

Pandemic and Poverty.

Solidarity Volunteers amid Covid-19 Emergency in Rome, Italy

Many commentators define Covid-19 a “democratic” virus in itself. It is claimed that it infects heads of state, politicians, stars of sports, as well as those belonging to the poorest and most excluded social classes. But the reality is very different.

In Italy, as well as in Europe, it is precisely the latter to be de facto the least guaranteed by a rights regime, and thus to have borne the greatest weight of the devastating health and socio-economic effects of the virus spread. The report on poverty in Italy by the Italian Caritas, a charity of the Catholic Church, tells of a 12.5% increase in the number of people assisted in 2020 compared to the previous year. For the majority of Italian nationality.

An already very preoccupying situation in Rome is made into desperate amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The 69-day lockdown resulted in the closure of dozens of “soup kitchens” and reception facilities in the capital, facilities which, in most cases, remained closed even after the end of the lockdown itself and still are to the day. In the capital, moreover, thousands of people have lost their jobs within a few months and became unable to buy the necessary food to survive.

An extreme poverty submerged, which risks to becoming a new serious emergency in the short term, that is a “new normal” of extreme social desperation. It is in this dramatic situation that a dense network of solidarity volunteers has been operating for months in Rome. Hundreds of young and old who have taken care of and continue to work to provide essential services to the homeless, the Roma community, or simply to those “normal” families, now turned destitute after the forced loss of their jobs.

Volunteers coming for the most part from the sphere of Catholic associations carried out an indispensable task by helping those who have been marginalized by the pandemic and silently drifted apart even more distant from belonging to the civil society.



In Rome, the Colosseum manned by the military during the first lockdown in March 2020.



The volunteers of the Community of Sant'Egidio, thanks to the collaboration of many supporters in charge of the kitchen, were able to provide the homeless with quality food assistance, with cooked food suitable for consumption on the street.



In the deserted streets of the city during the lockdown, a volunteer of the Community of Sant'Egidio, distributes food and medical supplies to the homeless in the center of Rome.



Although there were no internally ill patients, the Romi camp in Via Candoni, in the peripheral Roman district of Magliana, was particularly affected by the lockdown caused by the Covid-19 emergency. Most of the people who live there found themselves without any source of food. Don Stefano Meloni, parish priest of the parish of San Gregorio Magno and other volunteers of the listening group of the Catholic non-profit organization Caritas distributed food parcels supplied by the Municipality of Rome in the camp.



The Volunteer Regina Coeli association (Vo.Re.Co.) hosted a canteen for needy people. Due to the Covid-19 emergency, the canteen was temporarily closed and the dinners, which have become take-away, are distributed directly by the volunteers at the entrance to the headquarters in Via della Lungara, in the historic center of Rome.



In Corviale, a historic Roman working-class neighborhood, a family of foreign citizens living there returns home after receiving food distributed by the volunteers of the ACLI (Italian Christian Workers Associations) through the local parish. During the covid emergency many Italian and foreign families were forced to accept food aid from voluntary associations in order to survive.



One of the many homeless who lives in the streets of the capital. For years it has carried out an important voluntary service of public green maintenance. He is assisted, with meals and health aids by volunteers from the Community of Sant'Egidio, after the closure of the many soup kitchens in Rome due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



A group of volunteers from the Community of Sant'Egidio during the lockdown in Rome, in the San Lorenzo district. The community has groups of volunteers who operate throughout the city, and coordinated by a contact person, a connoisseur of the social and territorial reality in which it operates



Volunteers of the Onlus Vo.Re.Co. (Regina Coeli Volunteers) prepare the breakfasts that are distributed every morning to anyone present at their headquarters in Via della Lungara, not far from the historic Roman prison of Regina Coeli.



A volunteer from the association "Lisola solidale" delivers food aid to a family in a district of the Roman suburbs during the lockdown in the spring of 2020. The closure, due to the Covid-19 emergency, of many activities has given a hard blow to many people already in difficulty after the long economic crisis that began in 2018.



