

Marivane Chiesa  
Editor



# Bienvenu Shelter

20 Years of Welcoming, caring and Empowering



CSEM



Bienvenu Shelter

For Refugee Women and their Children

**BIENVENU SHELTER**  
**20 YEARS OF WELCOMING,**  
**CARING AND EMPOWERING**

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6. Laura Bondi. **Madre Assunta Marchetti uma vida missionária**
5. Lice Maria Signor. **Irmãs Missionárias de São Carlos, scalabrinianas**  
– 1971-2001
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2. Lice Maria Signor. **Irmãs Missionárias de São Carlos, scalabrinianas**  
– 1934-1971
1. Lice Maria Signor. **Irmãs Missionárias de São Carlos, scalabrinianas**  
– 1895-1934

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MARIVANE CHIESA  
Editor

# **BIENVENU SHELTER**

**20 YEARS OF WELCOMING,  
CARING AND EMPOWERING**



Brasília  
2021



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*To migrant and refugee women  
who passed by the Bienvenu Shelter Welcome Center  
along these 20 years of walking.  
You left your marks of faith and hope.  
And to Sr. Melanie Hester (in memorian),  
first Scalabrinian Missionary Sister who,  
with courage and determination, began this mission.*

The Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of St Charles Borromeo, Scalabrinians (MSCS), founded in Italy in 1895, has as its specific purpose the evangelical and missionary service to migrants and refugees, especially to the poorest in situations of greater vulnerability. In 2021, it carries out its mission in 27 countries around the world.

The MSCS Sisters contemplate human mobility from the perspective of faith and see in migrants/refugees the image of the pilgrim Christ: “I was a stranger and you welcomed me”; they live welcome and solidarity, they take on apostolic itinerance and witness to communion in diversity.

With their feminine strength and sign of hope in the world, they commit themselves to the proclamation of the Gospel, the witness of life, the inculturation of the Scalabrinian charism in different contexts and the welcome capable of strengthening people in mobility as protagonists of communion among peoples.

The MSCS Sisters have been present in South Africa since 1992.



[www.scalabriniane.org](http://www.scalabriniane.org)

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## PRESENTATION

Upon being installed as Bishop of Johannesburg in 2003, I realized new challenges of understanding the precious work done by Bienvenu Shelter in its capacity to respond to the needs of migrant and refugee women and children in Johannesburg.

The Archdiocese of Johannesburg, blessed by the Lord with a vast wealth of gifts, created this space of life and service, to welcome, support, and care for so many migrant and refugee women and children including locals, daily. The Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters, leading with dedication this ministry, gave us all the opportunity to understand the mission of caring and serving migrants and refugees.

Although Bienvenu Shelter has expanded and improved its service to women and children who come from afar, this affection and care also reaches those who are experiencing trauma, those who suffer xenophobia, discrimination, and violence. In addition, people in the local community who are supported, see Bienvenu Shelter – in its twenty years of existence – as a blessing in their neighbourhood.

This shelter is important for our communities as it represents the love of God who gives of himself, serving and protecting the lives of those in need, people that Jesus Christ chose to represent his love: “*I was a stranger and you welcomed me*” (Matt. 25,35). The Shelter is a living sign of God’s love in our midst. It is an important tool that gives hope to migrant and refugee women and children, it also helps them to integrate into the host community. Beside the Scalabrinian Sisters, Management and staff, volunteers, collaborators, donors, friends, and former residents who work to support the Shelter, the local Church is present to accompany migrants and refugees.

I ask God to continually bless Bienvenu Shelter with successful stories of strong women who after their stay in the Shelter, leave to consolidate their newly rebuilt life. I pray for Scalabrinian

Missionaries Sisters to have vocations that will continue this ministry to witness to the love that makes all things new (Rev 21,5) – that same love that is patient and kind, the love which “*is not jealous, is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it is not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*” (1Cor 13,4-7).

+ Buti Tlhagale  
+Buti Tlhagale, OMI  
Archbishop of Johannesburg



**Buti Tlhagale, OMI**  
Archbishop of Johannesburg

Johannesburg, March 23, 2021.

# INTRODUCTION

*A great hope smile upon us*

(Madre Assunta Marchetti)

It was the beginning of the new millennium and in the city of Johannesburg, as it was worldwide, the church was celebrating the jubilee, celebration of biblical memory, in which the slaves were freed, and the debts were forgiven.

In this city, missionary women and refugee women longed for solutions and projects that had the power of hope and the strength to rebuild lives. In the dialogues, meetings and efforts of multilateral articulations, a dream was taking shape and a project was being structured, with the support from the local church, migrant and refugee leaders, collaborators, and many volunteers, who joined the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters, who led this initiative.

The solidarity of many and, in particular, the faith of these courageous women made the miracle of the jubilee become a project that took shape in the form of a shelter, which also helps, guides, supports, strengthens, empowers, stimulates, accompanies, and celebrates, even today – and promises to do so for many years to come – as many as are needed. On March 23, 2001, thanks to a set of positive factors and shared solidarity, ideas, resources, services, and love, emerged in a peripheral neighbourhood of the city of Johannesburg, a home for refugee women and children named Bienvenu Shelter for Refugee Women and their Children. The name of the Shelter is a tribute to the founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family, Pierre-Bienvenu Noailles, who donated the building where the work began.

In the pastoral service carried out at the local church by the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters, together with and in favour of immigrant people, and especially refugees, many of these people

from other countries found the comfort of faith, the support of solidarity service, the friendship that articulates relations of support and protection. At this point, the activities and care of these people who, for the most part, arrived in South Africa fleeing conflict and persecution, took place in public places, which was not ideal in terms of security and privacy. The lack of a safe, specific, and specialized physical space for refugee women – especially when there were children with them in serious situations of need – questioned the leaders and mobilized the ethnic communities. Ecclesial and civil society organizations working on behalf of this population encouraged efforts to find lasting solutions. Solidarity between conationals and between poor women could not encompass all situations and organizations that worked with activities and projects with migrants and refugees united, adding efforts. The local church supported and collaborated in the search for answers to the challenges of the mobile population, especially the need for decent housing and support for access to basic rights and services for refugee women and children.

In the mind and heart of those who worked with refugee women in situations of serious vulnerability, it was very clear the need to find a space to build a residential shelter that would respond to emergency cases and could grow, in the future, attracting resources and professionals to reach other realities, such as the regularization of the migratory status and the socio-occupational insertion. A series of actions of articulation with actors, institutions and professionals made the dream become a project and begin to materialize.

Since the year 2000, behind the scenes, there were articulations preparing the project, such as a meeting held at the residence of the Scalabrinian Sisters, Yeoville District in Johannesburg, in September of that year, between the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and the then Provincial Superior of the Scalabrinian Missionaries of the Province Christ the King – Sr. Maria do Rosario Onzi, accompanied by the Provincial Counsellor of the Apostolate, Sr. Egidia Muraro and Sisters Marlene Wildner and Marivane Chiesa.

Meanwhile, to celebrate the Jubilee, the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family decided to donate 10% of its assets to social works and donated a property in the Bertram's neighbourhood, suburb of Johannesburg, for the installation of the Shelter. The

Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family was founded in Bordeaux France in 1820 and its mission is “to share with Jesus the reunion of the Family of God, to be signs of communion in a divided world” and is dedicated “to the ministry of education and assistance, through its schools, parish catechesis, orphanages and children’s homes”.

The Congregation of Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters (MSCS), which worked in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg with the enthusiasm of the Pastoral for Refugees, initially assumed responsibility for the management of the project and the management of the institution, working in the Bienvenu Shelter until today, with the formal support of the legal entity that was set up to manage the work. The Congregation of the MSCS Sisters was founded in Piacenza (Italy) on October 25, 1895, and is founded by Blessed John Baptist Scalabrini, the Venerable Fr. José Marchetti and the Blessed Mother Assunta Marchetti. The purpose of the MSCS Congregation is the evangelical-missionary service to migrants, especially the poor in vulnerable situations (Constitutional Norms of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of St Charles Borromeo – Scalabrinians, n° 113). The MSCS Sisters experience their mission in the world through working in various fields of attention to people in mobility. Currently, in addition to the work carried out in South Africa, the MSCS sisters are present on the African continent in Angola and Mozambique, and in 24 other countries in the world, on four continents. The Scalabrinian Charism welcomes as a challenge the complex realities of human mobility in the era of globalization and puts itself at the service of those on the move.

The joint work was also attended by the Jesuit Priests, through the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), an international organization linked to the Society of Jesus, whose purpose is to accompany, serve and defend refugees and people in forced displacement. The institution contributed to fundraising through small initial projects to help pay electricity, water and other costs related to the basic needs of the new institution, in addition to providing legal and financial management support in the early years.

Anonymously, in many cases, and constantly for years and years, with commitment and dedication, the families and especially some leaders of the Portuguese community of Johannesburg made a

difference in order for this shelter to materialise and prosper, despite the many unforeseen difficulties that arose in the two decades of its existence.

At the beginning – and especially with the increase of programs and projects that sought to respond to the challenges, needs and demands that were emerging from an increasing number of refugee people – Funders were key actors for the Bienvenu Shelter to become what it is today and overcome difficulties, unforeseen and other obstacles. To the financiers, who appear listed at the end of this volume and to all the professionals who conducted negotiations, supervision and the various forms of dialogue during these many years: great and sincere gratitude echoes from the Bienvenu Shelter's management, of the Scalabrinian Sisters and, even without knowing it, of the thousands of people who received the benefits offered thanks to the resources received from friends, donors, financiers and supporters of the Bienvenu Shelter and its initiatives.

In the year of celebrating the twentieth anniversary of this journey, the Bienvenu Shelter women and children and staffs were truly blessed and overwhelmed to receive a much needed and very special birthday gift from MISEREOR: a new minibus, which arrives to meet a need recognized by a donor who, for years, accompanies and strengthens the institution in its dreams, projects, and efforts. Our gratitude! The present was inaugurated precisely in the celebration of the 20th anniversary, March 23, 2021, in the Parish of St John the Apostle, Florida, with the transport of residents and employees to participate in the Eucharistic Celebration of Thanksgiving, presided over by the Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Johannesburg and President of the Advisory Board, Fr. Jean Marie Did'Ho Kuzituka.

This work is the result of field study and research conducted by the Scalabrinian Center for Migratory Studies – (CSEM) in late December 2018 and early January 2019. The researcher Igor B. Cunha, then an employee of the CSEM, conducted 18 interviews, of which 8 with refugee and migrant women and 10 with volunteers, employees, and collaborators, as well as documentary consultations. Subsequently, with the collaboration of other CSEM professionals and with the help of volunteers, it was possible to complete this work. We thank the management of CSEM and all those who agreed to participate with formal and informal interviews, with testimonies

and with ideas and texts in the construction of this important historical record.

Celebrating the 20th anniversary of this journey, with an even greater demand for attention and service than that which gave rise to the Bienvenu Shelter, the management and the entire team that currently manages the organisation, after listening to all those involved who have participated in this project since its beginnings, in the course of these long years and currently, presents to the community, the local church and volunteers and benefactors this short volume.

