



REGIONE AUTONOMA DE SARDIGNA
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA



Sicomoro
Cooperativa Sociale Onlus

MENS SANA

IN CORPORE

MIGRANTIS

**A VADEMECUM
TO REFLECT
ON EMOTIONS,
EXPERIENCES
AND WHAT YOU
MIGHT FEEL
WHEN
ENCOUNTERING
THE NEW
CULTURE**



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IMPORTANT NOTE

In the Vademecum we have used gender neutral terms with regard to both the professionals involved in the reception projects and their beneficiaries. However, we would like to emphasise that this entire project is aimed at both genders who are beneficiaries of the reception projects.

Furthermore, we must specify that in Italy all the professional roles described in this project can be performed, with equal competence and right, by both women and men.

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“You don’t learn a culture, you immerse yourself
in it”

Bruner, 1993

WHY A VADEMECUM?

The word *Vademecum* comes from the Latin *vade mecum* meaning *come with me*, or, symbolically, *I’ll give you a hand*, and is indeed a small-format guide containing essential information on a given topic.

The **Vademecum Mens Sana in Corpore Migrantis (Healthy Mind in the Migrant’s Body)** encourages reflection on a very important aspect in every person’s life: recognising the different emotions that we might feel at certain times, naming them and understanding them.

In this *Vademecum* we have summarised the experiences of more than one hundred foreign nationals, adults and minors, who we met at various SAI reception projects between January and May 2022. We have collected and processed **the emotional experiences of their migration process and cultural transition**, and brought them together in this guide, which we hope will also prove useful for other people facing the same challenges.

We are aware that arriving in a “new world” is certainly an opportunity to improve certain aspects of your life, especially for those who - like you - had to or willingly decided to leave their homeland. But for a migrant, approaching a new culture also means being constantly exposed to multiple stressors which can become risk factors in terms of personal wellbeing, inner health and social relationships.

When you left your country, you brought with you both your uniqueness as a person and your different customs, habits, rules, religion and languages. The inevitable need to build new social, friendship and emotional networks requires an ongoing comparison with differences in religious identities, family cultures, dress codes and daily actions. Sometimes you might bring differences that your host culture has trouble understanding; sometimes what you find in your new culture may be too far removed from the social context to which you are accustomed and therefore difficult for you to understand.

Too often these difficulties go unreported and we are unprepared

to understand them and manage the experiences they trigger: the **Vademecum Mens Sana in Corpore Migrantis** aims to be a valuable tool for tackling all of these things!

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THE VADEMECUM

This Vademecum addresses a number of experiences which frequently come up in the testimonies of foreign nationals when they come into contact with the new culture and adapt to it day by day.

These are experiences that you may recognise because you have also experienced them yourself, or you may encounter them as you continue your transition process.

Since many of these experiences have important emotional implications, the following pages attempt to "*name the emotions*" that can accompany these practical, everyday experiences, in order to promote a distinction between living in a state of **wellbeing** and being in a state of **distress**.

We recommend using this guide to reflect, on your own, with the professionals you meet and with your friends, on the sometimes complex and difficult inner experiences that accompany this process. "*Giving a name*" to aspects that stress and frustrate us, understanding the difference between expectation and disillusionment, reflecting on new relational dynamics that are often discouraging, as well as welcoming emotions related to sadness and homesickness, is important in helping us to understand ourselves and work on our personal wellbeing.

This Vademecum may not be able to help you get your papers or a job faster, but we hope it will help you better understand your daily life in a new world, with all the emotions that come with it.

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We have worked together with all the young migrants who participated in this project in the hope that the Vademecum Mens Sana in Corpore Migrantis will be a useful guide for you.

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WELLBEING AND DISTRESS

WELLBEING: the feeling that you are living with energy, motivation, enthusiasm despite the difficulties. Your body feels strong, your mind peaceful and your soul willing.

DISTRESS: the feeling that you are living with little enthusiasm, unhappy, hardly ever smiling and not wanting to spend time with anyone. Your body always feels in pain, your mind is confused and your soul is lonely.

WELLBEING is to be sought, DISTRESS is to be addressed and resolved.

1 A JOURNEY THAT YOU NEVER IMAGINED WOULD BE SO LONG...

You left your culture, your society and your family behind, embarking on a long, dangerous and tiring journey to Italy. This is where your new journey begins, in an unknown place where you carry with you the hope and expectation of creating a different life. You're looking for more personal safety or job opportunities to improve your life and that of your family members. Perhaps some of them stayed behind in your home country and this feels like a great burden and **responsibility**. When you get to Italy you find a very different place and culture from what you're used to and you might ask yourself:

What do I do now!?

In our reception projects you will find professionals and staff who are ready to help and guide you on this new journey and could become a great resource for you. You may not be aware of how long it can take to achieve your goals, and you will soon discover this when you try to pursue them. Sometimes it's normal to feel disappointed, angry, scared and very frustrated. Time will indeed become one of your greatest enemies: waiting for documents, slow bureaucracy, lots of online paperwork and waiting for replies from the offices that you will have to deal with. What's more, there are schedules to be met and even the facility where you are housed will require you to follow rotas and rules... how tiring!!!

What about the job that I dreamed would change my life and that of my family?

Again, you won't be able to find a job quickly and it might be different from what you expected. Jobs in Italy are organised based on precise laws, demand for skills and it is really important to speak the local language... Going to school to learn how to read and write in Italian would be a great start, but even that will require time and patience. In short, everything is new to you! And maybe you didn't imagine it would be like this! That is why giving yourself time, not giving up on the dream of a better life, facing up to difficulties and taking care of yourself (by understanding the emotions that trigger distress or generate wellbeing in you), will prove very important in achieving those results that will make you feel content, happy, part of your new country and in control of your own future.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FEEL RESPONSIBLE?

Being responsible means being accountable for one's actions and their consequences, recognising whether you have the necessary skills to achieve your goals, whether personal or together with others. As you embarked on your journey, most of your family probably motivated and supported you throughout the different stages of your migration. Families often expect the member who migrates to achieve goals that they consider useful for the whole family. It is therefore natural to feel loyalty and responsibility towards your family. That is why you will often feel that although your family is physically far away, they are very present in your life psychologically. Once you arrive in Italy you will feel a sense of unease linked precisely to your own expectations and aspirations as well as those of your family. Expectations about work and relationships, among others, that aren't always easy to reach. An unease that stems from the difference between what you had imagined together, before you left, and what you can actually do in this new country now that you have arrived. You might therefore feel some confusion between loyalty to your family and their expectations and what the professionals supporting you in the reception project suggest, but also your hopes for yourself and your personal desires. When these three things blend together, you may feel distressed, inadequate and a



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sense of guilt. This feeling triggers intense distress, causing you to make snap decisions, and has nothing to do with "responsibility". Acting responsibly means acting after having carefully assessed all the real conditions you are experiencing in the present. Remember that unease is a normal feeling that can, however, threaten both your health and the choices you make. This is why it is important to be able to talk about these experiences with people you trust and reflect on what is happening.