During the lockdown, a volunteer plays cards with two Binary 95 guest immigrants, a social center of support for homeless people. In its facilities in Rome, many of them were able to spend, in addition to the nights, even the days in the period when traffic on the city streets was not allowed.



In Corviale, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Rome, the non-profit organization “Il Campo dei Miracoli” has created and manages an avant-garde structure in which “social football” is practiced, a sports discipline based on cooperation and solidarity. During the Christmas holidays, the volunteers of Il Campo distributed food parcels and medical aids to the citizens of Corviale, particularly affected by the economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.



One of the many homeless who lives in the streets of the capital. During the lockdowns imposed by the Italian authorities during the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation of homeless people in the capital Rome, such as those who live near the Verano cemetery, has become particularly difficult. In the impossibility of accessing the public canteens, closed due to the health emergency, and of doing small jobs, not being able to move around the city, their survival depends exclusively on the assistance provided by the voluntary non-profit organizations operating in the capital and which for this reason they stepped up their interventions after the pandemic began.



Two volunteers of the ACLI (Italian Christian Workers Associations) collect food surpluses in a local market in Rome. Fruits and vegetables will improve the quality of the parcels of food distributed during the Covid-19 emergency by the association to the many families in economic difficulty.



Two young volunteers from the Community of Sant'Egidio delivered food to a homeless woman near the Verano cemetery in Rome during the lockdown.



One of the homeless who lives in the streets of the capital. For years it has carried out an important voluntary service of public green maintenance. He is assisted, with meals and health aids by volunteers from the Community of Sant'Egidio, after the closure of the many soup kitchens in Rome due to the Covid-19 pandemic.



A voluntary pediatrician from the “Medicina Solidale” non-profit organization, having seen a little girl in the medical clinic opened for years in the district of Torre Gaia, on the outskirts of Rome. The doctors of this NGO, during the Covid-19 emergency, visited and treated hundreds of adults and minors, Italian and foreign, for free, who had difficulty accessing the national health system. This non-profit organization, in addition to two clinics where general medicine and pediatric medical examinations are carried out, and the necessary medicines are distributed free of charge, assists fragile and homeless people in seven street clinics.



In the popular suburb of Corviale, during the Covid-19 emergency, the volunteers of Acli (Christian Associations of Italian Workers) distribute food to families, Italian and foreign, in need.



For volunteers from the Community of Sant'Egidio, food delivery is also a way to constantly monitor, especially during the Covid-19 epidemic, but not only, the social and health conditions of those who spend their lives on the street. Operating for years in the territory of the capital, they have known the stories and problems of the many homeless who live on the streets of the city. In some cases, in addition to the distribution of food and health facilities made indispensable by the Covid19 emergency, legal assistance and interfacing with local institutions are provided.



The work of the volunteers of the Community of Sant'Egidio begins with the packaging of parcels containing the meals to be distributed to people in need. These are then entrusted to small groups of people who physically take care of delivering them.



A group of homeless people live in some old caravans near the Verano cemetery. Their economic and housing situation has significantly worsened due to the Covid-19 pandemic. They are assisted with food parcels, legal advice and health facilities by volunteers from the Community of Sant'Egidio.



Roma communities living in official and non-official camps in Rome, often far from the city center, have been particularly penalized by the lockdown. Without any possibility of contact with the outside and, often, with the institutions, they could only count on the help of the volunteers.



A Romi woman shows a free meal voucher received from the Catholic public association "Community of Sant'Egidio".



The premises of many Roman parishes, such as that of Sant'Agnese in via Nomentana, are the reference point for the preparation and storage of food distributed by volunteers of the Community of Sant'Egidio to people in economic or social suffering in the capital during the Covid-19 emergency.



Piazza del Popolo, in the center of Rome manned by the military during the first Italian lockdown, in 2020.



The Covid-19 emergency led to the closure of all soup kitchens in Rome. Hundreds of homeless people like this person who lives near the Verano cemetery have lost their main source of hot meals. Replaced, often only partially, by those provided directly in the streets by volunteers from numerous charitable associations.