With this initiative is also noted the gratitude, in the form of thanks and recognition to all the people who were part of this journey, especially the women and children who trusted in the Bienvenu Shelter, in their Team of Sisters, Professionals and Volunteers, that always taught with their lives, their testimonies, their struggles and for all love given and received at the Bienvenu Shelter. The same feelings of gratitude extend to the professionals of the Shelter team who during these 20 years collaborated for the success of this Mission; to the countless benefactors, partners and representatives of the institutions that have supported us and made a difference to the success of this history.

The purpose of this publication is the gratitude that enlivens those who were a part of this journey, is the recognition for the many gifts and gift-persons who blessed this project, and it is the *Deo Gratias* by Father Marchetti, who from the origins of the Scalabrinian Work knows how to bless God for everything. And for the many reasons for gratitude and praise for this work, which the thousands of people benefited through it do not cease to proclaim. With them, this volume records the narrative of gratitude for all the people and organisations that made the initial project materialise, then gain body and strengthen, and continue responding to the new challenges that day by day, month by month, year by year, are emerging in the trajectories of women and girls, mothers, and refugee children in this South African land.

Johannesburg, 23 March 2021 – Celebrating 20 years!

**Sr. Marivane Chiesa, mscs**

Director of the Bienvenu Shelter



# CHAPTER 1



**I was admitted in Bienvenu Shelter  
on the 3rd of December last year, by then I was seriously  
ill, not documented and had no one to turn to.**

**Today I am in good health and, have documents.  
I would like to thank you for taking me in  
and the warm welcome you gave me.**

**My God bless you all and may you continue helping other  
women the same way you helped me.  
Thank you for returning my hope and the start you've  
given me.**

**Apart from my biological family, you have become my  
family.  
Thank you very much for everything.  
Yours Sincerely.**

*(Jessy<sup>1</sup> – from Zimbabwe – n.d.)*

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<sup>1</sup> All the names of migrant or refugee women used in this volume are pseudonyms, out of respect for those concerned, to preserve their identities.

# **1**

## **REALITIES THAT IMPELLED THE PROJECT**

Two movements marked the process of ideation and the construction of the project that took shape, after a few years of researching and convergence of efforts, in what today we have in Bertrams, suburb of Johannesburg, as a grandiose work that responds to many challenges that women, children and refugee families live: the Bienvenu Shelter and its professional training centre, Mother Assunta Training Centre. On the one hand, the historic moment of human mobility in the region, in which the presence of people from dozens of countries seeking refuge in the city shifted from a massive majority of men to a diversity of profiles – which included wives and children of men who had arrived earlier – and which, over time, included a considerable increase in women who were fleeing, regardless of whether or not they counted on the support of a family member in Johannesburg. At the same time, some sisters articulated and mobilized all those that they could identify as possible partners – among them, two missionaries from the Congregation of the Scalabrinian Sisters and one from the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family stood out, who worked in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg in the animation and pastoral coordination, working together (and for) migrants and refugees, identifying the emerging and challenging need to find emergency shelter for refugee women and their children.

In faith, and with the perspective of scalabrinian missionary life, the reinterpretation that takes place after two decades of successful development of that dream, initially configured as a project and then transformed into a point of reference and a sign of hope for many, is that of gratitude and recognition, which these pages record as memory and as an effort to value the steps taken.

Before going into the details of how the Bienvenu Shelter came about, we collect in this chapter the contextualization elements on human mobility and the main initial articulations and mobilization of the actors involved in the ideation and construction of this project that completes 20 years of achievements.

## **1.1 Brief contextualization on human mobility**

Human mobility in Africa is a complex scenario, extremely broad and diverse. To show some elements that make up the conjuncture of African migration, especially forced migration, and the recent challenges related to this reality (from Johannesburg, South Africa) are recorded below, in some pages, elements on the reality of human mobility from the point of view of the people who make up the work and relations of the Bienvenu Shelter; a socio-pastoral and humanitarian look.

As Patricio and Peixoto claim, “recent migratory dynamics [in Africa] point to hybrid contexts, in which many countries are concomitantly emitters, receivers and places of transit, which can change their position over time depending on the internal and external conjuncture” (2018, p. 13). The dynamism of the conjunctures, in addition to the multiplicity of typologies, those actively involved and motivations, makes the process of data collection and other information on human mobility on the continent very difficult. The scenario is very heterogeneous on the continent and attempts to analyse African migration as a whole can be simplistic and dangerous, for the risk of sustaining stereotypes.

Still, according to IOM (2020), in 2019, 21 million Africans lived on the continent in a country other than their birth. These figures attest to the fact that African migration is mainly South-South, with priority being given to, or sometimes unavoidable, moving to neighbouring countries.

As mentioned, such migration has several typologies. With regard to internal displacements, it is important to highlight those caused by war conflicts and environmental events, and the phenomenon of urbanization, led by people leaving their homelands with a view to enjoy the services and opportunities offered by cities, in their own country and possibly in other countries. Among the opportunities, it

is worth highlighting the labour issue that feeds migration in search of work. People, usually with low or medium qualifications, move to urban centres or to other countries in search of better wages or living conditions. It is important to note that this varied range of motivations for the various types of travel can occur within the internal, international, and intercontinental.

In the African context, it is worth highlighting the hegemonic incidence of the so-called “forced migration”, although this term is the subject of several debates and criticisms, the expression indicates geographical dislocations induced by external and internal factors that limit, but do not eliminate the protagonism of those actively involved, of which refugees who achieve protection are a small part, although official numbers indicate high contingents (Inglês, 2015). According to the African Centre for Strategic Studies (2021), in 2021 more than 32 million Africans are internally displaced persons, refugees or asylum seekers, representing 3 million more than in 2020.

The refugee, in accordance with the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol, is the one who has a well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, participation in a particular social group or political opinions, whether or not he is able to therefore avail themselves of the protection of their state of origin. In later years, in Africa, the Organization of African Unity (now the African Union) expanded the definition, including people who “because of an aggression, occupation, or foreign domination, and events that seriously disrupt public order – in part or in all of their country of origin, or of their country of nationality – is obliged to leave his habitual residence to seek refuge elsewhere, outside his country of origin or nationality” (Saadeh, Mayumi Eguchi, n.d.).

According to the UNHCR report (2020), five of the world’s first 10 countries of origin for refugees or asylum seekers are in Africa: South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Central African Republic. Not infrequently, war conflicts and widespread human rights situations lead forced displaced groups to South Africa. In 2021, Southern Africa welcomed 6.5 million internally displaced persons and 1.1 million refugees and asylum seekers mainly from Rwanda, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi and South Sudan (African Centre for Strategic Studies, 2021).

South Africa stands out for the significant number of immigrants (about 4 million people), which represents 7% of the population. It should be noted that in 2005 this percentage was 2.8%. South Africa has stood out, on the one hand, for the reception of refugees – according to the UNHCR report (2020), there are about 89,000 at the end of 2019 – on the other hand, there are numerous xenophobic demonstrations, with acts of violence against foreigners. A large proportion of these refugees and asylum seekers live in the poorer outskirts of Johannesburg with limited access to socio-economic survival opportunities, exposed to high risks of violence, xenophobia, and crime, in addition to many difficulties in access to health services, education and documentation.

Even if not explicitly included in the legal definitions of refuge, forced migrants should also include so-called environmental displaced persons or climate displaced persons. In recent years the continent has been the scene of numerous climatic events – floods, droughts, cyclones, desertification – that have affected the daily lives of millions of people. In South Africa, for example, cyclones Idai and Kenneth in 2019 affected countries bordering South Africa, such as Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. These migrations, even if they do not fall within the statutory definition of refuge, can legitimately be considered forced migrations. Finally, the phenomenon of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation or trafficking of organs, to which is added the abduction of children for the formation of so-called child soldiers, cannot be forgotten.

In the African context, South Africa also stands out as a country of attraction for workers, mainly from Lesotho, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. Almost always to the labour issue is added the theme of housing and migration regularization. The documentation renewal process, executed by Home Affairs, suffers from policy volatility. According to reports from various organisations that provide support to refugees, it is not rare that they achieve renewal for 6 months, and then receive the right to only a few weeks of stay.

The migration of workers and the displacement of refugees sometimes also involve the mobility of skilled workers, which implies the loss of important human resources, especially in the area of health. In other cases, on the other hand, what happens is the migration of students, who move regularly or irregularly in search of training and study opportunities.

With regard to extra-continental migration, the relocation of African migrant workers to Europe and the Middle East should be highlighted. Many of these migrants move illegally, often aided by networks of smugglers. Administrative irregular migration is very common on the African continent, not only in relation to workers, but also to asylum seekers, who often find it difficult to regularize their status, the situation that the Bienvenu Shelter faces (with the support of its network of volunteers and organizations) guiding and supporting the women and children welcomed and their families, in many cases, for the regularization of the migratory condition in the country.

The reflection on the migratory phenomenon in the South African case, assumes a specific complexity, which requires considering the deep-rooted consequences of the apartheid regime, as well as its updates and applications in this society, which relate them to the exploitation of labour, xenophobia, and the adoption of restrictive, exclusionary and security migration policies, which increasingly hamper the process of acquiring and exercising citizenship. It is a multifaceted xenophobia that creates an environment hostile to migrants and refugees, increasing police power and urging citizens to denounce “illegal migrants” to state authorities, in a dispute between poor black “natives” against poor black “foreigners” (Schierup, 2018).

Among the factors that most fuel the flight of refugees in Africa there are undoubtedly *wars and armed conflicts*. It is estimated that at the beginning of 2020, approximately 25 African countries were in conflict and war, especially the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Somalia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Sudan and South Sudan. The consequences in terms of human rights are disastrous, particularly as regards the psychophysical health of women and children, which largely explains the efforts of the professionals of the shelter and their partnerships to prevent and treat psychological suffering, traumas and mental illnesses that are registered among children and adults welcomed.

The reality of serious threats and risks is portrayed in the courses reported by the women hosted at the Bienvenu Shelter. Many come from countries where frequent violations of human rights and/or armed conflict occurs, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo,

the country of origin of the majority of women and children in the institution, as well as Zimbabwe, Malawi, Burundi, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. Most are people who have been victims of abuse of power, violations of freedom and/or sexual violations. Countless cases of women and children's victims of torture are welcomed at the Bienvenu Shelter.