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TIME

The clock ticks, days go by and often months too... and sometimes years can go by as you put the pieces of your new life together...

Time goes by as you slowly try to achieve your goals, it can take a very long time and seem endless. Very often the reasons may seem difficult for you to understand and out of your control.

An invaluable resource will be to train your patience while waiting and to always recognise in the small steps that you make day by day, your opportunity to grow and create a new future.

2 FINDING WORK.... FROM DREAM TO REALITY...

"Having a job" is the tool that will allow you to fulfil your goals in life. You will be able to secure a better present and future for yourself and your family back home. You will be able to send your savings to your family, to send your siblings to school and to take care of your loved ones. This is probably the **great expectation** that motivated you to embark on your journey and make this huge change. You will soon discover, however, that in order to work, you will have to take many steps that take up a lot of your "time". You will have to obtain a document to become a legal citizen in Italy, one that gives you an identity and a tax number, you will have to

be registered with the Employment Office, sign an employment contract, write a CV to take with you and you will have to demonstrate your skills... Furthermore, whatever job you are going to do, it's essential that you are able to speak Italian. You must be able to read the documents you will have to sign and you must be sure that you understand the rules of the job that will be explained to you. You will find out that for some jobs, the same ones you probably did in your home country, in Italy you are required to have some sort of "qualification": you will have to go to school and obtain a middle school or high school diploma, and, if you really want to, maybe even a university degree.

In Italy you will find that, even for the simplest jobs, there is a required training period called "Tirocinio Lavorativo e Formativo": you will be placed in a job, you will be reimbursed for expenses and you will be trained for that specific role. It is only after this traineeship, and as long as it goes well, that you will be offered an employment contract. During this time you might feel **confused and frustrated**, because you had not imagined that getting a job would be so complicated!

But don't lose hope! You must learn to ask the specialist services for information and trust the professionals who will accompany you on this journey. During this phase you will have to **learn to plan your life beyond your everyday activities**, to see things from a longer-term perspective, to take responsibility, without ever giving up on your beliefs in "fate or a higher will" but supporting those beliefs with a good dose of commitment and patience!

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO PLAN BEYOND THE EVERYDAY?

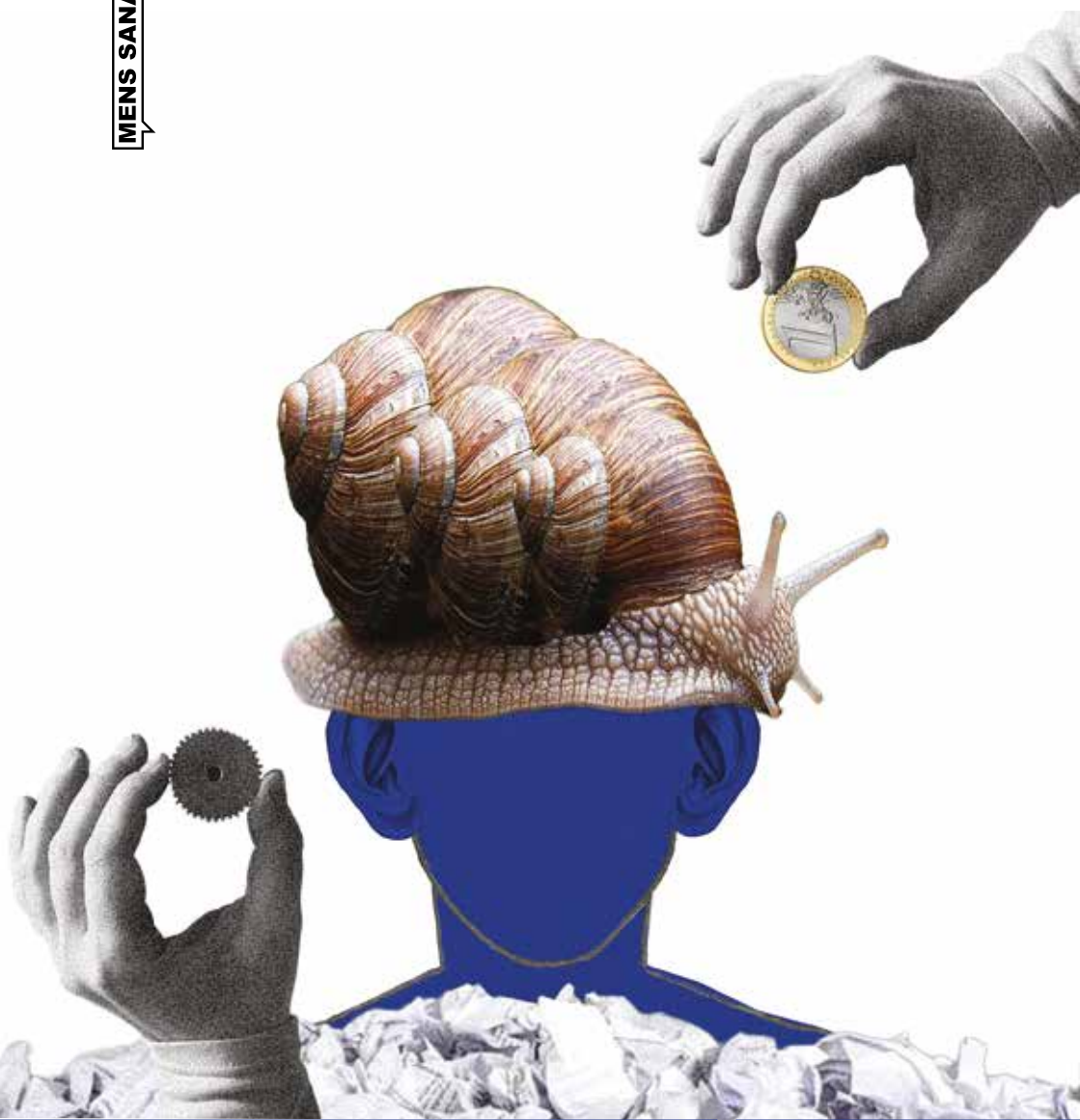
Knowing how to plan beyond your present everyday needs means "seeing far ahead in time".

The struggles of everyday life can sometimes put us in a hurry to achieve a goal, but the fastest way is not always the best way! To make our wishes come true, so that they are lasting and stable, we may have to build a long path, step by step.

This requires patience, perseverance and the wisdom to see what needs to be done today in order to achieve tomorrow's goals. If you aim for a distant goal, you will need to act to create the right conditions to achieve it and, with the right amount of

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patience and wisdom, you will be able to feel how things are changing, anticipate what may happen and feel prepared to face each step...