All the care interventions of the volunteers of the Community of Sant'Egidio were carried out strictly following the health safety protocols indicated by the authorities.
To safeguard the health of operators and of assisted people, often fragile from the health point of view.



Two volunteers from the Community of Sant'Egidio in conversation with a homeless man who lives in the Tuscolano district, on the outskirts of Rome, to whom the association distributed food parcels and medical aids, before and during the Covid-19 emergency.



The entrance, in Via della Lungara, in the center of Rome, of the headquarters of the non-profit organization “Vo.Re.Co (Volunteers Regina Coeli). Founded by Father Vittorio Trani, historical chaplain of the ancient Roman prison, welcomes former prisoners and people in difficulties in its living spaces and provides free hot meals to hundreds of people every day.



One of the many homeless who live near the Verano cemetery in Rome. During the Covid-19 emergency they regularly received food and health care from the volunteers of the Community of Sant’Egidio.



The boys of the amateur sports club Calcio Sociale distribute food parcels to needy families in Corviale, a historic popular neighborhood on the outskirts of Rome, on the occasion of the Christmas holidays.



A volunteer from the non-profit organization Vo.Re.Co. (Regina Coeli volunteers), like every morning, distributes sweets for breakfast to people in difficulty who go to their headquarters in Via della Lungara, not far from the historic Roman prison of Regina Coeli.



A volunteer from the “Lisola solidale” Association prepares packages of food aid to be distributed in the suburbs of Rome to families in difficulty who have requested it.



Many people who live on the streets in Rome are immigrants. These are often workers who, having lost their jobs, found themselves without any economic resources. During the lockdown, they were forced to rely only on the help of the volunteers who supplied them with food and other essential items. down, they were forced to rely only on the help of the volunteers who supplied them with food and other essential items.



Via del Corso, in the center of Rome, deserted and manned by the Police during the first lockdown of March 2020.



Many poor families, like this couple in the southern quadrant of the capital, are forced to live in makeshift shelters due to the serious housing crisis in Rome. For your minimal needs, entrust in fact only to the assistance of the volunteers. It became vital during the Covid-19 emergency.



Packages containing foodstuffs left, during the first lockdown in Rome, by the volunteers of the Community of Sant'Egidio on the benches where homeless people live.



“L'isola solidale” is an organization of social services, which houses about forty inmates under house arrest or under license in its structure on the Via Ardeatina in Rome. During the Covid-19 emergency, his volunteers distributed food packages to he many needy families in the Roman suburbs.



A homeless man eats the lunch provided free of charge every day in Rome by the Community of Sant'Egidio to hundreds of people living in his difficult condition.



Don Stefano Meloni, pastor of the parish of San Gregorio Magno, coordinator of a Caritas listening group, takes notes on the requests of the members of the Roma community in the field of Via Candoni, in the district of Magliana, on the outskirts of Rome during the Covid emergency. 19.



Piazza di Spagna, in the center of Rome, deserted and manned by the police during the first lockdown in March 2020.



A woman is waiting for her turn to be examined, during the Covid-19 emergency, in the clinic of the “Medicina solidale” association in Torre Maura, on the outskirts of Rome.



A local of the Community of Sant'Egidio Onlus, in Tuscolano, in the southern area of Rome. Here are prepared the packages of food that the volunteers of this association deliver to the homeless who live in the neighborhood.



Every week there are thousands of food packages that the volunteers of the many associations operating in the capital are able to distribute to homeless people, but also to Italian and foreign families in serious economic difficulties.



In the parish of Sant'Agnese, on Via Nomentana, in Rome. a volunteer from the community of Sant'Egidio is waiting to go out for the shift to deliver food to the homeless.



A young volunteer from the Community of Sant'Egidio perla with a homeless person in a street in the popular district of the Roman suburb of Appio-Tuscolano.



In the deserted streets of Rome during the lockdown, two volunteers from the Community of Sant'Egidio deliver food and medical supplies to the homeless. Organizing small groups of people, always the same, helps them maintain a constant and personal relationship with the people they help.