



EMPTY SILOS

CROWDED STREETS

October 2024

A Report on the Humanitarian Situation in Trieste
Three Months After the Closure of the Silos.
An Overview of Needs and Possible Solutions



INTRODUCTION

In June 2024, the Municipality of Trieste cleared residents from an abandoned warehouse known as the “Silos.” Centrally located near the main train station, the building had long been a squatter settlement for migrants and refugees arriving in Trieste via land, a journey commonly called “the Balkan route.” This report aims to shed light on the situation of people arriving from the Balkan route in Trieste, three months after the closure of the Silos, highlighting the dramatic rise of people sleeping in the streets. The writing organizations, which are IRC Italy, Linea d’Ombra, Diaconia Valdese, ICS, DONK Humanitarian Medicine, San Martino al Campo and No Name Kitchen, hope this report is useful in aiding local and national institutions in adjusting existing policies and services in order to craft an adequate response to this situation.

CONTEXT

The Silos was cleared on the morning of 21 June 2024, following an eviction order signed by the mayor of Trieste. The operation lasted several hours and ended with 165 people being transferred to various reception centers throughout Italy. After the eviction, the mayor ordered Coop Alleanza 3.0, the owner of the Silos, to secure the building and provide for its surveillance within 15 days. Coop Alleanza complied by fencing off the complex.

Before the eviction, the Prefect - the local representative of the Ministry of the Interior - invited the organizations involved in the reception and support of migrants and refugees to attend two meetings at its local office (Prefettura) on 10 April and 17 June 2024. The Prefect outlined the plan to clear the Silos and asked for cooperation from third sector entities. Notably, however, the Prefect did not provide substantial information on plans to address the serious shortcomings in migrants’ and refugees’ reception in Trieste since the summer of 2022¹. The Prefect announced plans to expand the Campo Sacro’s capacity to receive a higher number of asylum seekers by completing work on the sewage system to bring it up to date and to install temporary housing modules donated by UNHCR in July 2024 in green areas. These construction projects would bring Campo Sacro’s capacity to about 150 places². Additionally, the Prefect announced his intention to deploy a high rotation mechanism at Campo Sacro’s reception center, transferring and redistributing asylum seekers from Trieste to other reception facilities (Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria, CAS) in Italy. Sadly, the Prefect did not address the situation of the people on the move, who arrive in Trieste and stay only for a few hours or days, while waiting to continue their journey to other destinations.

The writing organizations have welcomed the prospect of increasing the number of places available at the Campo Sacro for those seeking asylum in Italy. The vast majority of people who arrive in Trieste, however, intend to continue their journey, making it imperative to simultaneously provide for their overnight shelter.

The day after the eviction of the Silos and in honor of World Refugee Day, the writing organizations asked the Prefect and the Trieste Mayor to clarify their reception plans for newcomers arriving in the city. In response, the Municipality of Trieste announced that it would remove the few portable toilets it had installed in the Piazza Libertà², adjacent to the Silos, out of fear of new vandalism episodes. Aid groups noted that the portable toilets were used by thousands, and already insufficient to meet demand. Despite such concerns, the portable toilets were eventually removed.

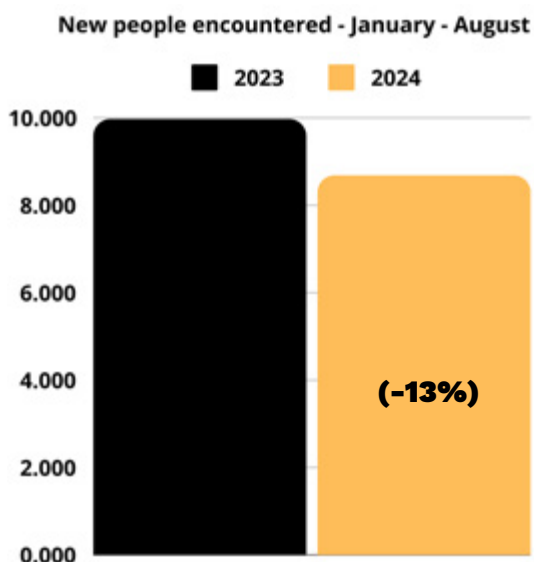
Since the closure of the Silos, the number of people arriving in Trieste seeking protection has not changed. Without any accommodation options, people have been forced to spend the night on the streets, in the open, or in makeshift bedding in the central train station area.