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EXPECTATIONS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

It is common to think about something, someone or a place based on little information, a few words heard from other people or based on images from TV and social media. We use this information, albeit very imprecise, to form an idea: we thus build our expectations (i.e., ideas and fantasies about what we expect to find) when we go to that place, or meet that person.

Perhaps you too set off on your journey imagining what you would find in your new country, based on very poor information that didn't quite match up to reality, such as how easy it would be to look for a house, find a good job, have a career in football, wear stylish clothes.

Therefore, it is not strange if what you had imagined for a long time is very different from what you actually find. In that case you may experience a strong feeling of confusion, anger or sadness. This is disappointment: not finding what you imagined and for which you had such high expectations.

3 TRUSTING OTHERS... IT CAN BE DIFFICULT, BUT SO USEFUL!

In the facilities where you will be placed to start your reception journey, you will find professionals with different roles and each of them will teach you something different about this new culture, the rules you need to know, your rights and your duties (see Appendix B, page 37).

It is often said that one's fellow countrymen also become points of reference for understanding how things work in the new country. Sometimes the information you get from fellow nationals is similar

to that of the professionals, other times it can be very different or even contradictory. This can make you feel a sense of mistrust and anger towards those you think you know least, i.e. the professionals. In fact, each of them knows very well the stages of the journey you will have to undertake, and the difficulties and the cultural differences you will face. Trusting them, their experience and learning from them about how to build your new life is an invaluable resource for building a better future. Each person who arrives here, as you did, has their own personal story, and there are often details that greatly affect the timing or outcome of the bureaucratic process. That is why your story, like any life story, even if similar, cannot be compared to anyone else's.

When you want something so badly (e.g. documents, permits, work, etc.) and you see others getting it before you do, it is understandable to be angry. You might also feel angry having to abide by rules that you may never have had to abide by before. For these reasons you might therefore see the professionals as the cause of your distress! In reality, the professionals are precisely your source for understanding the meaning of those rules or why your migration story is unfolding in a certain way.

WHEN ANGER TAKES OVER!

Anger is an emotion experienced by everyone, young and old, and in some cases leads us to express overt behaviour or, at other times, to repress it while feeling the anger bubble up inside! There are many reasons why we might find ourselves losing our temper, for instance when we consider another person responsible for having caused us harm or discomfort; or, if we cannot find a direct person to blame, it is possible to become angry with ourselves. It always seems necessary to find a "bad guy", a person to blame for what happens in order to channel your anger towards something or someone. This can sometimes make you angry with those close to you, even if they care about you, because you expect them to understand and listen to you or to have the solution to your problem. But this is not always possible and it can cause you to feel all-consumed by anger, burning with rage! You feel your face turn red, your arms

feel stiff, your heart beats fast, you feel hotter and start to sweat, your forehead and eyebrows furrow, you clench your teeth until you're almost grinding them! Being angry all the time is an emotion that can jeopardise your wellbeing: both for yourself and others. That is why it is important to be able to talk about these experiences and to reflect on what is happening, so that you can understand who you are turning your anger towards, why, and how you can better deal with it.

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TRUST

Of course after all the experiences you will have had, it can be really hard to trust other people! However, remember that you have to discover a new culture and a new territory and you can find trained professionals around you who can support you in understanding and knowing.

In addition to words (...and here in Italy they use a lot of them!!) listen with the heart, to recognise people who have the skills to guide you. Treat them with respect and see that they do the same to you. This is the basis for **trust**.

4 SO MANY RULES FOR LIVING TOGETHER!

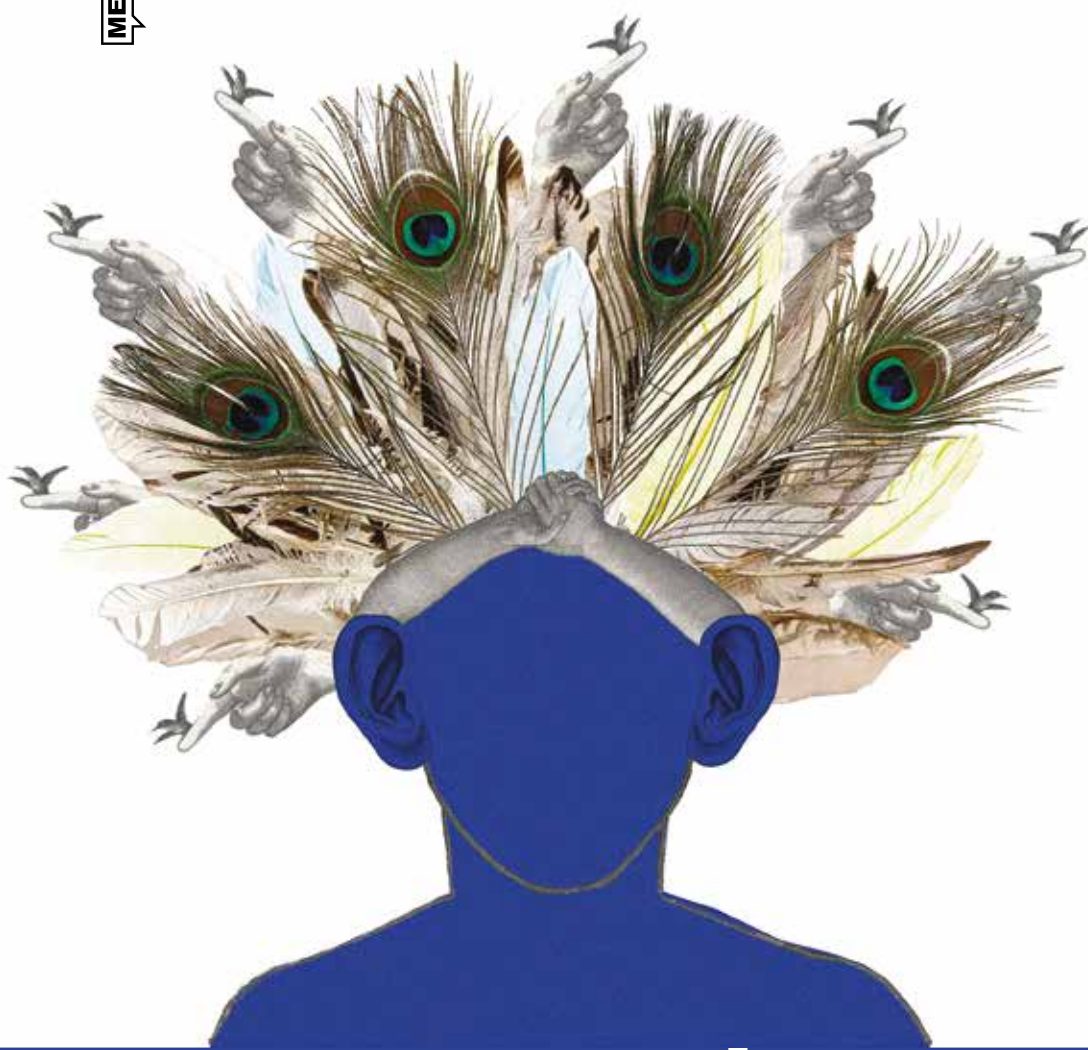
As you build your pathway of integrating into the new territory and culture you may find yourself having to comply with social rules, instructions from some professionals or very strict bureaucratic timescales.... Or much stricter than you had imagined!

