

CASA BETANIA - photographs by Francesca Cesari

About 650,000 people mostly from Africa and the Middle East have landed on Italian shores since 2014 and despite the number of arrivals has greatly reduced in 2018, Italy has become the main route into Europe for hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers arriving by the sea.

Casa Betania* is a Reception Center run by Caritas, an Italian religious charity, active since the end of 2013 in an ancient cloister in Ferrara, Italy.

The structure mainly hosts African asylum seekers women - often with their children - who come directly from the sorting centers where refugees are welcomed immediately after their arrival, or from previous experiences in housing projects in Italy.

The girls normally stop at Casa Betania for a couple of years, during which they attend internal courses of Italian that allow them to have the basic tools to proceed in the path of training and autonomy, hoping for the positive outcome of the commission that establishes who will obtain the right of residence.

Life in the community is largely self-managed and time that is not spent in training activities is dedicated to child care, housework, cooking and communication with families and friends through cell phones and social networks.

In fact this remains a rather closed universe, in which contacts with external people or initiatives solicited by the NGO operators are rare and the girls tend to stay with each other, keeping a strong distance between Casa Betania and the new social context in which they are located.

These images describe the life of this compact and variegated female community, focusing on individual portraits to concentrate on the personality of women who have made a very tough choice for changing their lives keeping deep roots in the reality that they left behind.

** Betania is the Italian name for "Bethany" recorded in The New Testament as the place where the house of Lazarus and his two sisters was located.*