*Silos eviction operation, 21 June 2024,
photography by Francesco Cibati*

A MORE DETAILED LOOK AT THE PHENOMENON

Some sources indicate a drastic reduction in the number of people arriving from the Balkan route (Frontex indicates a -77% decrease in transits in the first eight months of 2024 compared to 2023⁴). The Friuli-Venezia Giulia region that houses Trieste attributes this reduction to the suspension of Schengen and the work to combat irregular migration⁵.

However, the number of people arriving in Trieste via land decreased much more modestly between 2023 and 2024. According to data collected by IRC Italy and Diaconia Valdese, 8,686 people arrived in the first eight months of 2024 (January-August), compared to 9,973 in 2023⁶. This corresponds to a 13% decrease of newly arrived people.



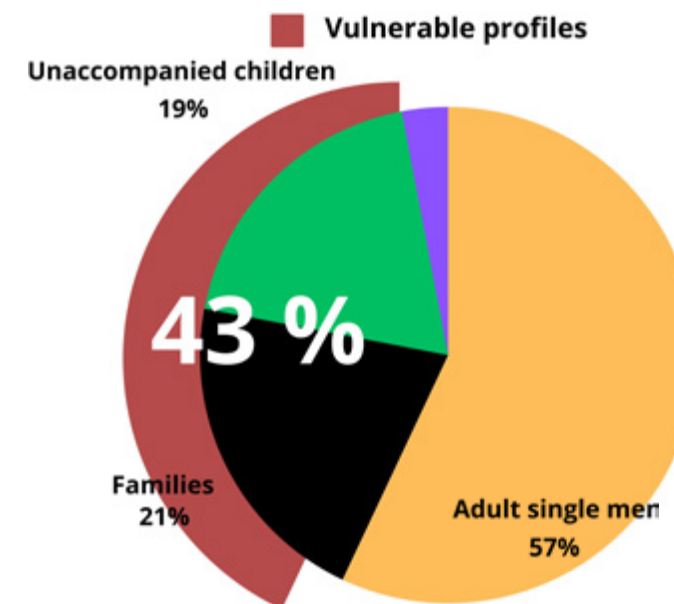
that of neighboring Slovenia which reported an 11% decrease of people arriving during the same period.

Showcasing these figures seems necessary in order to confirm through objective data collected in the field, what is obvious to the people who are familiar with the situation in the Piazza Libertà area: the entry of a considerable number of people into Trieste remains a constant phenomenon, as do the immediate needs of these people.

In the three months following the closure of the Silos, from 21 June to 20 September 20, 2024, IRC Italy and Diaconia Valdese staff met 5,054 people in the Central Station area, an average of about 55 new people per day. 57% of the people who arrived are single adult men (2,847), while the remain-

ing 43% consists of vulnerable profiles: 21% are families (189 households, totaling 1,099 adults and accompanied children); 19% are unaccompanied children (993), and 3% are single adult women (125).

Afghanistan, Syria, and Turkey (Kurdistan region) are the main countries of origin of the people encountered. Many people from these countries, especially the first two, have a strong need to access international protection, as is also evident from the high recognition rates, both in Italy and the rest of the European Union⁷.



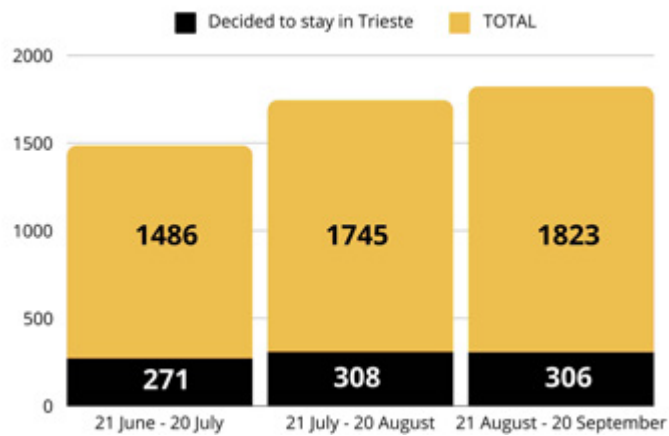
As depicted in the graph on the left, only 18% of the people met (885) said they intended to seek international protection in Trieste - an average of nearly 10 people per day. The remaining 45 people who arrived on average per day declared other countries as their final destination.