This is not easy to live through, for many reasons:

- these are often rules that you have not had to follow up to that point and therefore you may feel that your freedom is being restricted!
- you may not fully understand the reasons behind these rules... or, it may even seem that some of them go against the very reason

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that you embarked on your journey in the first place!

- based on your cultural upbringing, you might attribute the success of your actions not to abiding by the rules but to a “higher will”... but it is very important that you also feel responsible for your actions and choices!

It is natural to be confused as you get to grips with a social context that is different from the one you have lived in and known until now, and perhaps even very different from everything you had imagined you would find. How can you help yourself to overcome your confusion? Acknowledge the positive aspects of these rules! You will be encouraged to take steps (e.g. learning the Italian language, going to school, completing traineeships, etc.) that may lengthen the time it takes to reach your goals. However, these steps are essential for achieving your goals in a way that allows you to respect yourself, others and complies with the law. Understanding why these rules are useful will enable you to turn your confusion into building your path in this new territory. And each milestone achieved will be one more step towards your future plans... as well as great personal fulfilment!

I CAME HERE TO WORK AND EVERYONE TELLS ME I HAVE TO STUDY!

I WANT TO WORK, BUT THERE ARE TOO MANY RULES HERE!

THEY GAVE ME A DOCUMENT TO WORK BUT I CAN'T READ IT!

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FEEL MENTAL CONFUSION?

When you imagine things to be a certain way but in reality you then experience something different, you may feel like you no longer know what to do. You seek information, but you don't understand it right away or it doesn't make much sense to you... and the confusion in your mind increases. This can lead to you feeling unwell. You may feel that your head is heavy, too hot or in turmoil. It is important to be able to talk about feelings of confusion with

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the people you trust and to reflect on what is happening, so that you can assess your expectations in the light of what can actually be achieved.

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5 I AM HERE... AND YOU ARE THERE

Technology, mobile phones and the internet are all tools that make communicating with your family and friends easier, even when you are separated by many miles of land or sea. When you start living in a new country, especially after sharing pictures of the things you can do or buy here, your phone might ring and... a friend of yours calls you because he wants information, he wants to know what living in Italy is like, he too wants to come with the aim and expectation of changing his life! *"I could come and you could host me?"* he asks... You explain to him that it is not what he thinks: there are many risks and problems you have to face, it takes courage and patience to face reality, you cannot find a job immediately, you first have to know the language, study and then learn a trade. And no, you cannot host him, because you live in a facility where you cannot let other people in unless they have a permit. When you tell your friend about your experience you might feel like they don't believe you, your friend might think you don't want him to come... that you don't want him to be *"as lucky as you were!"*... This may make you feel upset, sad and angry, but you may also be *scared* of losing your closest and most personal relationships. Your friend might think that you are lying because he has seen pictures of you or other fellow nationals wearing new clothes and shoes, in beautiful places that seem full of opportunities, but those pictures do not show the struggles and difficulties you go through on a daily basis. Many reply, *"I am sincerely telling you the truth about what this experience is really like, it is important that I do... then, when you come here you will see and understand..."*, choosing to be honest with the other person, while experiencing the pain of not being believed.

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THE MANY SIDES OF FEAR

Fear is a strong emotion you feel when you perceive a situation as dangerous and you feel insecure in facing it. When you are scared you may want to either run away or stay still. When facing a real danger, such as a dangerous animal or an accident, this emotion is of great importance for survival. This emotion is often also experienced in relation to our thoughts and ideas which, although in reality are less dangerous than they appear to us, make us feel in danger.

Even losing the trust of people we care about, or feeling lonely or abandoned can make us feel scared. By feeding these thoughts you may live with a heavy sense of fear, increasing your level of anxiety, worry and stress.

Remember that the most common response to stress is to avoid situations that scare us or that we perceive as threatening. However, the relief we feel from avoiding these stressful situations is only temporary and increases the feeling of losing trust in yourself, causing the much-dreaded event to appear ever more impossible to deal with. It is important to be able to talk about this feeling with people you trust and reflect on what situations are causing you fear and stress, to understand what you are feeling and find the right ways to react.

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6 FEELING LONELY HURTS

Christmas, in Italy, has a somewhat similar importance to Eid al-Fitr. They are two fundamental festivities for religions, although they celebrate two different events: Christmas celebrates the birth of the Christian Jesus, Eid the end of the Muslim fast. The way we celebrate Christmas in Italy, however, may surprise you: after mass, everyone goes back to their homes, to enjoy Christmas dinner and get together with loved ones. The streets are empty and

all the houses have their lights on.

Why am I telling you these things? To tell you that Italy is a country with a culture that strongly revolves around the individual: what does that mean? It means that we like to celebrate with our family, rather than in the street with many strangers from our town; we tend to value personal success over that of the community; we especially care for what we own (our money, our home, our clothes), and we tend not to want to share these things, unless it is with very close family and friends.

You are probably wondering what happens to those people who don't have family here. They might feel lonely, especially if in their home country they lived in an extended family, with lots of people, not only mum, dad and siblings, but also grandparents, uncles, cousins and neighbours, all together, maybe even in a house with extra rooms for guests, which you won't always find here in Italy.

And how does it feel? I will tell you that feeling lonely hurts, and you may experience this feeling more than once here in Italy. It is not strange to experience loneliness. In fact, you will find that many people feel lonely, as you might too: don't withdraw into yourself, talk about your loneliness with those around you, the professionals and your peers following the same journey of getting to know this strange new culture. The good news is that loneliness can turn into dialogue, knowledge and perhaps new friendships.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO EXPERIENCE LONELINESS?

To experience loneliness is to feel alone, isolated, misunderstood. Our head feels heavy, full of thoughts that cannot be translated into words, our eyes are sad, looking at our inner world rather than the outside world.

The strange thing about loneliness is that it does not only affect us when we are alone, but also when we are in a crowd, at a party, at school or at work. We can always feel lonely, sometimes we choose it, sometimes we have no choice. Loneliness is a feeling that transforms us: it can make us wary, distrustful of others and the outside world, but it can also make us discover inner resources and new possibilities for achieving our dreams.