**Table 1.1** – Main countries of origin of people staying at the Bienvenu Shelter, second year, country and percentage (2008-2010; 2012-2020)

<b>2008</b>	Zimbabwe (53%)	Congo RDC (32%)	Burundi (7%)	Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Somalia (1%) and other countries
<b>2009</b>	Zimbabwe (48%)	Congo RDC (29%)	Burundi (6%)	South Africa (5%) and other countries
<b>2010</b>	Congo RDC (47%)	Zimbabwe (29%)	South Africa (9%)	Mozambique (4%) and other countries
<b>2012</b>	Congo RDC (51%)	South Africa (16%)	Zimbabwe (14%)	Rwanda (5%) and other countries
<b>2013</b>	Congo RDC (43%)	Zimbabwe (15%)	South Africa (12%)	Lesotho (5%) and other countries
<b>2014</b>	Congo RDC (44%)	Zimbabwe (15%)	South Africa (12%)	Ethiopia (6%) and other countries
<b>2015</b>	Congo RDC (43%)	Zimbabwe (16%)	South Africa (10%)	Burundi (6%) and other countries
<b>2016</b>	Congo RDC (45%)	South Africa (18%)	Zimbabwe (9%)	Rwanda (7%) and other countries
<b>2017</b>	Congo RDC (42%)	Zimbabwe (21%)	South Africa (13%)	Ethiopia (5%) and other countries
<b>2018</b>	Congo RDC (42%)	Zimbabwe (21%)	South Africa (16%)	Malawi (8%) and other countries
<b>2019</b>	Congo RDC (38%)	Zimbabwe (25%)	South Africa (7%)	Mozambique (6%), Ivory Coast (5%), Ethiopia, Malawi, Swaziland, Nigeria, Uganda, Burundi, Cameroon, Rwanda, Angola, Kenya, and South Sudan
<b>2020</b>	Congo RDC (32%)	Zimbabwe (26%)	South Africa (17%)	Swaziland, Burundi, Malawi, Mozambique, Uganda, Cameroon, Lesotho, Rwanda, South Sudan, Ethiopia

**Source:** Archive data from the annual reports of the Bienvenu Shelter.

In general terms, considering the profile of people served at the Bienvenu Shelter, we can see the prevalence of refugees from East Africa, in a corridor that descends from Sudan to South Africa. The following table shows the four main **nationalities** of people staying at the Shelter, according to the year and its percentage of incidence. It can be observed that the DRC, between 2008 and 2020, is always the country with the highest number of people staying, with the exception of 2008 and 2009. Next, Zimbabwe and South Africa alternate, in this case also with the exception of 2008 and 2009. The Bienvenu Shelter welcomes, in certain situations of extreme need, South African women, especially in cases of victims of domestic violence, in conjunction with the networks of articulations in which it participates in Johannesburg. Fourth, there are several countries. The 10% increase in South African women received in 2020 refers to the increase in cases of domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **1.2 A beginning marked by cooperation and solidarity**

The creation of the Bienvenu Shelter is part of the history of the presence of the MSCS Sisters on the African continent, especially in South Africa. The first request to open a mission in the country occurred in 1986, when then the South African Episcopal Conference formalized the request for the MSCS Congregation to open a mission with the initial objective of forming and sensitizing the local Church and society to the migratory reality of the country. The request also included the perspective of the accompaniment in faith to the Portuguese immigrants, as well as the presence of refugees who were located in different places within the country.

Despite her efforts to comply with this request, it was only in 1992 that the then General Superior of the MSCS Sisters, Sr. Marissônia Daltoé, together with Sisters Isaura Paviani and Ilse Biasibeti, managed to step on African soil and have first contact with that reality. From this visit it was defined the opening of a community with the aim of assuming a missionary service in the pastoral care of the Latin-speaking communities, particularly with Portuguese-speaking immigrants, in Odendaalrus, in the area of Goldfields, of the Diocese of Kroonstad (Signor, 2015).



This first insertion of the MSCS sisters in South Africa resulted in a partnership that reaches the present day. For the Portuguese Community, the team of the Shelter holds great esteem, for its strength and generosity, for ongoing charity and for doing good to the people around it. Throughout history, this community has become a huge support of the work of the Bienvenu Shelter, making itself present through donations, services and relations of attention and solidarity.

The month of September 1992 marked the arrival of the MSCS Sisters – Teresinha Mezalira, Aires Scapini, Maria de Lurdes Zambiasi – in South Africa, where they dedicated themselves to pastoral assistance to the ecclesial communities of migrants in the Diocese of Kroonstad.

The year 1994 was an important milestone in the history of South Africa, as the formalisation of the end of the apartheid regime, as well as the beginning of a process of social reparation for thousands of black South Africans, also marked profound changes in the political field, social, cultural, and religious. In this context, the migration issue, which was characterised by the invisibility of human mobility during the regime, has undergone significant transformations and the fact that the country is one of the main destinations of immigrants and refugees from other African countries gained visibility.

In this context, the profile of migrants and refugees was characterized by male migratory flows. The men risked, first with the intention of settling down, especially in Johannesburg, and later, seeking family reunion, with the preparation of the arrival of the women and children.

The increasing migratory flows and the increase in the number of refugees in Johannesburg presented themselves to the MSCS Sisters as a great appeal for the implementation of actions that would meet the growing social demands presented by these groups, such as safe housing, support with documentation, assistance in accessing basic services (such as health and education), especially regarding the needs of refugee women who arrived in the country accompanied by children and, many, pregnant women, without protection and support networks, homeless. In many cases they ended up living on the streets of Johannesburg.

In the wake of these social changes, at the end of 1998, the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters Marlene Elisabete Wildner and

Marivane Chiesa began their mission in South Africa with the refugees in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, “a pastoral service with refugees who were numerous” (Signor, 2015, p. 385). From the beginning, the MSCS activity was developed with the construction of articulations with professionals who worked with refugees and with ecclesial leaders, such as Sr. Cathy Murugan, of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family, with whom they joined forces and strategies to brainstorm and organize services that would respond to the emerging needs of the migrant population and, especially to the most vulnerable contingent at that time, who were people seeking refuge in South Africa.

Thus, in 1999, after a period of reflection and dialogue with the Diocese of Johannesburg, represented by Fr. John Fylenson, Vicar General, the Department of Pastoral Care for Refugees was created, where the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters began to work directly.

In the context of the activities of the MSCS Sisters in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, the challenge was to stimulate pastoral care for refugees, that is, to be a presence of faith and hope in the union of peoples. In that context, the meeting place for migrants and refugees was centred around the Cathedral of Christ the King, in the city centre. There they met during prayer groups with migrants and refugees of many nationalities, especially those of English, French and Portuguese languages. By participating in and encouraging these activities, the MSCS Sisters realized the need to meet the demands for hospitality presented by them, as well as to provide a place of their own that could shelter them. According to Sr. Marivane:

There was food, shelter, transportation, among other things. The context of the time was post-apartheid when South Africa had just opened its doors to refugees from other African countries. The centre of Johannesburg, which was occupied solely by whites during apartheid, attracted people from various backgrounds after the end of the regime (Sr. Marivane Chiesa – Director of the Bienvenu Shelter – 02.12.2018).

It is important to mention that this post-apartheid context was also characterized by many demonstrations and street violence, which threatened the safety of the entire population, and in particular

endangered people from other countries who, often not knowing the language yet, lived in precarious situations, on the margins of society.

In their work and socio-pastoral attention, the MSCS Sisters, together with the demands of migrants and refugees, verified the need for institutional care among the indigenous population. Given the serious social and economic problems experienced in the country, there was a contingent of South Africans living on the streets, dependent on the few Shelters that existed. In this context, it was rare for refugees to find a place in such shelters. Consequently, the alternatives found included shared housing, sometimes in bedrooms, and sharing the same space with a number of 15 or even 20 people; or the option of sleeping on the streets of the city remained. This situation became more dramatic as refugee women and children were growing under the same conditions.

These appeals stemming from the precarious situation of reception, especially to refugees, were shared by the MSCS Sisters with the other local people actively involved, with whom they worked in articulations for a common goal. In addition to the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) has proved to be a decisive and proactive partnership, as it was through them that they were able to refer refugees to the Bienvenu Shelter to be assisted through JRS and pastoral services. This collaboration and structure enabled the beginning of the Bienvenu Shelter.

Together with those actively involved who collaborated with the Department of Pastoral Care for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Johannesburg and with leaders of refugee communities (with whom the MSCS Sisters maintained permanent contact) a process of analysing the demands of the respective communities was carried out. The migrant and refugee leaders came from countries such as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, among others, which led to the idealization of a specific Shelter to care for this target audience.

In a special way and in response to the Scalabrinian Charism, the MSCS sisters felt the need to expand the pastoral and social care work they performed, seeking more effective responses to the social needs of refugees. For this they had human resources and institutional support, but the work could only be realized with the convergence of

gifts and actors, needing much time so that it could happen, much articulation, and a force from above.

In the year 2000, in which the Catholic Church celebrated her Jubilee worldwide, the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family, as a sign of unity with the Universal Church and as an act of love for God and for our brothers and sisters, practicing the meaning of the jubilee itself, donated 10% of its goods in the service of the poor. Among the donations was a house located in Bertrams, on the outskirts of Johannesburg, which served as a place for the formation of candidates for religious life. Through the articulations that the Scalabrinian Sisters and Sr. Cathy Murugan had made, in reciprocal collaboration for the socio pastoral care of refugees in the Archdiocese, the Congregation of the Holy Family became aware of the demands of refugees, as well as the desire shared by all, which took the form of a project to create a welcoming space for this population. Thus, the property was donated to the Congregation of the MSCS Sisters in order to serve, from that moment on, as an institutional shelter for refugee women and children, which received the institutional name of Bienvenu Shelter, in memory of Pierre-Bienvenu Noailles, founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

Together with the donation of space, the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family has undertaken to maintain an annual financial contribution in collaboration and support for the development of the activities of the Shelter; contribution that remains to the present day. In return, the MSCS Sisters offered human resources to manage and coordinate the institution's activities.

Still in that initial period, Sr. Melanie Marie Hester, a pioneer Scalabrinian missionary in this work who died prematurely on 15 January 2013, joined the project, leaving a legacy of love and dedication that is remembered to this day by the people who knew her and by the institution. With the support of the volunteer Adília de Sousa, who was legally the first director of the Shelter, Sr. Melanie began to coordinate the process of shaping the project of a shelter for refugee women and children, which was approved by the institutions involved in September 2000, implemented from the beginning of 2001. According to the testimony of Sr. Marivane Chiesa, "together, the two [Sr. Melanie and Adília] worked in various functions as

needed, as drivers, social workers, administrators, among the most diverse tasks, because the number of employees was reduced”.

The beginning of our MSCS mission in Johannesburg, like every new mission, brought with it many challenges, but the hardest thing at the end of the day was to go home knowing that this time too we had no way of responding to the most basic needs of a human being, home, food... real welcome. The Bienvenu Shelter, which emerged from the solidarity between people and institutions, meant for us to make concrete, materialize, what we try to preach, the love of God happening, and lives being welcomed and rebuilt.

The decision at that September 2000 meeting among the institutions involved was the best that could happen at that time of our missionary lives. It was comforting to be able to say to migrants and refugees, with the creation of the Shelter: “We understand your pain and welcome you, not only in words, but in fact”.

When the Shelter started to work, I was already in Angola giving life to that mission, but I took and carry in my heart the certainty that the Bienvenu Shelter was right step in response to the call of the Scalabrinian Charism (Sr. Marlene Wildner – 21.01.2021).

The donation of space by the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family was the first great step towards the realization of the shelter. To this initiative were also added other actors such as the Jesuit Refugee Service, which has contributed over three years to the fundraising through small initial projects that have made it possible to cover some of the basic expenses of operating the space, as well as made the donation of a car for the use of the house activities.