After the closure of the Silos, people with very different profiles, intentions and legal statuses find themselves sharing the Central Station area

**EVERYDAY WE MEET
ON AVERAGE
55 NEW PEOPLE
45 travel to other destinations**

10 decide to stop in Trieste

as a place to spend the night. There is a nearby Daytime Care Center on Udine Street that operates during the day (from 8:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.). Outside of those hours, people are exposed to the el-

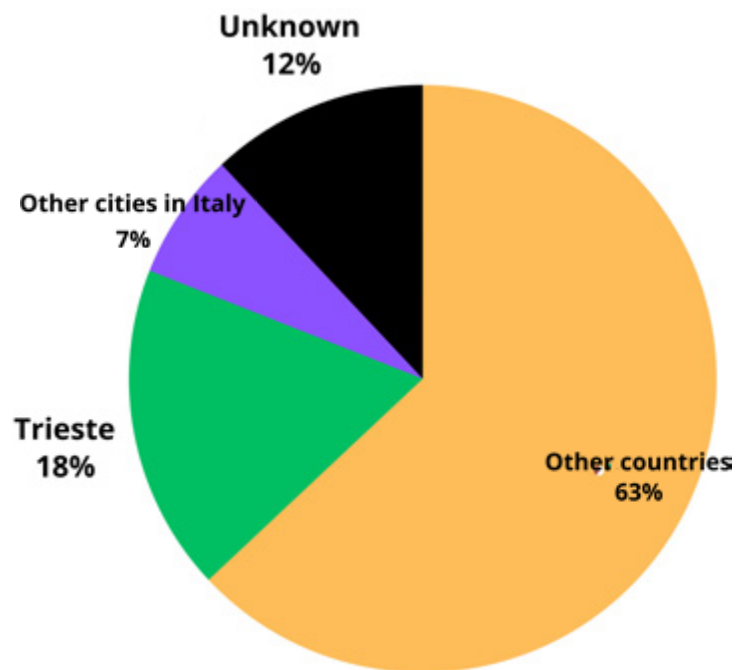


ements, without access to shelter, hot food, or toilets.

During the three months after the closure of the Silos, an average of 100-120 people slept outdoors in the Central Station area, with peaks of 150 and lows

of 30. These numbers are inclusive of asylum seekers waiting to enter the reception system, people waiting to be able to gain access to the Police Headquarters to express their intention to seek protection, and people passing through on their way to other destinations.

Estimating the number of people arriving in Trieste remains complex. In particular, many people arrive at night when most aid organizations are not present. Linea d'Omra and No Name Kitchen are two groups that try to attend to and monitor people arriving at night, but given limited capacity, many of these people almost certainly go underreported leading to an underestimation of the number of people arriving to the city in the data above.



PIAZZA LIBERTÀ AT NIGHT

After the closing of the nearby Daily Center, Piazza Libertà comes alive at night, filled with newly arrived people, homeless, asylum seekers, and other marginalized people in addition to volunteers, NGO workers, and activists. The Linea d'Ombra association, present from 7 p.m. until around midnight, provides basic health care, food, clothing, and socialization.

This intensive work is sustained thanks to the formation of an impressive system of supporters from all over Italy. Prominent among them is the network of “Fornelli resistenti” who bring significant quantities of hot food, based on a schedule managed by the organization “Mediterranea Venice”.

Overnight from 11:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m., volunteers from No Name Kitchen are present in the piazza and around the train station. Between June and September 2024, these volunteers observed the arrival of an average of eight families per night, many with infants and very young children. While Trieste is often not the final destination for these families, they often arrive as the station and its services, such as restaurants and restrooms, are about to close. They are therefore forced to join the people sheltering overnight in Piazza Libertà and the train station. The restrooms inside the train station close at 10 p.m., and with the removal of the portable lavatories from the piazza, there are no others around. Many women and children with whom the volunteers spoke to, requested a bathroom; lacking such basic infrastructure, people were forced to use public spaces instead. The lack of sanitation is of particular concern. Law enforcement officers, train station employees, and cleaning services staff wake those sheltering in the piazza and adjacent train station before 5:00 a.m. and request they move as it is “time to clean up.”

In addition to suffering the humiliation of not being able to use toilets, families are forced to sleep exposed to the elements, including cold, rain and strong wind. Often the children encountered were already very sick with contagious diseases. Staying on the street at the mercy of the weather exacerbates their health problems. Some of these children struggle to walk because of illness or exhaustion from walking many kilometers to reach Trieste.