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PERSONAL RESOURCES

Personal resources are all those skills, abilities, talents, attitudes or interests which characterise us. We often have many, even if we don't always use them all!

Also knowing how to recognise and give meaning to our emotions and bodily sensations is a great personal resource, which can help us to live better.

Another great resource is being able to understand aspects of life that we did not know and being able to adapt to what's new, starting with some of the skills or attitudes we already possess, or with our ability to make the best use of the resources available externally (e.g. material, social or health resources). Every resource that we are able to grasp and develop helps **support our wellbeing**, face the challenges that life throws at us and find relief in difficult situations, even when they are traumatic. It is not always easy to understand the resources available to us to cope with a situation.

In fact, sometimes it may seem as if we don't have that many, but this is not true! Each of us has our own personal skills that we can put into practice in our daily life... what resources do you have?

7 THE SHAME OF LOSING YOUR NAME!

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

MIGRANTS

REFUGEES

FOREIGNERS

THOSE PEOPLE...

ALIENS

In this new land you will find yourself meeting many people who will be eager to get to know you and for you to get to know them.

However, in your daily life, you may also find yourself in situations where a person, despite not knowing you at all, will judge you or attribute negative characteristics to you, for no valid reason. The real challenges of dialogue between people from different cultures are often compounded by social intolerance, fear of foreigners and racism (attitudes whereby an individual or group does not accept that individuals and groups with ways of thinking and behaviours that are different from their own exist).

You may then find yourself in emotionally-charged experiences where someone, without much respect, will call you "migrant", "foreigner", "alien", or make nasty comments about the colour of your skin. Or you may also meet people with a surly and unkind attitude towards you, who look at you with fear and suspicion because of your skin colour, your facial features or your clothing.

There is no good reason for this, yet it will be painful for you and you may feel **ashamed** for being a "migrant", a "foreigner", deprived of the right to be known as an individual before being judged.

We know this can happen, we've heard it from many people.

Remember that people who behave in this way are generally unfair in other situations too.

Don't let this weigh heavy on your soul and be happy with all the other positive people you will meet.

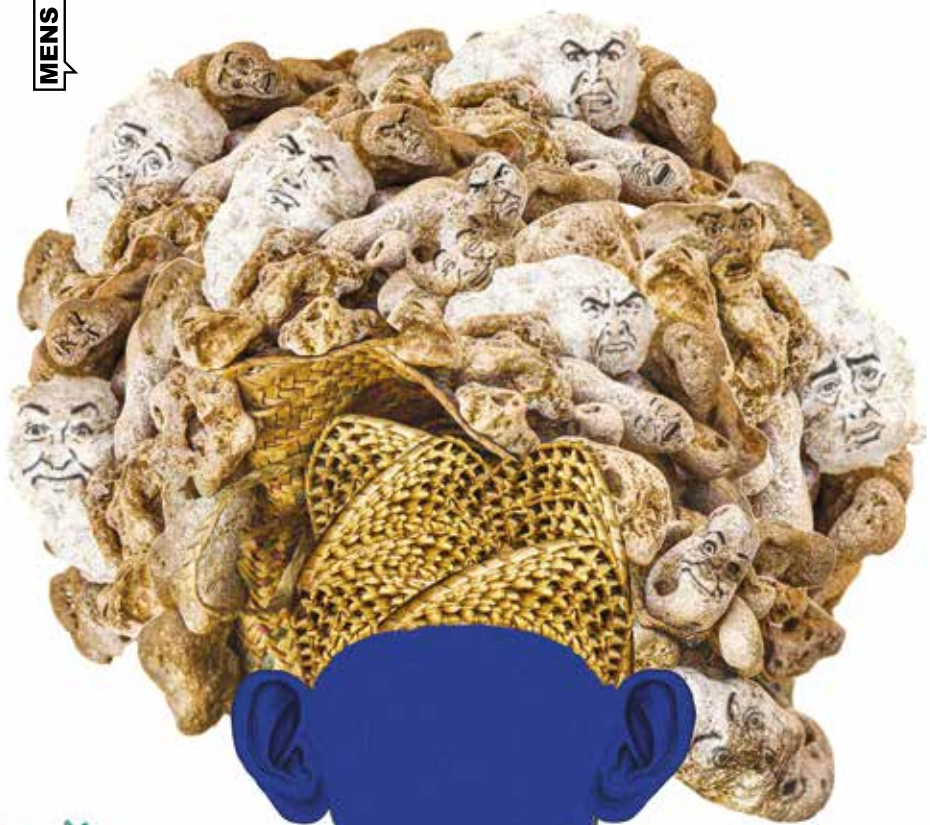
HOW DO WE FEEL WHEN WE FEEL SHAME?

Shame is a feeling of deep unease aroused by the fear, real or imagined, of being judged unfavourably, with contempt. You may experience this feeling when, for example, you move away from the image of yourself that you feel is right or that you would like to show in the context in which you are living, when you feel that you have made a mistake or that you are behaving in a way that others consider strange.

This is a feeling that may arise because of your personal beliefs or because of how other people speak or behave towards you. What happens in the body when we feel shame? Our cheeks burn, our face blushes, our foreheads and palms sweat, our he-

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arts beat faster, and our eyes look downwards to the ground. Everyone has experienced shame, even if we don't openly admit it because it is not a pleasant emotion!

Shame is a painful feeling that can jeopardise your ability to feel comfortable with yourself and others, which is why it is important to be able to talk about these experiences with people you trust and reflect on what is happening, so that you can understand what idea or situation has caused this feeling and make sense of it.

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8 THAT FLAVOUR REMINDS ME OF HOME!

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU COOKED A MEAL?

WOULD YOU EVER HAVE THOUGHT ABOUT DOING IT?

AND WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE FOOD OR THE DISH THAT MAKES YOU FEEL MOST AT HOME?

Cooking the typical dishes of your culture will be something you will find yourself doing very often!

Perhaps, in your culture, the kitchen is a place only for women. Here, cooking is an activity for both men and women, and so it may seem strange to you to cook for yourself, or for the other people you share your house with.

Knowing how to cook means learning a skill that is highly autonomous and that has many important aspects!

Through cooking you can learn about the ingredients typical of the new culture you are experiencing and discover new fla-

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vours to excite your palate. Or you might just be faced with new foods that you don't like, and so being able to cook your own dishes will mean that you can eat what you are used to and what makes you feel good!

Cooking the dishes of your homeland and seeking out the traditional flavours of your culture can also be a way to make home feel less far away and help when you feel nostalgic or alone. That's why you might feel **sad** if you can't find those special ingredients at the nearby market... or if that rice, that potato or that tea doesn't quite have the flavour you were hoping for... Wanting to experience your own traditions and culture through tastes and food is a very normal thing. You should try to keep this joy alive, finding your own more personal and creative solutions, even if you have to make do without an ingredient!