The contribution of the Combonian Fathers, in addition to their support with donations to organize and prepare the initial space and structure, also contributed to the sending of two foreign volunteers (from the United States and Poland) who assisted in the mission of creating the Creche and the Baby Room, where refugee mothers could leave their children while they went to work or when they went out to find solutions for documentation, health, professional training or job opportunities.

Another collaboration that has made a difference in the initiative that contributed to the Bienvenu Shelter regarding the work of excellence and the quality of today, in its response to the challenges that women, children and refugee families live, was that of the Oakford Dominican Sisters, especially through Sr. Justina Priess. Since 2001 and until her death in 2020, she expanded the scope of the project, giving voice to refugee women and their children, through English classes and fundraising through the network of friends and family who with a missionary heart have left their deep marks of generosity and solidarity.

This principle of activities, marked by collaboration, solidarity and networking of institutions and leaders of migrants and refugees, marked the genesis of the Bienvenu Shelter and has become, throughout its history, a way of acting of the MSCS sisters. The Shelter is the result of collaborative and network actions that have become part of the institutional culture. This collaboration also says a lot about the MSCS Sisters' way of working, with an attentive look at people in situations of vulnerability, and the urgency of the migratory phenomenon as a transversal social fact that dialogues with various principles that inspire and guide other congregations, organizations and groups acting in that context.

The Bienvenu Shelter was officially opened on March 23, 2001. However, even before the official opening, the shelter was already occupied by women and children who needed care. The first Housemother received was Mamá Emerence, with her five children<sup>2</sup>. Once the Shelter began to operate, a support network was strengthened that helped meet the needs of the women and children there.

Since the beginning, among all that difficult situation, after that land left Apartheid, with its borders open, welcome all these people, who actually came from different situations like violence, torture... they brought a different baggage from ours, different from what we were used to, and we opened the Shelter

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<sup>2</sup> One of her children died, tragically, in a hit-and-run in front of the Shelter, recording the first death of those 20 years, which unfortunately, was not the only one suffered in the house.

with open arms to receive them. It's something I sometimes wonder: at first we didn't have a special training to do... was, in fact, the good will, I think that there was the intervention of Scalabrini and Mother Assunta, to actually light that flame inside each one and say: Okay, we're here, we're going to do our best and we're going to try to get these people to heal their wounds around us, and they can walk out of here with a smile that many no longer had. This was the first chapter (Adília Pestana de Sousa –Scalabrinian Lay Missionary (SLM) – 25.02.2021).

In a few years of its inauguration, the Shelter already had a Creche and a Baby Room for the children residing at the Bienvenu Shelter, who also welcome children of residents and children from the local community, with priority to the children of mothers who passed by the Bienvenu Shelter. This gives children the opportunity to integrate into the community and gives mothers time to attend to appointments, learn new skills etc, especially regarding professional training and preparation for leaving the shelter and achieving their autonomy, in every sense. The support for children today makes it possible to reach the external school units where children go after leaving the Shelter, including articulations with the public sector and with continued support to their families, by providing aid for the payment of school fees so that they can attend public schools in Johannesburg.





## CHAPTER 2



Hello, first thing I want to thank you and God for everything.

I want to thank you for everything You have done for me and my child, God bless you all staff for the things you have done for us.

I came to the Shelter my baby was 6 months old and now he is 1 year and 3 months old.  
Thank you very much, thank you for the accommodation you do for us.  
God continues to bless you!

To all staff, if I did something wrong, please forgive me.  
I want to say I won't have more time, thank you very much to all staff, I love you so much.  
Be blessed all of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I keep you in my heart.

*(Lucie – From Congo RDC – 01.11.2017)*

## 2

# THE BIENVENU SHELTER

As stated earlier, the Bienvenu Shelter was established on 23 March 2001 in a suburb of Johannesburg as a shelter for refugee women and children.

This initiative marks a path of dedication and commitment of the Congregation of the Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo – Scalabrinians (MSCS) and their partnerships in the African continent, highlighting a history of presence in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Mozambique, and South Africa.

The Bienvenu Shelter adopts and reflects on the mission of the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters: to serve in the perspective of ‘being a migrant with migrants’, with special priority and attention to those who go through situations of greater vulnerability, protecting and promoting their dignity, their human rights and promoting their protagonism. Therefore, the welcome takes place in the form of an embrace between sisters, women who give themselves trusting and supporting each other, by the trust given and received, by the attention offered and by the welcome, by the small and large gestures of service they have given, strengthen and help rebuild life.

From a house where to stay – an initial emerging challenge – the Bienvenu Shelter today is an organization with its own status and with management under the direction of the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters, which has grown and consolidated, keeping year by year the humility and daring to listen, interpret the demands, seek to add forces, resources, and capacity to implement responses and launch themselves in courageous trajectories. The needs and dreams of the people who are welcomed and accompanied by the Team, professionals, volunteers, are transformed into motivation, goals to be achieved, efforts to converge on solutions that impact the lives of refugee women and their children.

Thus, completing 20 years of this journey is a moment to look back and contemplate the achievements and consolidate the steps, because new challenges come knocking at the door; and the listening that is born of love because of Jesus Christ and those people that He loves has power to nourish speech, actions and commitment that have efficiency and effectiveness to achieve results for and by the people who most need it, and that for the specific mission of the Bienvenu Shelter, are refugee women and children.

## **2.1 Bienvenu Shelter: welcoming, caring and promoting**

Most of the refugees who arrive at the Shelter are routed by members of the network of organisations working on behalf of people in mobility and other populations at risk. There are also those who request individual stays, seeking contact directly with the Shelter Team, in lesser frequency.

The organisational structure of the Shelter is composed of a board of directors, teams of professionals and an expressive number of internal and external volunteers, who collaborate so that the demands of the welcomed people are met, in the most complete way possible. At certain times, the Bienvenu Shelter also relied on the valuable collaboration of international volunteers, sometimes in conjunction with related organizations, who in this way also supported and strengthened the Shelter's mission. In 2018 the shelter had approximately 30 people as employees and volunteers, mostly professionals. In 2019 the volunteer human resources were around 22 and in 2020 the Bienvenu Shelter had voluntary collaboration of 27 people, who collaborated according to the emerging needs and life situations and the possibilities of the professionals who work voluntarily in the activities and projects of the Bienvenu Shelter.

The space has 6 collective rooms and one reserved for particular cases, such as if someone is sick or just given birth, for example. The capacity is for up to 45 women and their children at any given time. In the same property work the Creche and the Baby Room, as well as kitchen, laundry, plus offices, reception, space for collective meetings between residents and a chapel.

Initially, the Bienvenu Shelter was set up as a residential shelter for refugee women and children, but soon expanded its care strategies and structured itself in a set of projects that meet the integral needs of the community living in the Shelter and, at the same time, takes care of the integration of refugee women and children in the community widely. This perspective is a strong differential of the Shelter, fundamental to the results and sustainability of the life projects of people who, after a period of, on average, 3 to 6 months of stay in the Shelter, can take their lives in their hands, and move forward in processes of autonomy and personal fulfilment.

I came here, they welcomed me... in 2017, yeah, I came here, they welcomed me. I felt lucky with a new family, with no money, but they welcomed me anyway, they give me a training and baking and with that baking I could go out selling and give money, that money I saved to get out. [...] I was welcomed for free, given food, clothes, so I really appreciate it, and not only me, they did it for my children also, the school fees, my children had to go to school so they looked for me, God bless the sisters... so thank you to the shelter, thank you for the sisters, let God continue their job they are doing, really, that is impacting people, when there is no hope and then when one comes... it's really... I'm really thankful! (Josephine – Congo RDC).

For Sr. Marivane Chiesa, director of the Bienvenu Shelter since September 2017, what “makes the engine turn” is to make each employee be in his or her position, and to determine that each resident of the house has his or her welcome space, which encompasses a number of small cares, such as receiving medication and personalized counselling, among other types of care.

The work routine starts in the morning with the meeting to pass information between the teams, in the shift exchange, when the director meets with the employees and volunteers to read the reports of the previous day of each of the ongoing programs and to share information, as well as to define guidelines and strategies to solve specific situations. In this way, it is possible to follow the events of the previous day in the Shelter and see if there is any activity that should be programmed for the day that begins. All areas participate in the internal articulation, which qualifies the service for the holistic

approach that the welcomed person deserves and receives from the team, including attention to the person in the human-spiritual, psychological, and professional aspects, health care, family, the documentation, and life project for the reconstruction of the stories of each of the residents.

In addition to the emergency demands (such as shelter, food, hygiene, and clothing, which are characteristics of welcoming) other factors are included, such as: listening and human-spiritual guidance, health care, including follow-up in consultations and examinations, documentation, psychological support, professional training, aid, and follow-up in cases of special needs and articulations to meet any other needs that may arise. The holistic approach to welcoming and assisting includes respect for the maintenance of one's faith and religious expressions, in a perspective of recognition of the cultural and religious diversity of the persons served. To this end, comprehensive care is based on the capacity of qualified listening that guides the action of the Sisters, collaborators and volunteers working in the space.

In the words of Adília de Sousa, who has worked in the Shelter since its inception, working in the Shelter Team, there is a commitment and a dedication for each welcomed person, which can go beyond the simple fulfilment of formal projects, focusing on the needs of the people there served. The action can

make a little more visible the migrant, the woman, and the child, especially, but we always go beyond... what we do here, so anyone in need we run and help, could we do more? I don't know. When we started it was just accommodation, however we started helping with education... and health, with the promotion of women, their independence... in short: the way the world is, I doubt nothing that from today to tomorrow we will think of another challenge... (Adília Pestana de Sousa, SLM – 14.12.2018).

In addition to all the work of direct care, professionals, volunteers and management of the Bienvenu Shelter also participate and strengthen networks of solidarity and articulation between the different organizations of civil society, the ecclesial context and,

including, from the public sector and security, in collective and multidisciplinary and inter-institutional efforts to strengthen the acting strategies to qualify, ensure and extend the coverage and quality of responses to the demands of people and human groups at risk or vulnerable situations in Johannesburg. These articulations also act in promotion and defence of rights and converge in efforts to influence the government in the search for policies, laws and government decisions that respect human dignity, promote life, protect people in need and encourage the building of a world without xenophobia or violence, where relations and the use of goods respect the dignity of every person and human group.

In the words of lawyer Federica Micoli, a collaborator of an NGO that network with the Shelter, in the work of those who work in favour of migrants/refugees in Johannesburg, the organizations “tried to establish a network organization, where we meet once a month. In the beginning it was more case discussions, now it is case discussions as well as advocacy and awareness raising” (Federica Micoli – 17.12.2018 – Lawyers for Human Rights).

The dedication for welcomed people extends to also focus on the local and regional reality, where they will live after leaving the shelter and where this population lives, as described by Lisa, member of the Management Team of Bienvenu Shelter:

Yes, advocacy plays a large part... this helps with the Migration Help Desk, and they are looking into human rights, equality, integration, and employment. It was a very good collaboration as they work with the city of Johannesburg, including migrants, to prevent xenophobic attacks, to promote that these people are not taking your Jobs. There are experiences and stories... a gentleman from Sudan opened a business shop and employed 37 South Africans. So, it's these stories that need to be presented, these positive stories about migrants and not all the negative signs. [...] Another gentleman from Malawi opened a liquor store and employed 17 South Africans. So, as we are involved in these advocacies through networking, it is up to us, as well, to educate and to make people aware! (Lisa de Sousa – 02.12.2018).