Food distribution in Piazza Libertà, photography by Elisa da Lio

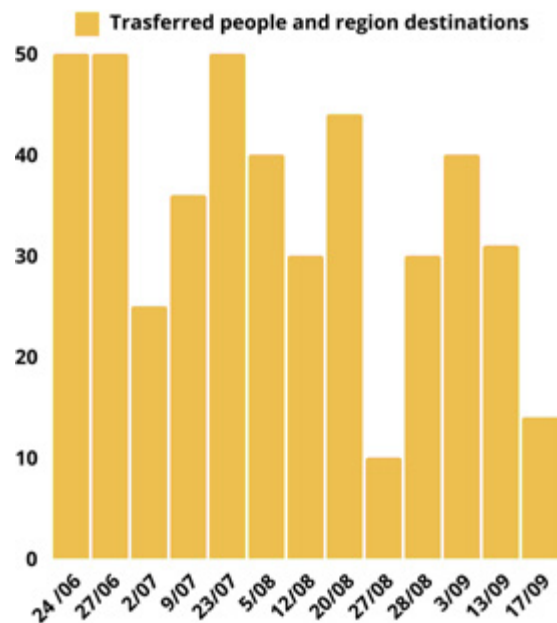
ACCESS TO ASYLUM AND RECEPTION

In the three months following the Silos eviction, the organizations that collaborated on this report recorded the arrival of at least 595 single men seeking asylum, corresponding to approximately 18% of all people met, in line with what was found during the first half of 2024 and during 2023. They were accepted into the Campo Sacro and Casa Malala reception centers rather quickly.

In the first few weeks after the closure of the Silos the situation had improved and the number of asylum seekers on the street was relatively low. From the end of July to early August, however, the situation deteriorated rapidly and waiting times for access to reception services lengthened again. Wait times have occasionally exceeded 20 days, during which people have been forced to live in the street while waiting to be entered into the reception system.

The organizations working on this report also identified 32 families with a total of 124 members and 15 single women seeking asylum, for whom the wait time to access reception centers and services has become dangerously long, exceeding one month in some cases.

The frequency of transfers of asylum seekers to other reception centers in the three-month period that commenced with the closure of the Silos increased compared to the same time period prior to the Silos' eviction: between 24 June and 21 September 2024 there were 13 transfers, about one per week, of approximately 450 people. Unfortunately, neither the transfers nor the small increase in capacity at Campo Sacro, compared to June 2024, (from 25 to 78 places), have adequately met demand and asylum seekers are still being forced to sleep on the streets.



Half of the transfers also occurred to Sardinia, a region notorious for inadequate conditions of its reception facilities: local newspapers have written about this, reporting on allegations of physical and psychological violence within the reception facilities. As early as 2023, the Italian Consortium of Solidarity (ICS) expressed concern about complaints received about the conditions of reception centers in Sardinia and publicly called on the Ministry of the Interior to investigate the incidents and guarantee adequate conditions in reception facilities⁹.

Monitoring activities have made it possible to verify the presence of an average of approximately 100 asylum seekers waiting for reception services each day (with peaks hitting 150 people) in the areas adjacent to Trieste's Central Station. These are asylum seekers who have already initiated their applications, but also aspiring asylum seekers waiting to access the Police Headquarters to express their intention to seek protection. This situation has also arisen due to the long wait times to access asylum services at relevant offices. These delays can vary from 7 to 30 days depending on the case, impeding asylum seekers from initiating applications. ICS, in collaboration with other organizations, reported to the Immigration Office of the Trieste Police Headquarters 57 people who claimed difficulty in accessing the Immigration Police Office, where they are required to appear in order to apply for international protection. Such challenges included allegedly discretionary practices carried out by authorities at the Police Headquarters⁹. The difficulty in accessing Immigration Police prevents applicants from initiating their applications within the three-day period established by Legislative Decree 25/2008. These delays further defer integration into reception facilities and services.

Finally, the local system of small capacity dormitories has proven valuable in housing migrants overnight, but it is woefully insufficient given the city's temporary shelter needs. Apart from the few places obtained from the dormitories for homeless people assigned to high rotation, only the dormitory managed by the Caritas Diocesan Foundation on Via Sant'Anastasio remained active during the period under review. It prioritizes serving families with children and other vulnerable individuals, in majority asylum seekers, thereby impeding the shelter's high rotation function. As a matter of law and practicality, small capacity, high rotation shelters are not appropriate facilities for asylum seekers, who, according to Legislative Decree 142/2015, are entitled to immediate placement in dedicated reception shelters. When the reception system for asylum seekers is saturated, as it is currently, asylum seekers are forced to live on the streets or try to find a bed each night on an emergency basis in ordinary shelters.

ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE

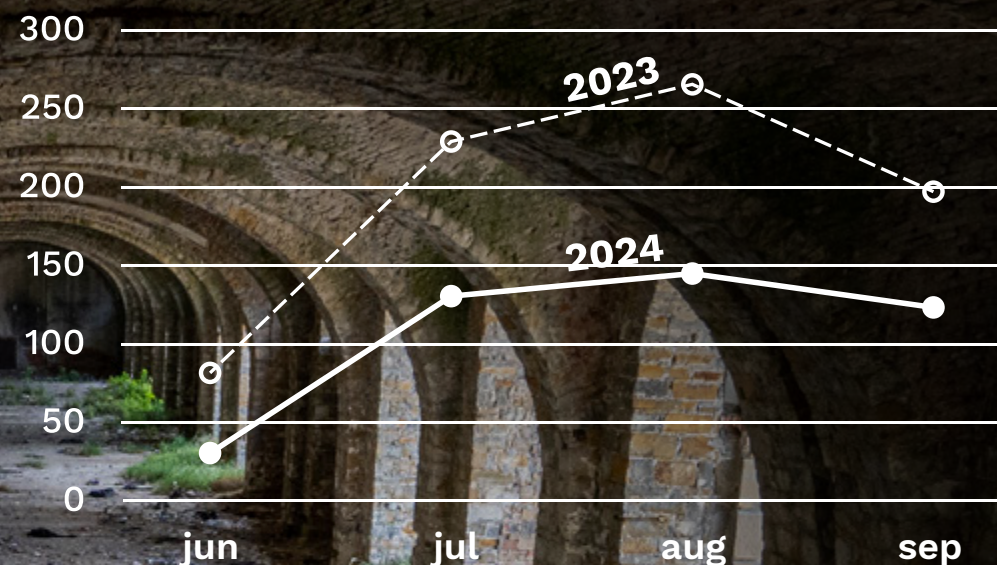
Access to health care remains a pressing issue among the migrant population in Trieste. There is only one non-profit health care provider that offers services free of charge to all nationalities regardless of immigration status in the area, Donk Humanitarian Medicine (DHM). DHM provides access to doctors and nurses in an outpatient clinic in the Daytime Care Center on Udine Street, open Monday-Friday from 4:00 p.m. until 7:00 pm. In addition, in August, the NGO Emergency opened a help-desk in the Daytime Care Center to aid people in navigating bureaucratic hurdles to accessing health care in Italy.

The DHM clinic has reported a slight decrease in demand in 2024 compared to that of 2023. In the three months since the closure of the Silos, there were 424 medical examinations conducted, rising slightly from June to September 2024. The number is lower than the corresponding period in 2023, but - as can be seen - not at all negligible.

The three most common diagnoses pertain to dermatological, musculoskeletal, and gastroenteric diseases and issues. Among dermatological problems, those arising from shoe rubbing and other minor environmental traumas and related infections have decreased year over year. Musculoskeletal issues from trauma - both accidents and alleged beatings by Croatian or Bosnian police and traffickers - and inadequate bedding are also routine. Insufficient and unsanitary food continues to spawn significant diseases of the digestive system as well as dental disease ranging from simple cavities to advanced gingivitis, attributable at least in part to the difficulty of maintaining proper hygiene.

Reports of cases of mental illness have increased compared to the same period in 2023. Some individuals suffered and sought treatment for mental illness before arriving in Italy, others developed mental illness only upon arrival. An increasing number of people are being diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and require on-going psychiatric care that is not available at the free clinic which provides emergency access only. The lack of access to preventative and prolonged health care reduces all patients' prospects for long-term recovery from mental illness and other chronic diseases, while limiting their ability to integrate into and contribute to their host community.

The availability of medication in 2024 was better than the prior year thanks to supplies provided from the Azienda Sanitaria Universitaria Giuliano Isontina (ASUGI). As in 2023, most health issues stem from insufficient housing that forces people onto the streets without adequate nutrition, sanitation, shelter, or protection from communicable diseases.