WHY DO WE FEEL **SADNESS?**

You can experience sadness when you cannot obtain or achieve something or a situation that you desire or that you believe will make you feel good. When you are sad your body feels weak and your shoulders slump, you don't feel like doing anything, your head fills with unwanted thoughts and you feel like your heart is broken. In the moment you feel sad and you may also feel lonely. You might even feel like crying.

It is important to be able to talk about how you're feeling with people you trust and reflect on what's happened, to understand the emotion you are feeling.

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9 **WOMEN, WHAT A MYSTERY!**

In this new country, you may encounter women in different contexts than you are used to: you may meet them in the

workplace, at school, on public transport and in any place you visit. They will be nice, shy, open, kind, cold... in short, each will behave differently towards you and this may lead you to not knowing what to think or how to react.

The way women dress can also be different: in every country there are differences in clothing, and this is also a cultural trait. In Italy, you will find that women are **free** to decide how to dress and this may leave you with more questions. Women freely decide what clothes to wear and when, according to social rules that are often not written down anywhere, but learned through experience. For example, among the first things you will notice is that veils and covers are not commonly worn here, even when entering a church: it might seem disrespectful, but in Italy it is not. Not to mention tight clothes and shorts, especially in summer. This isn't meant to be provocative. Or to invite attention. It's not considered disrespectful either. Once again, social rules apply and everyone has their own personal taste in dressing and how they want to present themselves to the world.

So how do you know if a person is interested in you, if they want to get to know you better, or if they are simply being friendly? Many would like an answer to these questions, but there is no single signal that can tell us what a person thinks of us. It is not enough for you to say hello, to sit very close to each other on the bus, to meet for coffee, to look each other in the eye or to hug: relationships with the opposite sex are complicated, should never be taken for granted, and need a lot of attention, listening and dialogue, in order not to be misunderstood. Understanding other people's intentions is really important.

Have you ever **felt taken aback** by a reaction that you did not expect from the other person, where you felt embarrassed or ashamed, realising that you had misinterpreted a look or gesture towards you? This is a completely normal emotion! Talking about it with your friends, professionals at the facility and your contacts here in Italy will help you better understand how you feel and deal with this strange emotion that we have all felt at least once in our lives!

DID THAT TAKE YOU BY SURPRISE?

When we have an experience that is far from what we imagined, we can experience an emotion called surprise: it is the moment when we realise that there is a contrast between what we thought, believed or saw and reality. When we are surprised, our eyebrows and eyelids rise, the pupils dilate, we open our mouth and our jaw drops. The knees may bend slightly and the body, if we are standing, may tilt.

All this might be accompanied by sounds or words such as "ah", "oh", "mm"... Surprise doesn't last long and then leaves room for another emotion (anger, joy, shame), which is activated according to the meaning we give to the event that surprised us. This can also happen in interpersonal relationships, when we interpret an attitude or gesture in a way that later turns out to be very far from the other person's intentions, so we may find ourselves surprised by the other person's reaction to us.

FREEDOM

Being free, experiencing freedom, means behaving exactly as our heart suggests, without external constraints or barriers. This leads to a feeling of pleasure because it allows us to fully express ourselves as individuals. But we must be careful: freedom does not mean disrespecting others, which is why it is a very difficult thing to manage. We must never allow what we consider a free expression of ourselves to offend, hurt or harm those around us.

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appendix A

BODIES, RELATIONSHIPS, CULTURES

Every society develops precise modes of behaviour based on social, cultural and religious norms, sometimes declared outright, but more often automatic and implicit.

Norms serve to regulate the relationships between people, the way they express themselves and make contact through verbal and bodily communication. In this appendix you will find some common situations in which these rules come into play and hints to guide you in dealing with them.

Have you ever seen two people kissing in public? Did you know that kissing has a very different meaning from culture to culture?

Kissing is a form of non-verbal contact and communication between bodies, perhaps the most intimate form of silent interaction capable of generating closeness.

Why we kiss is still a mystery; we know that it has many meanings that can differ drastically depending on the culture in which we observe them. In some societies it is considered a disgusting practice, in others it is used to communicate emotions such as love, joy, passion, tenderness, comfort, courtesy, or even as a social convention.

In Italy, among friends and family, it is a fairly widespread custom to give a kiss on each cheek to greet each other when meeting, or to wish each other well on certain holidays or celebrations. Between two people who are in a romantic relationship there is more freedom to kiss publicly, but not too much, as sometimes very passionate kissing is not viewed positively and is considered to be reserved for private moments.

In other societies things are different. In the Netherlands and Belgium giving three kisses is the norm, but the triple kiss is typical of Orthodox cultures, particularly in Ukraine and Serbia.

In China kissing is not practised because it is considered unhygienic, and in Japan it is impolite if performed in public. In Kenya, kissing does not exist; for the Samburu tribe, for example, lips

must only be used for eating and the Maasai consider kissing an impure gesture.

Despite this incredible variety in cultural ways of experiencing kissing, scholars tell us that it is actually incredibly good for your health! When we kiss we use as many as 146 muscles and five pairs of cranial nerves that send information about movements, temperature, tastes and smells from the lips, tongue, cheeks and nose to the brain.

This exchange seems to strengthen our immune system, produces stress-regulating hormones and puts us in a good mood. It is therefore up to each of us to choose, based on the norms of the context in which we find ourselves, the relationships we experience, our own values and personal desire, our own way of approaching kissing, with respect for ourselves and others.

Have you noticed that greetings are often accompanied by physical contact, such as a handshake, a fist bump, a pat on the back or sometimes a warm hug?

These gestures involve different socially-accepted forms of body contact, i.e. we do them automatically without thinking about it, in different situations and they change according to the type of relationship we have with people. The handshake is used in more formal interactions to introduce oneself, to greet, to say goodbye and sometimes to reject a proposal. In friendlier relationships, on the other hand, a pat on the back or an exchange of kisses on the cheek is more likely.

Depending on the degree of friendship and familiarity, a hug is common, a gesture in which you wrap your arms around the other person's body as a sign of affection and love. The map of bodily gestures is indeed rich and sometimes complicated, and, again, varies from country to country. In England you shake hands and it is a very strict rule that you always use your right hand. In Algeria, you say *assalamualaikum* to everyone you meet, regardless of how well you know them, whether in the lift, on the bus or in a bakery.

In Italy, however, there is an unspoken rule that, except in rare cases, if you do not know a person you do not say hello, sometimes

not even in public places, like a bakery! On the other hand, when you know someone, you use various forms of physical approach. But then how do you know when and how to greet a person? Can we express our preference when we have to greet someone? How do we know what kind of greeting we would like to receive? It can be agreed upon consensually! We can openly state how we like to greet, for example, "I like to fist bump, do you have a preference?", or if we do not want any kind of contact we simply greet verbally while keeping our hands in our pockets. The body communicates what we want, even in avoiding doing things we do not like.