## 2.2 Holistic Support

Holistic support is the category used by the MSCS Sisters in the Shelter to refer to the model of care and assistance provided to refugee women and children assisted in the institution.

The first 48 hours of permanence of the residents in the house are considered “emergency hours”, because in most cases of reception, women come from traumatic situations such as human trafficking and war. Some manifest crises of panic and/or anxiety, others arrive with health problems, and some even close in an eloquent silence, which demands a respectful posture of those who attend and welcome her. In this phase of welcoming the team seeks to support them, favouring the individual times of each one, in a climate of respect for the moment they are experiencing.

Holistic support effectively includes the reception of the person, with everything that involves the moment she lives, in addition to the experiences that marked her, especially the dramas and challenges of the migratory journey in situations of violence and risk. As Adília de Sousa points out,

Sometimes the mother is as vulnerable as a child. If she came to the point that she came, it was not because she wanted; but she had a little house, it was a small and simple house, she was the mother of that house. We have to start there, that she lost everything. In addition, he also lost his colleagues, neighbours, family, God knows what she went through to get here, many of them are mistreated along the way and raped (Adília Pestana de Sousa, SLM – 14.12.2018).

The missionary heart of the Scalabrinian Sisters who manage the Bienvenu Shelter embraces, without discrimination, all the welcomed women and their worlds, including their churches or religions, and their ways of living, nourishing, and celebrating their faith. For the small number of Catholics among the residents or members of the Team is offered at least once a month the possibility to participate in the Eucharistic celebration if they wish. However, for all of them, without constraints or controls, it is ensured the physical space of the chapel for the silence, the personal prayer and, also, the songs or the sound of the batuques, which express, in the languages and

modalities of each one, their faith, their beliefs, as is the case in mourning celebrations. Prayer is always welcome, it is shared, it is a place of encounter and reciprocal welcome among residents and with other actors who work or circulate in the family environment of the Shelter.

The reception and respect for the different religious affiliations of the women living in the Bienvenu Shelter also integrate an important aspect of the comprehensive care provided to the users of the house. According to Sr. Marivane, “the migrant person during their migratory journey may lose everything, belongings and even family members, but does not lose their faith. Prayer keeps them strong, calmly and promotes a spirit of integration”. In order to favour this aspect, the Shelter offers a chapel in its interior, “a space where residents can stand alone, say their prayers if they wish and reflect on their own lives”. On weekends, each resident is free to attend meetings, celebrations, spaces or traditional rituals of their own church or religion.

During the period of receiving the mother, the service extends through the various programs and projects, initiatives, and activities that the Shelter offers or through demands that emerge from the strengthening of the relationship of trust between refugee women and the team of the Bienvenu Shelter, as well as the capacity of the resident to identify their needs and to seek solutions to their problems. As time passes and the person feels like family in the shelter, the bonds of affection and sense of individual responsibility are strengthened to rebuild life, causing positive and motivating relationships to arise, in which are added the efforts of the Bienvenu Shelter Team with the desires and commitment of each refugee to pursue projects and dreams, which are gaining shape also thanks to what the Bienvenu Shelter performs and makes happen.

The main idea of the holistic support offered in the house is that no woman leaves the residential stay in the organisation if she does not have the minimum capacity to, figuratively, “stand up”. These resources, in a broad sense, being well at the psychological, physical, financial level and even in what refers to the quality of relationships with people who may be of risk or support. Still, it implies considering whether at least they are properly directed to the migratory situation in relation to the country’s legislation.



Each one receives personalized assistance, through which the potentialities of those who can advance are encouraged, and the frailties of those who need help are embraced to be overcome. The memory of those who follow this project since its beginnings clarifies the dynamics:

[and Staff] ... needs to do Counselling about what happened, if she was forced by the companion, by the husband, by the mother... are various causes... If the woman comes from an abusive relationship, it is also another issue that we have to see, because the child also reveals itself with all these things, the child sees everything 24h. We have the organizations we work with in the psychological part; there are the groups for children, which we call "Play Therapy". And in the shelter, we also have Drama Therapy, once a week for women and children. [...] For example: when they were here cutting the stones, they had to put explosives, there were times when they broke the explosives, then once I had to lie under the bed to calm the woman who was hiding under the bed, to say that she was here [and not in the war from which she had fled].

We had this kind of training, the whole staff had, we learned how to bring the woman back when she disassociates herself. We have to take care too, if a woman sees an accident, that's enough to trigger, the pain she had... So sometimes that's a little difficult because they're crises, and it's actually a blessing to have organizations that help us with Counselling, in psychology and some of them also with psychiatrists.

We have several cases [of people] who had to be hospitalized because they disassociate themselves in such a way that they have to undergo intensive treatment. This is where [the question of the length of stay in the house] comes in: we give the 3 months to be here, but each case is a case. I think the Scalabrinian Sisters have this gift, alongside the immigrants, to have this tolerance that ok, we have the door open, 3 months. Meanwhile we see that the person is not well, and we continue to help (Adília Pestana de Sousa, SLM – 14.12.2018).

When refugee women decide to take up residence in South Africa or when they decide to return to their countries of origin, they always receive concrete support to implement the project designed. This support is provided to women while they are residents in the

shelter and, often, the support extends over time, in order to better establish themselves and integrate themselves in a dignified way into the local community. When they opt for new migratory projects, with goals that include emigration to other countries, also the Bienvenu Shelter ensures support and information, support for documentation of the resources and contacts needed to enable them start and help the development of the new project of life of the woman and, normally, of the family she is rebuilding from the received welcome.

The testimony that recounts the memory of one of the young women welcomed illustrates how the accompaniment of the women who, taking part in a period of this journey, are part of the people who are justly honoured by the Team of the Bienvenu Shelter as subjects of this story, for being themselves the main protagonists, those who make the difference in their journey:

It was a girl who was being abused, it was a case of human trafficking... the girl was with us at first not very well, had to be helped psychologically, also in the adaptation and integration in Johannesburg. She needed a lot of support to get a job, to help keep the hours without doing anything, to be able to regain her dignity... she also took a cooking course. Took the little stove she won, so when she gets home, she can do anything for her. When they did a job that made a little money, the day they leave, we give them their money. When they leave, they don't leave empty-handed, if they get a job they give [us] the money they can get to keep.

[Here they have] 3 meals a day; have transportation help to go to the hospital or clinic if she has health problems; she has help to go to Home Affairs to solve documentation; they can leave the children in school; we help. So, there they can remake their lives until the day they leave and not leave empty-handed, for us it is good to know that they have that balance as soon as they leave with their money (Adília Pestana de Sousa, SLM – 02.12.2018).

The Bienvenu Shelter in December 2012 was recognized for its work to protect life, especially for “welcoming refugee women and their children”, which was recorded in the receipt of the Michael Bell Memorial Prize, delivered to the Shelter by the International Alliance of Catholic Knights.

Listening is one of the transversal principles that guide care at the Shelter and involves respect and care in dealing with trauma experiences, as reported by lawyer Federica, from one of the networking organisations of the Bienvenu Shelter, Lawyers for Human Rights. For her one of the concerns of the team in the care is about the importance of not “retraumatizing” the people received, that is, there is the risk of causing some kind of situation that can be interpreted by a traumatized person as a nuisance that she herself is causing to the organisation, or fear of leaving wrong impressions. For example, in delicate cases, such as the women who have just gone through war situations, the initial care taken by the team is one of great and delicate attention to the attitude of those who wait for the time each one needs to be able to start speaking, until the person feels able to communicate. Wanting to get a lot of information from people in post-traumatic stress situations can make the refugee’s psychological situation worse.

Bienvenu Shelter, by hosting many migrant women, also works with the most traumatized of them. So, we realize that by having better communication and case discussions, our interventions are more effective towards them also because we know we are working together.... for me it is important not to re-traumatize them, so I work with the psychologist and can tell if they are from war-torn areas. For example, you need to give the women time because you need to rebuild the person first, otherwise it could be more damaging to and for them (Federica Micoli – 17.12.2018).

The importance of listening can be seen in the report of volunteers who work in the segment of legal advisory actions, for example, since often the moments of meeting with residents become spaces to vent, moments when refugees speak of their realities and sufferings, and end up not requiring any legal service. The same attitude, focusing on respectful listening, is signalled by the team of professionals who dedicate themselves daily to the attention and care that the Shelter ensures to each of the welcomed people, in a unique and non-discriminatory way. Listening, discreet interaction, observing participating in activities are initiatives that, step by step,

allow the vulnerable person to reach their inner capacity to decide and react, in the ways and times that are proper to them.

### **2.3 20 years – Making a difference**

The Bienvenu Shelter excels in the quality of care, which aims to offer refugee women and their children holistic support to facilitate their self-reliance and integration into the community. Still, the quantitative dimension is considered, since this helps to measure the impact of the institution's work, as well as providing elements for evaluation and planning of activities and services.

The local impact of the Bienvenu Shelter, statistically, is limited, especially if we take into account the broad dimension of the phenomenon of refugees in the city of Johannesburg, the urgency of its challenges, budget and structure limitations. A diachronic gaze, however, that focuses on a temporal perspective, coupled with an extensive view of the institution's reach, which covers not only refugee women and children, but also other migrant groups and local communities, may reveal the significant incidence of the Shelter's activities in the local context.<sup>3</sup>

First of all, it is important to know the number of people specifically served by the Bienvenu Shelter. The first data refers to the accommodation of refugee women or asylum seekers and their children. They're usually the sons and daughters of the foster women, but the experience of the care team indicates that in some cases they are children who are with mothers who have taken them in as adopted sons or daughters, sometimes informally, to protect them, within a culture of care that is shared by the community. In other cases, in those 20 years, the team realized that the mother showed insecurity when providing data about one or other of the children

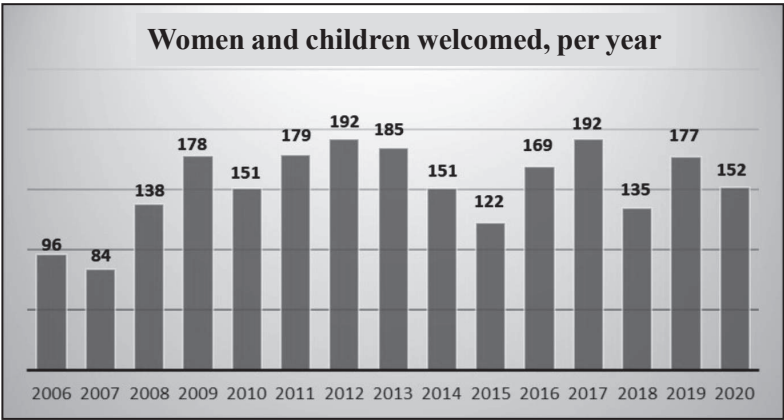
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<sup>3</sup> The following statistics were compiled from a set of institution reports from 2005 to December 2020. For the first years (2001-2004) only cumulative information was kept. As a single standard of data disclosure was not used over the years, it was not always possible to present statistics referring to the entire period of work. Thus, it was decided to limit the statistical reach to the years in which standardization was possible, which are indicated in each of the graphs and tables. Any exceptions are marked in the tables.

she carried with her, such as date of birth. The coexistence showed that there were cases of mothers who acquired orphaned children, for example, in the flight of wars and in cases of widespread violence.