Empty Silos after eviction, photography by Francesco Cibati



*Before and after the eviction,
photography by Francesco Cibati*

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In view of the critical issues described in this report, as a result of which thousands of people are forced to live outdoors and are hindered from exercising their rights, it is incumbent upon institutions to take prompt action and corrective measures. The following recommendations echo those made in “Abandoned Lives” 2022 and “Abandoned Lives” 2023, to which we refer.

7.1. URGENT HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT ALL PEOPLE IN NEED.

It is recommended that the Municipality of Trieste:

- Strengthen the emergency shelter system to meet demand. Transition shelters to a high rotation, year-round basis to ensure a minimum capacity of 50-70 places for emergency shelter. These facilities should be located in central areas of the city, close to the train station.
- Open a dedicated overnight shelter for unaccompanied children;
- Open an evening canteen service that functions year-round to provide food and other basic necessities for those sleeping in the piazza or Central Station;
- Return the portable toilets to Piazza Libertà, increase their number, and ensure adequate maintenance.

7.2. STRENGTHEN THE SYSTEM FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS SO THAT IT IS COMPLIANT WITH CURRENT REGULATIONS.

It is recommended that the Immigration Office of the Trieste Police Headquarters:

- Know and comply with the law regarding asylum seekers’ rights and the procedure for applying for asylum. In particular, they must eliminate unnecessary delays that prevent asylum seekers from exercising their right to seek international protection at their offices;
- In particular, to refrain from requesting additional documentation or information for the purpose of initiating an asylum claim.

It is recommended that the Prefecture of Trieste:

- Expeditiously complete the renovation of the reception center at Campo Sacro while making the work plan and its timetable public;

- Immediately set up the temporary housing modules provided by UNHCR with the goal of increasing shelter capacity to 150 places by winter;

- Ensure access to an asylum-seeker reception center as soon as the person expresses a willingness to seek asylum, even if mandated finger printing and photographing for identification purposes as per Regulation (EU) No. 603/2013 have not yet been completed

- Strengthen the capacity of the first reception system for receiving asylum seeking families and prioritize these and other vulnerable groups;

- Restore the reception capacity of “Casa Malala”, the only reception facility currently able to accommodate families, as the structure suffers from a lack of routine maintenance by the city and is dilapidated¹⁰.

It is recommended that the Prefecture of Trieste and the Ministry of the Interior:

- Ensure that transfers from Trieste to the reception facilities in other parts of the country comply with the standards and services required by Legislative Decree 142/2015.



*The monumental gateway of Porto Vecchio is the last remaining shelter. For how long?
Photograph by Francesco Cibati*

NOTES

1. See Reports [“Abandoned Lives” 2022](#) e [“Abandoned Li” 2023](#).
2. Radio Koper - [“The closure of the Silos will take place as soon as possible.”](#) 17 June 2024.
3. Piazza Libertà (Freedom Square) is the square where the Trieste Central Station is located.
4. Frontex, [EU external borders: Detections down 39% in first 8 months of 2024](#), 13 September 2024.
5. Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region, [MIGRANTI. GHERSINICH \(LEGA\): CALO FLUSSI FRUTTO ANCHE DI OPERA REGIONE](#), 13 September 2024.
6. This figure depicts the number of newcomers from the Balkan route encountered by International Rescue Committee Italy and Diaconia Valdese in the Trieste central station area during the mentioned period. The data was gathered through individual and group interviews with people supported with legal orientation and first aid. The monitoring activity is carried out during the entire daytime, and partially in the evening, of every day of the year, including weekends and holidays. Please note that these figures refer only to newly arrived individuals physically encountered and assisted by IRC and Diaconia Valdese, and might not comprehensively depict the actual numbers of individuals arriving in and moving through Trieste. [Additional info is available here.](#)
7. European Union Agency for Asylum, [EUAA presents Latest Asylum Trends for the first half of 2024](#), 16 September 2024.
8. Italia Che Cambia, [Attacks on migrants in Sardinian reception centers witnessed by videos released by Indip](#), 9 September 2024.
9. For example, it has been reported to IRC staff that cultural mediators informally interview people waiting in line to apply for asylum and allegedly check messages or photos on people’s phones, looking for useful evidence to redirect individuals to other Police Headquarters in Italy. For additional information, [see here](#).
10. RAI News, [Malala House, the ‘reception for the Balkan Route amid filth and degradation](#), 25 July 2024.



October 2024

On the cover and on the back: people in difficulty, abandoned by the institutions, find shelter in the monumental passage of the Porto Vecchio. Photography by Lorena Fornasir