Have you ever tried to approach a person and felt that they were keeping you at a distance? That you misunderstood their behaviour by confusing friendship with an interest in you or, vice versa, that it was the other person who interpreted your way of doing things differently from your intentions?

Just like kisses and greetings, relationships have social codes that do not always coincide when different people and cultures come together. There are different types of relationships and degrees of interpersonal proximity and distance, which include different ways of making physical contact.

If, for example, you think a person likes you and you also like them, before attempting a physical approach, try to check whether you are both on the same page.

Notice what happens when you meet them, do they approach you with open arms or do they close them and move away as if they do not want contact? If you want to go up to a person and approach them, pay attention to their reaction, do they move their body towards you or retreat? Observe, note, keep an eye on the other person's behaviour to help you understand how to adjust the distance.

When in doubt, if you are not sure whether the other person likes you, do nothing or communicate what you need with a clear and simple request, e.g. "may I hug you?". Be prepared to accept a rejection, no one is obliged to do anything and you too can say no when faced with a proposal you do not want to accept.

Paying close attention in this way enables you to behave in a consensual and respectful manner towards yourself and others. This applies to any type of interpersonal relationship, at work, in friendship and even in intimacy, when you are in a romantic and/or sexual relationship.

Have you ever thought it strange to see a woman coming home late at night or going out alone? Have you ever been surprised to meet a grown woman who is not married and has no children? Have you ever heard that men are less emotional than women, less committed to family and childcare and more oriented towards working outside the home?

If you have had these thoughts and felt these feelings you have probably been confronted with social gender norms different from those you grew up with.

All over the world, men and women are taught different things about how they should be, what they should do, and how they can consent to these things.

These are teachings that concern every aspect of life, from choosing what games to play as a child to how to spend your free time, what job to prefer and whether and how to start a family. These are what we call gender roles, i.e. what society expects of men and women.

Society teaches men to be tough, strong, ready for action, never to show emotion, and teaches women to be beautiful, kind, accepting, and caring.

Attributing these rigid characteristics to men and women leads to similarly different choices in life, but they are not always the result of each person's desire, talent and plan. The rigid division of roles and ways of being has indeed been challenged in history.

More and more, women have the freedom and the right to choose to organise their lives according to their own desire: they can decide to study, work, travel and not have a husband and children. Increasingly, men allow themselves to express qualities and activities traditionally associated with women, such as expressing how they feel, crying and even lovingly cradling their babies. It is a freedom that takes nothing away from anyone, but gives value, dignity and respect to every person.

appendix B

PROFESSIONAL FIGURES IN RECEPTION CENTRES: THEIR NAMES AND ROLES

In reception projects in Italy there are numerous professionals you can come into contact with, both inside and outside the centre where you live. The division of their roles is not always clear, either because they might be professional figures that you had never come into contact before, or because each of them is in charge of an important part of your reception process and it might be confusing to distinguish the different areas. This text will try to shed some light on some professional figures and their main tasks. This information can be a starting point for a discussion with them when you meet them!¹

THE COORDINATOR

The coordinator of a CAS (Centro di Accoglienza Straordinaria - Extraordinary Reception Centre) or a SAI (Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione - Reception and Integration System) Project is responsible for ensuring that the reception offered in the centres to those who, like you, present themselves as asylum seekers or refugees, functions in the best possible way. The coordinator's role is essential because they have to manage the centre, the people who live there and also the professionals that work there. It will be the coordinator who will immediately explain to you the basic needs you will be guaranteed (e.g. bed, meals, delivery of personal hygiene products, necessary clothing). They will also give you all the information you need about how the centre is organised, the existing behavioural rules that you will be required to respect, and will introduce you to the other workers who are part of the team. The coordinator will also have the task of helping you to under-

¹ In these descriptions, what was stated in the introduction with respect to gender neutral terms applies. We use gender neutral terms exclusively for ease of translation but, in Italy, all the roles described in these pages can be performed by both men and women. We have chosen a selection of some of the professionals you will meet. If you want to learn more, you can refer to the SAI Operations Manual for the management of reception services.

stand the Italian government bodies and do whatever is necessary to produce the documentation they require, in compliance with immigration rules.

THE LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL MEDIATOR

This professional figure will be of great use to you until you learn the Italian language and culture! They are often former guests of the reception centres, or foreigners who have lived in Italy for some time, who have specific personal characteristics, language and communication skills and who know your language and culture of origin. They can help you understand the new country you have arrived in because they have an in-depth knowledge of the language, culture, social and political context of Italy. Their task is to make communication possible between you and other people who speak a different language, and to act as a “bridge” between different cultures. They make sure that everyone has correctly understood even the complex words, meanings and concepts, and also help others to understand certain reactions and behaviours you might adopt when faced with certain situations, based on your different cultural values.

THE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR

If you are an Unaccompanied Foreign Minor (UFM) you may come into contact with a professional educator. Their role is to organise and promote activities that allow you to both get to know and be with other guests in the Facility and to make use of external services in the area (school, sports, etc.). In addition, the educator has the task of supporting your personal growth, according to your age and the skills you show when you arrive, to help you develop your potential and find the resources for healthy and correct development, with the ultimate goal of making you independent while respecting yourself and others.

THE SOCIAL WORKER

The social worker is another figure who takes care of reception and who organises the first personal interviews when you meet. This is very important to gather essential information about your personal situation and to identify any special needs (e.g. with respect to your health).

Through listening and observation, social workers can assess your needs, requirements and intervene by providing the necessary

support for placement in the most suitable centre and collaborating with the other professionals in the team.

THE LEGAL ADVISOR

The legal advisor has specific knowledge of the laws and all national and international legislation on immigration and international protection so as to offer you the legal assistance you need. Legal informants provide you with initial general information on Italian law, applying for asylum and your rights and duties as a “migrant”. They will follow you through the entire legal procedure to obtain the various titles and permits you need. They will support you in preparing for your hearing at the International Commission, which grants international protection, and will inform you about the timeframe, results and other actions to be taken if the Commission decides not to grant you protection.

THE PSYCHOLOGIST

The wellbeing of your thoughts and emotions is also important for your health! The psychologist can take care of your psychological wellbeing, both with respect to your emotional state when you arrive and in the following phases of your reception. Their role is to provide you with support and assistance in the different stages of your journey in order to recognise together the emotional fragilities that cause you discomfort and stress. The psychologist supports you in enhancing your ability to adapt to the new reception system and organise your daily life. The psychologist also intervenes when you face stressful situations (such as appearing before the Commission, receiving a rejection, or unpleasant or painful events concerning your family or country of origin). They are invaluable in supporting your journey towards building a new life and achieving an autonomous and independent future.