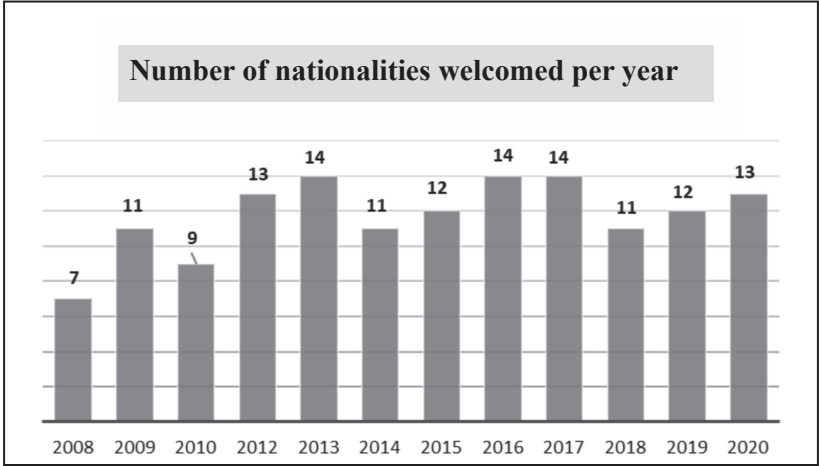
There are budgetary and structural limits – such as, for example, the number and size of rooms available – that restrict the capacity of accommodation and limits the performance of the Shelter. Even so, the option of a temporary limited service allows the rotation and multiplies the number of people welcomed. As shown in Graphic 1, the **number of people annually housed** has changed considerably over the years, with peaks of 192 in 2012 and 2017, and an average in the last 5 years of about 189 people per year. From the foundation of the Bienvenu Shelter until 2005 the total number of people welcomed was 465.

**Graphic 2.1** – Safe and Secure Accommodation for Refugee Women & their Children



As regards the nationality of the persons accommodated in the Shelter there is a wide diversification, as shown in Graphic 2, which refers to the years 2008-2010 and 2012-2020. This implies significant ethnic-cultural diversification, which represents both a wealth – in terms of sharing experiences, cultural traits, and ethnic identities – but also possible challenges in terms of coexistence, assistance and difficulties in migratory trajectories and hostile contexts of origin and transit.

**Graphic 2.2** – Number of people staying at the Bienvenu Shelter by nationality of origin



In general terms, within the reference period, the organisation hosted refugee women and their children from a total of 22 African countries. Always in relation to the countries of origin of the people welcomed in the Shelter, as shown in the following table and in Graphic 3, in the last 12 years people from 3 African countries were received: Zimbabwe, Rwanda and DRC:

**Table 2.1** – Nationalities of origin of people received between 2009 and 2020

Zimbabwe, Rwanda, and Congo DRC	12
South Africa	11
Burundi	10
Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Malawi	9
Angola and Zambia	8
Uganda	7
Kenya, Nigeria, Swaziland, and Lesotho	5
Cameroon	4
Sudan and Somalia	3
South Sudan	2
Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Kenya	1

**Graphic 3** – Map of the countries of origin of the people welcomed in the Bienvenu Center between 2009-2020

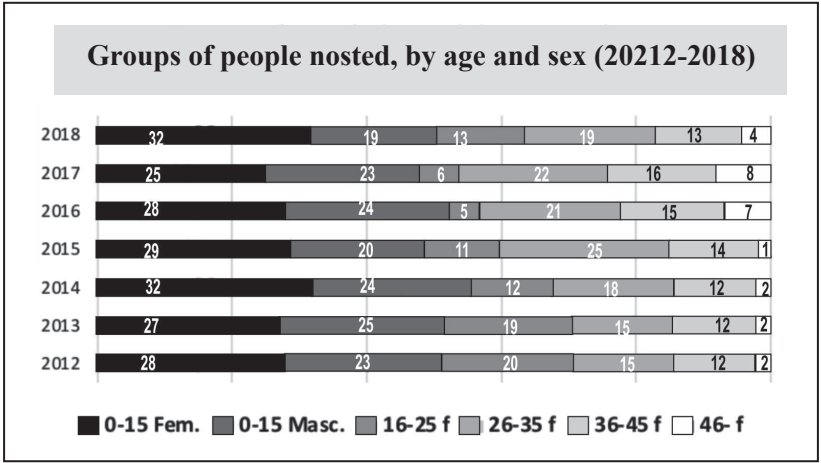


With regards to **age**, Graphic 4 shows how, between 2012 and 2020, approximately half of the people staying are children – female or male – under 15 years of age. The rest is formed by adult women (from 16 years).

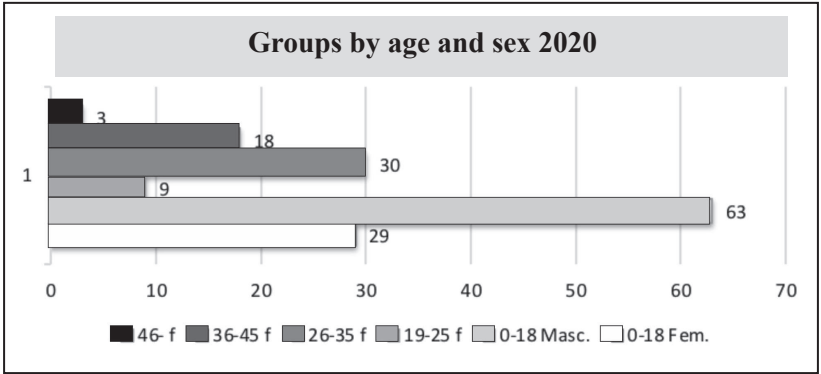
In recent years there has been a small increase in the number of women over the age of 46 who, however, remain in the minority. The main group of adult women varies, but in most cases, it consists of people between 26 and 35 years.

It should be noted that, from 2019, the organization of care data followed a different criterion, gathering together the information of people under 18 years of age and adults from 18, and no more from 16 years of age. Thus, 61% of the people received appear in 2020 under the age of 18, while adult women accounted for 39% of the people received.

**Graphic 2.4** – Groups of residents by age and sex between 2012 and 2018



**Graphic 2.5** – Resident groups by age and sex in 2020

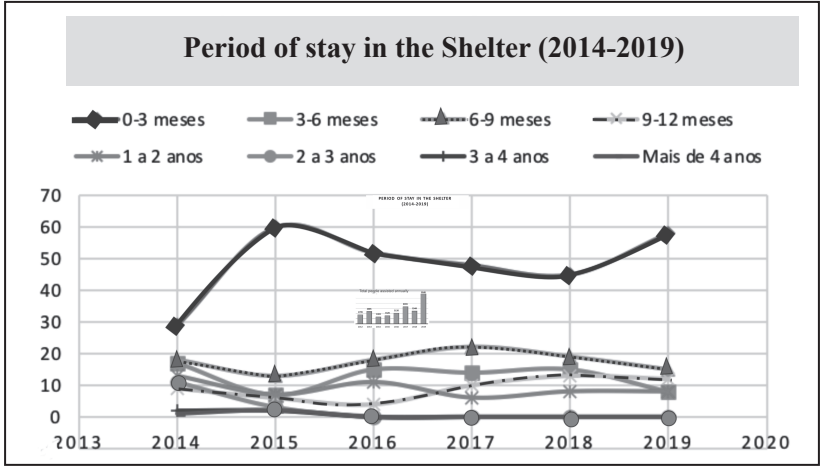


Another important element to be highlighted is **the length of stay** of refugee women and their children at the Bienvenu Shelter. On this issue we have data for the period between 2014 and 2020. As can be seen in Graphic 5, there is a progressive reduction in the length of stay, and in 2019 58% of the people staying resided in the shelter for less than 3 months, compared to 29% in 2014. In most cases (between 60% and 70%), people staying in the organisation resided less than 6 months. In recent years there are no more people



leaving the organisation with more than 2 years of stay. Whereas the Shelter does not normally accommodate people who are passing through short-term periods because of its profile of comprehensive care and support for life reconstruction pathways after periods of greater vulnerability, the length of stay is effectively personalised, between 3 and 6 months, normally, but with attention to the specific situation of each resident.

**Graphic 2.6 – Period of stay of the welcomed persons**



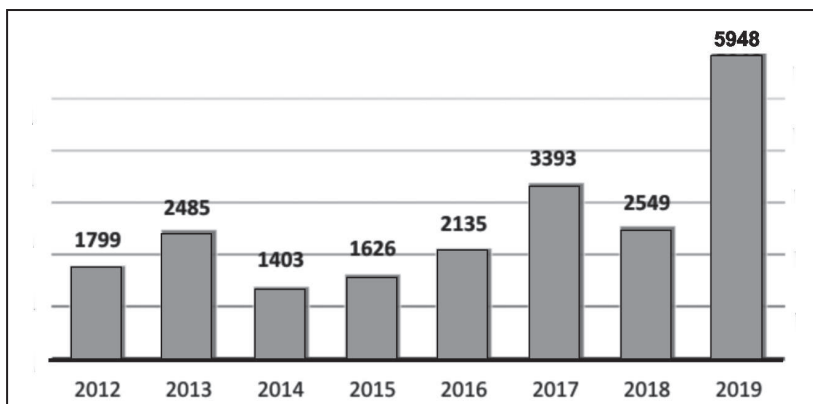
In addition to the people directly and specifically welcomed as residents of the Bienvenu Shelter, the organisations activities reach a much greater number in the different programs and projects it develops.

- Activities provided in the house: Computer courses, English Classes, homework support, Art and Drama therapy, regular Spiritual and reflection therapy and support groups for the residents.
- Livelihood Training Courses offered: Beauty (Manicure/pedicure/hairdressing), Catering & Baking, Hairdressing, Sewing.
- External Training courses received: Advanced Professional Childminding, Early Childhood Development Training, and Ancillary Health Care Course.

- Accessing and support in Education both Primary/High School, After-school support for children aged 6-10 years. Assistance with school uniforms, stationary, transport and school fees.
- Community Outreach Program: Outreach support provided to ex residents and long-term psychosocial assistance to ex residents and the Local Community in desperate need of clothing, food, hygiene services, health care needs, transport to hospitals and accessing medical services. Home Affairs assistance, assistance with repatriation and funerals.

In Graphic 6 we can check **the total number of people benefited by the activities** of the Bienvenu Shelter.

