rondi (Altreconomia, April 2022).

frequency: the last one, on 4 April, when a van on the A10 near Bordighera inadvertently hit two Sinhalese people left probably just before in the nearby parking area by a truck. Another two victims, on 31 January and 2 March 2022, both electrocuted while on the roof of the train that travelled from Ventimiglia to Mentone. Deaths of despair, with little knowledge of the dangers. Border deaths.

At sunset, on the evening of 5 May 2022, we were at the beginning of the Passo della Morte, monitoring passages, clothes and documents. There is a conspicuous sample, like the other times: from these traces you can reconstruct the stories of people, but above all you can understand how this movement of humanity does not stop even in front of the walls and the misfortunes. At some point we hear a rustle, and we meet a Syrian father from Idlib with two children aged 10 and 15. He resisted 11 years of war, then he could not do it any longer and came from both his motherland and the Lebanese refugee camp where his children could not study. He is in a group with other people, he shows us his and his children documents: he arrived by boat at the Southern Frontier four days before, he tried to pass in vain the Brennero pass, now he is here. He is peaceful, despite everything, and the two children seem to be too. The wife has decided to stay in the refugee camp for the moment. "We have nothing to lose, let's just look ahead", he tells us. Next, meaning Luxembourg, "where my mother has lived for 12 years". Legal reunification was not possible, so the only road left was the most dangerous one. "But now we are almost there". When we say goodbye, it is getting dark. A few hours later, after dinner, we decide to go and return to Menton to see any refusals. At the train station, full of citizens and tourists who take the last train to Nice, we see from the corner of our eyes three figures climbing. They seem relieved, cheerful. They are the Syrian father and the two sons.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In its Communication on the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2021-2024 to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, the European Commission recalls that "the rights of the child are human rights", that "every child in Europe and in the world should enjoy the same rights and be able to live without discrimination, recrimination or intimidation of any kind. It is a social, moral and human imperative".

On 23 February 2022, the Council of Europe adopted the Strategy for the Rights of the Child for the period 2022-2027, among which migrant children are repeatedly mentioned as having same rights of their European peers.

However, reading the testimonies reported in the pages of the report, the famous words of Benjamin Franklin come to mind: "Well done is better than well said". The reform of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which should provide for a series of improvements for children involved in migration routes, is in a continuous stalemate and on 9 and 10 June the Ministers present at the EU Council for Justice and Home Affairs on the one hand discussed the EU strategy on the rights of the child - adopting conclusions which recall, among other things the extreme vulnerability of minors involved in migration processes, who should be offered an emergency reception - while on the other they were debating a voluntary mechanism for the distribution of migrants, but also the possibility for Member States to introduce internal border controls beyond the current time limit of two years, by adopting a General Approach, which never mentions the words "minors" or "children". In July 2021 a European Parliament resolution expressed deep concern "at the continuous and serious reports of violence and rejections at the external borders, including from one Member State to another and subsequently to a third country".

Yet the extraordinary solidarity shown towards the Ukrainian people, also in terms of the speed of the European response in granting the right protection to people fleeing, should show the way to a better Europe, capable of openness, acceptance and coexistence with those fleeing war, persecution, and hunger. The scenarios that global crises put before us should not be underestimated: the hunger or climate emergency, which already force so many people to leave their homes and their countries, cannot be de-rated as "economic migration" towards which European countries have always chosen to adopt a repressive approach.

Coming to Italy, children who manage to arrive in our country alone are still victims of practices in border territories that are too different, insufficient voluntary guardians, inability of the system to identify - and especially - the minors most at risk of trafficking and exploitation and to adopt an effective referral system for their protection. On the reception system, a few steps forward are being taken, starting from the increase in the contribution that the Government offers to the Municipalities for the reception of unaccompanied minors. Others are hoped for in the direction of a true territorial distribution of the first

and second reception, aiming at a system that can accommodate all the children who decide to stop in our country.

For minors, travelling alone or with their families, as well as vulnerable people arriving at our borders, to receive immediate protection, we recommend:

- To the **European Commission** the adoption of a Recommendation to the Member States for the adoption and implementation of policies to ensure the full protection of unaccompanied minors at the external and internal borders of Europe and on the territories of the Member States and to promote their well-being and psychophysical development also through strategies aimed at school and training inclusion. The Recommendation should provide for a system of regular monitoring by the Commission of Member States' efforts in this direction and a fund dedicated to improving cooperation and coordination between Member States in order to speed up procedures concerning unaccompanied minors, including family reunification.
- **European governments** must refrain from using practices that erroneously distinguish between categories of refugees, respecting international law and the principle of non-refoulement, allowing access to their territory for all asylum seekers and extending good practices, such as those implemented in many countries for the rapid registration of asylum applications but not only, established for Ukrainian refugees to all asylum seekers, also introducing them in discussions on the approval or revision of European Regulations on migration, such as the Regulation on asylum and migration management, the Regulation on asylum procedures and the Regulation that introduces pre-screening of third-country nationals at the external borders.
- **The European Parliament and the EU Council** to propose appropriate additions to the Proposal for a Regulation introducing pre-screening on third-country nationals at the external borders so that the mechanism for independent monitoring of fundamental rights provided for in Article 7 is also applicable to unaccompanied children, who should be granted the ability to report violations of their rights. In addition, the mechanism should also apply to violations committed outside formal border procedures, provide for dialogue with civil society, effective remedies for victims and sanctions that are genuinely disincentives for states.
- **The Italian Government** to encourage the creation of or support virtuous networks in the territory, allocating resources to support multi-stakeholder organisation experiences (involving institutions, the Third sector, citizenship, the world of religious institutions, the private sector) that introduce responses in terms of reception and protection, with priority for transit and cross-border areas. Humanitarian assistance projects in border areas should ensure at least: local coordination of interventions and integrated management, a night shelter, adequate reception for children and families, a large number of cultural mediators in order to ensure adequate information for migrants,

families and unaccompanied foreign minors, a referral mechanism for potential victims of trafficking and for people with mental health problems.

At Save the Children, we want every child to have a future. We work every day with passion, determination and professionalism in Italy and around the world to give children the opportunity to be born and grow up healthy, receive an education and be protected. When an emergency breaks out, we are among the first to arrive and the last to leave. We work with local realities and partners to create a network that helps us to meet the needs of children, guarantee their rights and listen to their voice. We concretely improve the lives of millions of children, including those most difficult to reach. **Save the Children, since over 100 years, fights to save children at risk and guarantee them a future.**



Save the Children

Save the Children Italia Onlus

P.zza di San Francesco di Paola 9

00184 Roma

tel +39 06 480 70 01

fax +39 06 480 70 039

info.italia@savethechildren.org

www.savethechildren.it