



ONDS ANNUAL REPORT

Over 26,000 people sought for help and support at the Help Centers in Italian railway stations, reads the Annual Report 2012 of the ONDS (Osservatorio Nazionale sul disagio e la solidarietà nelle stazioni italiane), the network of 15 centers promoted by Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane and ANCI (National Association of Italian Municipalities).

Now located in 15 different cities, mainly in medium-large ones, the Help Centers are based on the cooperation between Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane, providing the space for free, Public Administrations, financing the activities, and Third Sector organisations, running the service.

Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane offers over 9,000 square meters for social activities in railway stations, where over 169,000 interventions were carried out in 2012.

2012





In fact, the aim of Help Centers is to guide homeless people and marginalised people in a broad sense to the social services available in the city, so that they can find an effective answer to their needs in more appropriate places than the railway station.

The Help Centers use an advanced IT platform, called ANThology, to register all the requests and the interventions, and to draw a statistical picture of homelessness in Italian railway stations, such as the one offered in the Annual Report 2012, whose figures are quite impressive.

Help Centers doors were opened averagely 576 times a day, 5 new clients (coming for the first time) per hour. Italians, though slightly increasing compared to 2011, are only 26,1%, while 73,9% are foreigners. Men are 76,9% and among them 53% are between 31 and 50 years old.

The highest number of clients is registered in major cities, like Milan and Rome. In the Fashion Capital the Help Center was accessed 34,453 times by 13,787 clients, 11,175 men and 2,610 women, among whom 8,676 from 18 to 40yo. In Rome the Help Center registered 20,952 accesses and 3,174 clients: 2,411 men and 726 women, 2,741 foreigners.

As for the South, Naples counted 7,309 accesses, whereas in Bari they were 10,485, and 589 the clients: 458 men, 88 women, 413 foreigners. Turin, the North-Western automobile capital, joined the ONDS in May 2012 and in only 8 months registered 7,959 accesses.

All these data confirm the trend described in the joint report presented by fio.PSD, Istat, Caritas and Ministry of Labour and Social Policies in October 2012, showing that over 50% of the 48,000 homeless people who attend social services in Italy (night and day shelters, soup kitchens, etc.) have visited the centers of the ONDS network.

Compared to this national photograph of homelessness, ONDS data confirm that social marginalisation is concentrated in Metropolitan areas – Milan, Turin, Florence, Rome, Bari, Naples, Catania. Yet, the percentage of foreigners among Help Centers' clients (73,9% in 2012) is higher than 59,4% registered at national level. Such difference proves that immigration has a strong impact on railway stations population. It is undeniable that also the economic crisis, particularly harsh in Italy, has severely impacted on Help Centers activities in 2012. More requests and more clients on one hand; on the other hand, less chance to offer effective answers. As a matter of fact, in several cases Help Centers were forced to reduce their working hours or limit their activities, due to diminishing funds, both public and private. In Genoa, for example, the private food donations for the soup kitchen have dramatically dropped, as if people were either too poor, or too much concerned of their future, to be keen to share the little they have with those who have nothing. But labour is the greatest issue today. The number of unemployed persons among Help Centers clients has increased: people who lost their job in the last year have no other chance than to (unwillingly) address to social services, whose answers are very limited. Not for negligence, nor incompetence: simply because they are not factories, offices, workshops. In a word, they are not job providers. All Help Centers, regardless their location or dimensions, deplore the lack of solutions for their clients: there's no job available, not even on the black market, as Naples reports.

Families are struggling, as unemployment today is no longer a single member's problem. Both parents and sons are jobless, and unable to offer each other any form of mutual support. Many families, especially in the South, don't have other revenue than grandparents' pensions.

Another serious question is the medical assistance of homeless people, whose access to the healthcare system is getting harder. Several projects of outreach medical units have been created by the Help Centers, but none has lasted, for lack of funds. Homeless persons in need of proper places to recover after a disease face similar problems: day centers are rare and not equipped to provide sanitary assistance, and neither are night shelters, which are obliged to send clients out by 8am, no matter what their health conditions could be.

Nevertheless, in this grim reality, something good is reported by all the Help Centers. They have strengthened their role in the network of local social services, proving the key importance of the actions they carry out in the field of social marginalisation. Perhaps, what makes the difference is that Help Center operators do not say: "This is out of my competence" to any client. They certainly cannot solve all the problems, but they have worked with passion and creativity to help people in need, often inventing and setting up new services to face new phenomena. At least, they have given homeless persons the feeling of not being alone.

OVERALL DATA 2102

14 CENTERS

Daily opening hours	84
Weekly opening days	76
Opening days in 2012	3.952
Opening hours in 2012	24.219
Total ACCESSES	169.019
CLIENTS	26.002
NEW CLIENTS	10.239
MEDIE	
Accesses per day	576,2
Clients per day	81,7
New clients per day	33,8
Accesses per hour	108,4
Clients per hour	11,6
New clients per hour	4,7

Client: all the individuals who have come to a Help Center from 1st January to 31st December 2012.

New client: all the users who have visited a Help Center for the first time.

Access: any time a Help Center door has been opened.

GENDER		
MEN	19.962	76,9%
WOMEN	5.855	22,6%
TRANSGENDER ¹	125	0,5%
unknown	60	
NATIONALITY		
ITALIANS	6.736	26,1%
FOREIGNERS	19.120	73,9%
Unknown	146	
AGE		
Minors	135	0,6%
18-30	7.300	30,0%
31-40	6.981	28,7%
41-50	5.901	24,3%
51-60	2.987	12,3%
OVER 60	1.020	4,2%
Unknown ²	1.678	

¹ Some Help Center does not register the “transgender” information

² The Help Center in Genova Cornigliano (1500 clients) does not register age and nationality registers only.