**Graphic 2.7** – Total number of people attended annually between 2014 and 2019



It is noteworthy that there is an increase in the number of people served in recent years. As of 2019, the Community Outreach Program has been carried out in collaboration with the Department of Pastoral Care for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Johannesburg. An agreement has been made between the two parties. Donations received by the Bienvenu Shelter, whether in food parcels, blankets, or other items of basic need, which are not indispensable in the Shelter, are shared with Pastoral Care and vice versa. Thus, the Department of Pastoral

Care for Refugees distributes to the beneficiaries and reports to the The Bienvenu Shelter, documenting with the information of those who received the donations. Therefore, the number of people served in 2019 was much higher than the average of previous years.

The data for the year 2020 are integrated in chapter 7 of this work, on the performance of the Bienvenu Shelter in the face of the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Bienvenu Shelter's work during 2020 was mainly focused on responding to the challenges of the pandemic.



## CHAPTER 3



**Dear Sister and Staff of the Bienvenu Shelter**

**Only God knows how grateful I am for everything that you have done for me and my baby Mercy.**

**Had it not been for you my baby would be dead.**

**You have helped me look for her both financially and socially.**

**You are like a mother to me. In actual fact you are a mother and a teacher.**

**I have actually learnt a lot since I came to Bienvenu Shelter.**

**You showed me love and I learnt to love in return.**

**You fed me when I was hungry and I sure I have learnt to share with other people.**

**There were times where everything did not seem to be right, but I am sure life is like that. There are always good and bad times, but they always pass, and we enjoy life again.**

**Now I am who I am because of your guidance. [...]**

**Loving daughter.**

*(Judith – From Mozambique – 26.05.2009)*

### 3

## **THE BIENVENU SHELTER – 20 YEARS OF WELCOMING**

This project, which, beginning the third millennium of the Christian era, wanted to be a safe shelter for refugee women and children who had no safe place to stay, while being implemented, was incorporating new initiatives and strengthening, whether it is its capacity to respond to challenges, multiply projects, innovate methodologically, and expand infrastructure.

Within a few years, the Bienvenu Shelter already had, in addition to the primary program of Shelter for refugee women and their children, a daycare for babies up to 2 years old and a daycare for children from the ages of 3 to 6 years old. Such initiatives supported mothers who needed a place for their children while they worked or were looking for work. Without delay, the English course that Sr. Justina Priess provided was taking shape and expanding its scope, while other courses were being created, articulations with civil society and public sector organizations were being established and/or consolidated and the autonomy of women initially welcomed became a priority to be accompanied, sustained and celebrated.

With the solidarity and co-sponsable creativity of friends, as well as with other partnering organisations, the expansion of services demanded that also the meeting tent be enlarged, which happened in several stages during the 20 years, as a sign of blessings for the Shelter its management team, and especially the people there attended. The expansion of the work is one of the results of the efforts and labors of many people and charities, to consolidate new paths in the lives of resident women and their children, as well as in the life and dreams of many others who are welcomed and empowered through the courses of the Mother Assunta Centre.

As an indicator of the greatness of this work, the Bienvenu Shelter was chosen by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, for a visit in the context of her attention to the care of people who have suffered torture, as is the reality of many refugee women sheltered, this event took place on December 8, 2018.

Dear Ms. Chiesa, I am writing to find out whether it would be possible to organize a visit at the Bienvenu Shelter on Saturday, 8 December in the presence of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and her delegation that will be visiting South Africa for a very brief visit. As a recipient of funding from the UN Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, we are keen to see how the shelter has been supporting torture survivors (Abigail Noko – Head a.i. – Regional Office for Southern Africa. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights – 26.11.2018).

The day after receiving this invitation for the honourable visit to the Shelter, another communication explained the meaning of the event: “We enthusiastically believe that her visit to Bienvenu Shelter, which we recommended, would be an unprecedented opportunity to raise awareness about and bring further support to the plight of women and children migrants in South Africa, many of whom are also torture survivors” (Claudia Gerez Czitrom, Human Rights Officer – Humanitarian Funds for Victims of Torture and Contemporary Forms of Slavery of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights).

Researchers and scholars, in addition to human rights activists and migrant/refugee leaders, today count on the Management and Team of the Bienvenu Shelter, as well as many of the volunteers, as competent interlocutors and available to think, act and focus on issues related to who makes the life of the Shelter, its challenges, struggles and achievements.

At the Bienvenu Shelter, the women and children can stay for up to three months, which gives them time to prepare for life and insertion in the city of Johannesburg. Special cases are regularly reviewed as well as the needs of each person and the solutions are built together, between the professionals of the Team and the

interested ones. Counseling services are provided during the stay in the house and also for as long as necessary to those who have lived in the house and often also to their families.

In recent years, due to the increase of cases of women refugees with mental health issues, among other situations of need, the period of 3 months of residence in the house is not always sufficient. They usually stay 6 to 8 months. Thus, the Shelter registered a lower number of received women, with longer stay, because the proposed service profile is something of longer duration, to promote integration in a sustainable way.

The Bienvenu Shelter also helps refugee children with school fees, school supplies, uniform and transportation so that they can attend public schools in Johannesburg, during or up to a year after staying in the shelter. This action takes place from articulations with the agencies responsible for public education and with monitoring of the school insertion process with children directly and, always, in articulation with their families. Special cases are assessed and considered.

The departure of the Shelter is prepared during the person's stay or the family nucleus, with listening and supervision, monitoring of administrative processes, donations of all kinds according to needs and in proportion to the possibilities of the center and its friends and benefactors. Many of the women and children welcomed and cared for, even after leaving the Shelter, stay in touch, support the new residents in their labors and projects and even return as professionals, collaborating with the Bienvenu Shelter and qualifying the services offered with their life experience and the training received, usually thanks to the programs and projects, services and partnerships of the Bienvenu Shelter.

The Shelter completes 20 years with a range of services structured and developed in a strategically articulated set, focusing on the attention to the people received, their integral well-being and the support they need to achieve their autonomy and trigger development processes that are sufficiently consolidated to rebuild their lives and those of their sons and daughters with freedom, trust and hope. The shelter also includes efforts to add, together with other organizations of the territory, efforts and initiatives of advocacy and awareness of the local society about the intercultural perspective that migrants and



refugees help, with their existential trajectories, to promote and even to forge.

Although it started its activities on 23 March 2001, the Bienvenu Shelter is a non-governmental legal organization – NGO since 14 July 2008. Until then, it was legally linked to the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), from which it also received financial support. Under the effective responsibility of the Congregation of the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters, which has the Executive Direction of the Bienvenu Shelter and its projects, in its organizational structure has a Deliberative Council, with whom the board works in close collaboration. Thanks to the legal entity under the legislation of the country, the Bienvenu Shelter has the registration of the real state of its property autonomously, having formally received the donations and complying with the local legislation, which gives sustainability to the Project, as well as rigor and transparency in management.

Upon completing 20 years of serving the neediest, the Shelter develops its mission through 5 Programs, structured in projects according to the demands of the people served and the possibilities of the organisation, its infrastructure and human resources, as well as opportunities made possible through formal and informal partnerships, always relying on financial resources and technical support from related organizations that believe in and support the Shelter or some of its projects specifically.

The highlighted table below presents the programs and projects underway in the year of the anniversary of the Bienvenu Shelter, 2021:

**Table 3.1 – Bienvenu Shelter Programs and Projects**

<b>1. Safe and secure accommodation for women and their children</b>
1.1 Basic needs (residential shelter)
1.2 Specific needs (health care, counselling, disability, and psychosocial assistance and accesses to psychiatric assistance.
1.3 Strategic exit Planning
1.4 The promotion of Social cultural diversity and social cohesion.
1.5 Empowerment (professional courses and strengthening of leadership)
1.6 Care and protection of victims of Trafficking in persons.

1.7 Care of victims of torture

## **2. Refugee and migrant children's education and protection Program**

- 2.1 Baby room (0 to 3 years)
- 2.2 Pre-school (4 to 6 years)
- 2.3 After School support (from 6 years)
- 2.4 Support for special needs and developmental delays
- 2.5 Assessments, monitoring and ongoing support for children
- 2.6 Liaising with parents through regular meetings formal and informal

## **3. Mother Assunta Training Centre – Empowerment Programs**

- 3.1 Basic skills training courses
- 3.2 Advanced skills training courses
- 3.3 Language courses
- 3.4 Assistance in setting up small business (accessing employment market)
- 3.5 Ongoing Assistance and support

## **4. Outreach Program**

- 4.1 Regular monitoring and reviewing of individual cases (visit, listen, guidance, problem solving)
- 4.2 Rental support and food assistance
- 4.3 Legal orientation and support
- 4.4 Health assistance
- 4.5 Psychosocial support and care
- 4.6 Collaboration with the Archdiocesan of Johannesburg – Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees Department to support migrants and refugees in vulnerable situations

## **5. Advocacy**

- 5.1 Articulation with institutions on combatting Human trafficking
- 5.2 Promotion and inclusion of migrants/refugees with public services and policies and Law of South Africa
- 5.3 Collaboration with police and special forces engaged with migrants/refugee women protection

**Source:** Administrative archives of the Bienvenu Shelter, 2021.

For the purposes of this publication some of the main ongoing projects will be presented below, with particular attention to those who represent reference services that have consolidated over time and guarantee support to refugee women and children in what they most need to gain autonomy in their existential and migratory trajectories.

### **3.1 Mother Assunta Baby Room**

In addition to the organisations accommodation for residency reserved for refugee women and their children in situations of vulnerability, the Bienvenu Shelter, among the initiatives it has implemented, has the **Mother Assunta Baby Room**, formed in 2009 to be a safe space in which refugee women, during their stay, can leave their babies from 0 to 3 years of age, during the day, so that they can legalize documentation, attend counselling, work and solutions to other needs.

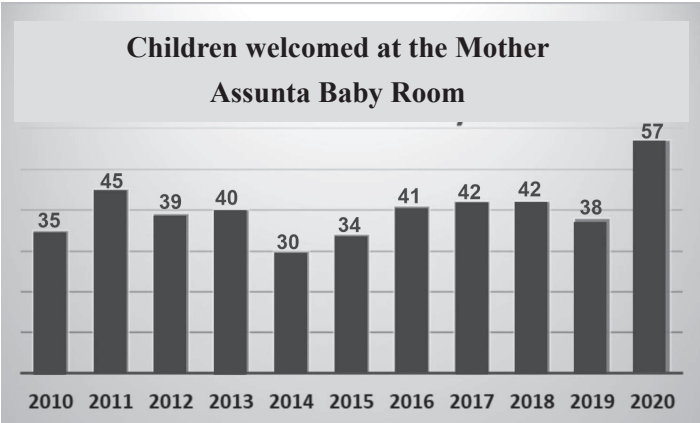
The objective of the project is to promote the holistic development of children and ensure mothers the possibility to seek or exercise a job and organize their lives with a view to their autonomy when leaving the Shelter. The Mother Assunta Baby Room extends the comprehensive attention and care, which is reserved to women and babies, strengthening the capacity of the Shelter to reach, in their care for these people, also the mother-child relationship, especially in cases where the experience of motherhood may have been accompanied by suffering and even trauma, harming beyond the mother's serenity, the children's healthy psychophysical and human-spiritual growth.