THE GUARDIAN

The guardian is a very specific professional figure who deals with minors and is appointed by a judge of the Juvenile Court. If you are an unaccompanied minor, i.e. you arrived in Italy without parents or adult relatives, a guardian will be appointed for you. The guardian will be an Italian person entrusted with your care and protection while you are living in the reception project. They are responsible for representing you in all those situations where, under Italian law, as a minor you need an adult to be responsible for

you. They supervise your reception, safety and protection conditions, ensure respect for your rights, your psychological and physical wellbeing, and are responsible for authorising any intervention that may be useful or indispensable for your wellbeing. Your guardian will be a reference figure throughout your journey until you turn eighteen, the age at which you become an adult in Italy.

OTHER PROFESSIONALS IN THE CENTRES

Within the reception centre, and therefore in your daily routine, you will get to know and relate to other professionals who perform important tasks set by the coordinator that are necessary for the smooth running of the project, both in relation to you and the other guests. There are the **reception and integration staff**, whose task is to support your autonomy and help you understand and learn many useful things for your daily life (dealing with paperwork, getting around by bus, managing the house you live in, understanding the rules of communal living, etc.). There are the **auxiliary staff**, who are responsible for maintaining a high level of cleanliness within the facility and for everything that needs to be done to ensure the various meals of the day. There are the **night staff**, whose task it is to be present at night and to enforce some important rules even when the other staff are not present. Not all staff are present at the same time and the availability of some services varies according to the type of facility.

appendix **ADVICE FROM SOME FOREIGN CITIZENS**

At the end of each meeting, we asked the young people with whom we had the pleasure of working to collect testimonies to express an opinion, a piece of advice or a thought they would like to give to a young foreigner who just arrived in Italy...

SOME OF THEM REFLECTED ON PATIENCE

"Being patient", i.e. being able to recognise and accept events that distance us from our goals without losing the hope of achieving them...

- Be patient because you won't achieve anything in this land in a hurry
- Be very patient to learn everything you need to know. You may feel stupid at first but give yourself time to learn and this will give you strength
- Be patient and don't focus too much on what others have. Take time to achieve your goals, don't be envious and "don't have eyes bigger than your stomach!"
- Look my friend... it's not easy here and it takes patience
- You must be ready to seek and seize what you are looking for and what you left your country for
- Be patient. If you've made a promise you must be patient if you want to fulfil it
- Be brave and patient to pursue your migration project
- Italy-documents-problem

SOME OF THEM REFLECTED ON RULES

"Living with new rules" means understanding a new world of limits and permissions that you are not used to, without being frightened by the personal confusion that these situations may trigger.

- If I could help, I would say that every culture is different, each has its own rules and procedures. Comply with the rules
- Aim to abide by the law in your new host world
- Always act respectfully. Be calm because, whatever situation you're in, respecting others is the best way to be respected
- Avoid getting into trouble
- Don't think that committing unlawful acts is integration. An Italian who breaks the law is in a different situation and has nothing to lose
- Act correctly, pursue positive actions and don't go down the wrong paths
- To understand the rules you can learn from those who have already learned to be here
- Keep learning and stay on the right track
- Go to school, comply with the rules and "walk" with the right friends

- Comply with the rules and make sure that people always have fond memories of you

SOME OF THEM REFLECTED ON LANGUAGE

“learning the language” is key to talking to people and understanding their way of doing things. You will struggle to learn a new language... but afterwards you will feel freer, more independent and responsible.

- Learn the language so that you can open many doors and walk in the world around you
- First of all, study
- Go to school for your future
- To understand the culture you have to go to school and not just speak a different language
- The most important thing in Italy is the language

SOME OF THEM REFLECTED ON RELATIONSHIPS

we **“create relationships”** because we are social beings and it is important to create a new network of relationships to escape the loneliness in which we can find ourselves.

- Everyone knows what is good for them and no one can decide that for you
- Keep helping those you feel are in need. Build your solidarity
- Keep a low profile and accept help. Trust the help you receive
- Observe what people do to learn practical ways of living
- The others (your fellow nationals) will not understand the difficulties and great risks you tell them. It is difficult to make people understand the reality of your journey and that things are different here than in your own land
- Be with a group, feel part of the group. Look around you and find your own way to be part of the group because loneliness can make you a bad person
- Listen to other people’s stories so you don’t think you are the only one who feels certain emotions

SOME OF THEM REFLECTED ON THE FUTURE

“having faith in the future” means slowly building it, seizing the opportunities in the present, even if it sometimes seems difficult.

- Spend your time here thinking about building your future
- You never know what awaits you in the future, but you can build the present
- Go slow, life is not easy and seize your opportunity, everyone has their own
- Learn so that you can bring “our Europe” back to Africa
- Don’t focus on the present but look to the future and follow the advice of those who take care of you
- Learn to trust others
- Sometimes you may ask yourself “What am I doing here?!”. In that moment you have to find the answers for your future
- Use your money wisely so that you can always have something in your pocket. And make sure your expenses are always proportionate to your money

SOME OF THEM REFLECTED ON EMOTIONS

“listen to your inner self, listen to your soul” in order to be able to take care of certain parts of yourself that sometimes suffer or other times rejoice...

- Don’t think too much and be brave
- Be honest and brave
- Bring peace and tranquillity so you can also receive it
- Don’t keep justifying your lack of knowledge with the fact that you are a foreigner
- Do not make promises in your heart to try to achieve things you cannot afford. Look at your own and not that of others, because envy will lead you to do things that are not right
- One person cannot help you forever, so believe in what you can do
- There will always be someone ahead of you, so don’t despair if your luck is different
- You could learn to do activities that in your country are only done by women (or men) and it could be a good opportunity
- Keep your mind open and when you are wrong, take responsibility for what you have done to understand how to do it differently

The *Vademecum Mens Sana in Corpore Migrantis* has benefited from the collaboration of numerous professionals who have provided their valuable contribution in one or more stages of the planning and writing process.

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Our warmest thanks also go to all the young people hosted in the communities and centres that we have met during these months. All of this work would not have been as valuable without the generous contribution of their thoughts and personal experiences.

Every single word this pamphlet contains comes from a dialogue with them, in every single sentence we have tried to maintain the value of the testimonies they so generously offered, and every topic covered should be read through the emotion of those who have the courage to rebuild a life far from their homeland.

You can download this *Vademecum* from the project's dedicated page on the website www.coopsicomoro.com

Il progetto *Mens Sana in Corpore Migrantis* si inserisce tra i Progetti finanziati dalla Regione Sardegna, Assessorato del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali, nell'ambito dei progetti qualificati in materia di politiche di integrazione degli immigrati non comunitari promossi dalla L.R. 46/90 per l'annualità 2021/2022