The Bienvenu Shelter values the importance of encouraging women to achieve self-sustainability by seeking forms of their own income. Having their babies cared for and protected so that they can seek alternatives worthy of maintaining their family increases their possibilities of emancipation.

From 2010 to 2019, Mother Assunta Baby Room cared for 386 children between the ages of 0 and 3 years. In the year 2020, due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Shelter needed to make some choices in environmental management and restructuring services to ensure not only care, but especially the health of professionals, as well as people assisted. Therefore, it temporarily ended the activities of the

Creche and increased from 3 to 5 years the maximum age of the children received in the Mother Assunta Baby Room, which explains the significant increase in the number of children attended in the year 2020, as shown in the graphic below.

**Graphic 3.1 – Number of children in the Mother Assunta Baby Room from 0-3 years from 2010 to 2019 and of children from 0-5 years old in 2020**



The nationalities of children cared in the Baby Room varied greatly over this time, but in most cases were Congolese, Ethiopian and Zimbabwean children. In 2012, the largest number was Zimbabweans, who reached 23% of all children; in 2014 Congolese were majority with 50% of the attendance, and in 2017 the largest group were Ethiopians, with 31% of the total. By 2020, 30% of children were Zimbabwean and 28% were from Congo DRC, while the other children – or their mothers – came from 8 other countries, namely South Africa, Swaziland, Burundi, Malawi, Uganda, Lesotho and Cameroon.

### 3.2 Lovely Bears Creche

Another initiative, in the line of care and attention to childhood, is the Lovely Bears Creche, a service that develops attention to children between the age of 3 and 6 years, in a peaceful and stimulating

environment, in which they can develop through love and respect, while their mothers participate in the workshops offered by the Shelter, or go in search of work, health, access to documentation or other issues, for which the support of care by sons and daughters is a precious help. The Lovely Bears Creche, as well as the Mother Assunta Baby Room, makes the service 8 hours a day, from Monday to Friday, with an extension of another 2 hours of providing aftercare support for the children.

In addition to the care of resident children, the Shelter welcomes in the Creche children of residents and children of the local community or children of former residents of the Shelter. This gives foster children the opportunity to integrate into the community and gives mothers, in addition to the freedom to manage their time and the safety of their children's well-being, the possibility of articulations and relationships with local community actors. For the welcomed women, this is an important possibility to open paths to their projects, aiming to advance the steps that serve them after leaving the Bienvenu Shelter. The service is done by a Team of professionals and sometimes has the support of national or international volunteers:

The three months that I was able to spend at the Creche was the best time ever. I was able to step into as well-organized and structured NGO, with good facilities and a beautiful Creche where the children are cushioned in a warm and loving environment. I was able to bring in my ideas and assist in both the big and small groups. [...]

In general, the program improved my knowledge and experience with children, especially such children coming from a vulnerable background. Those children and the people I worked with became a part of my life and still mean a lot to me today.

I really enjoyed my time in the Creche and at Bienvenu Shelter, as everyone made me feel welcome and at home. I am very thankful for this experience and the possibility to make my dream come true.

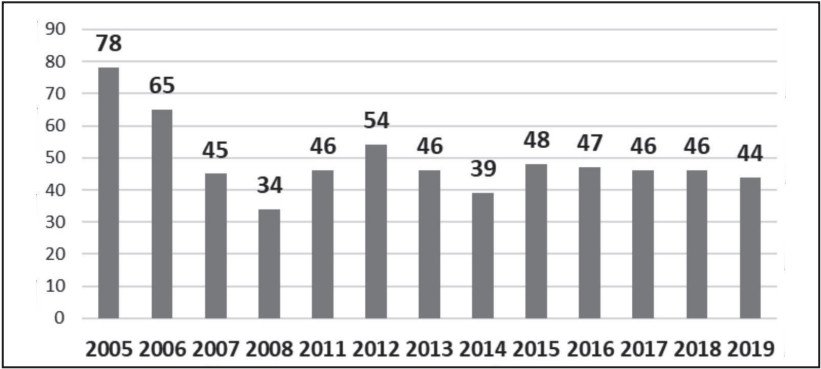
[...] You will always be in my heart, may God Bless and guide your wonderful work. Thank you for everything!!! (Claire Giuliani – Italian – 25.09 to 11.12.2015).

As fundamental practices, the Creche encourages children to be respectful to each other, promoting interactions where they learn to deal with differences. The activities aim to develop everyday skills, creativity and art, favoring learning through play, sports, recreational and cultural activities. The process of family participation takes place through home visits, as well as periodic meetings with parents and guardians of children.

It is worth noting the limited number of children, corresponding to the capacity of the space: in the Baby Room can be received up to 29 children – 14 Toddlers & 15 infants – and in the Nursery up to 29 children – 18 Small Group & 11 Big Group.

The chart below shows the total number of children cared in the Creche (resident refugees, former residents and children from the local community) in the period 2005 to 2019, for the years of which data are available. In 2020, from March, due to the pandemic were temporarily interrupted the activities of the Creche, so the data of the said year do not appear in the graph.

**Graphic 3.2** – Number of children from 3 to 6 years old, welcomed in the Lovely Bears Creche, per year



Therefore, through the attention and articulations between Shelter professionals, mothers, special projects and those actively involved, with the day care service the Shelter extends its comprehensive attention to mothers and their care to the welcomed people. At the same time, it promotes the psychological, emotional and intellectual development of children, promotes integration in the local context

where they arrived after hard and sometimes tragic migratory days, and, at the same time, ensures mothers a support that favors their involvement in the construction of their new life project, their resilience to overcome the tests and to re-signify their trajectories and the choices they need to make for the near future. In this case too, as in the case of Mother Assunta Baby Room, among the refugee children, the number of Congolese, Ethiopian and Zimbabweans were the main nationalities served.

For attended children who complete the age for school inclusion, the Shelter does not measure efforts to ensure schooling and literacy at the appropriate age and, also, for those of the families who live in the vicinity and who request help to plead with the education network vacancies, materials and uniforms needed. Adília's testimony is enlightening:

With the Department of Education, we are a little better, already we manage to put all the children in the school, in the primary. The schools here in the area already know our work, we will make the registration of children and we no longer have to suffer so much, thank God. For 4 years we can say that all the children of the Creche have a place in the primary school. The most difficult is when they arrive in the middle of the year, because to be able to enter them in schools, in the middle of the year, it is more difficult, but we do not give up until we find a solution... (14.12.2018).

### **3.3 After-School Support**

Another education support activity carried out by the Bienvenu Shelter is the monitoring of school tasks for children who study from the first to the third year of elementary school. During the days of the week, between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m., a teacher is available to clarify doubts of children in any discipline they need, offering school reinforcement for this age group.

The average attendance is 60 children per year in this initiative. The activity occurs even during the period of school holidays, encouraging the continuity of studies and emphasizing its importance for these children. In addition to classes, the Shelter also seeks support

to assist children in relation to school materials, uniforms, school transport and tuition fees in schools. This support comes largely from families and merchants who voluntarily donate these articles or cash amounts to pay for school enrolment.

At the Bienvenu Shelter,

The first thing we really want is for the child to start to integrate. If it is a child who has to go to school, try to take care of the child's education. It's very much what that phrase says: "I was a migrant and you welcomed me". This phrase is one of the phrases that reflect in our day to day, anything that get the hands dirty is exactly that, is to know that we are welcoming, therefore, a person with dignity, that is a human being. And the child is the same thing, the child is the fastest, the child comes with a case of culture and violence is already another case, starts soon the counselling, there are others that are too small to reveal themselves, but one thing the Bienvenu Shelter has is that after two weeks the child has arrived is totally different. At first, she is afraid... at last she comes running to you with open arms, it's like they say, the return of love, the hug, the smile of the child, begin to learn our name, come running to us, she is no longer afraid... (Adília Pestana de Sousa, SLM – 14.12.2018).

The after-school support is one of the activities that has had over the years with broad voluntary support in the Bienvenu Shelter. The following testimony illustrates, in part, the characteristics of this service, which expresses the holistic and qualified attention that the Shelter seeks to ensure in all that it does:

[...] I have learnt how, where and what is expected when providing child protection. I have learnt how to deal with vulnerable children and how to establish normalcy back into their lives. I would like to appreciate the assistance I received from Teacher Yvette and the Principal, Phindile, on how to conduct various lessons and activities and the expected results. The relationship I have created with the children is very strong and I am grateful for the assistance provided by the Principal and the big group of Teachers.



I am also grateful to the C.O.O. for orienting me, smoothly, and preparing me on what to expect and how to deal with it. Thanks again for identifying my strength and passion in children. I am grateful to Sister Adilia and Sister Kadia for always putting in a word of encouragement whenever they come to class and for appreciating me. Many thanks to Mama Zizina and teacher Stella for the enormous assistance while the teachers were away, and it was just me and you.

Thank you all, you have made my experience worthwhile, and I look forward to volunteering more often. God Bless You All (Grace Kiruri – South African – 17.08 to 30.09.2015).

### **3.4 Training courses**

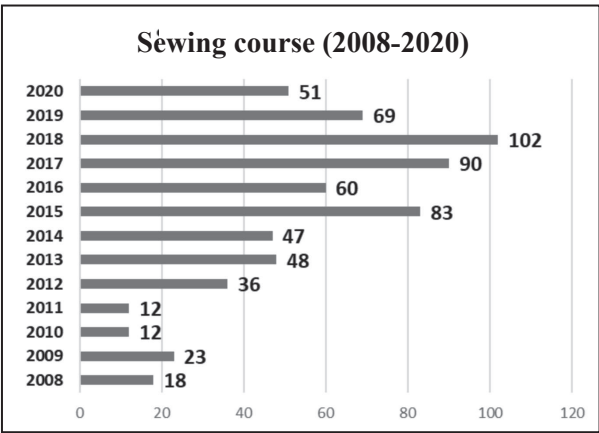
Since the beginning, the Bienvenu Shelter has faced the challenge of providing sheltered women, in addition to punctual support in response to urgent needs, also the resources for their life reconstruction process, after the period of welcoming into the organization.

Language courses and professional training courses were the initiatives that provide the most support tools for foreign women who want to remake a future project into reality where they arrived and of which the Bienvenu Shelter is part.

Thus, from the beginning, specific courses and activities were introduced with individualized learning or support workshops, accompanied by professionals from the Shelter or volunteers, so that the welcomed women prepared to take over, even autonomously, a space in the local context through labour insertion, because it allows the independence they want and need.

The Sewing Project, traditionally offered and recognised for the results and opportunities it offers women, fosters financial autonomy, freedom of self-organisation and recognition within the community, in addition to contacts with local persons actively involved of their new context and strengthening self-esteem through the development of skills, being especially sought by ex residents of the house.

**Graphic 3.3** – Number of refugee women who have completed sewing course per year



From the initial opening of the Shelter and until 2017, when the Mother Assunta Training Center was created, in addition to the Sewing course, other professional courses were occasionally organized, such as craft or baking courses, who have helped foster women to learn or develop professional skills, who have supported them in their journey of independence and the rescue of dignity and hope.

Another highly valued course was Computer Literacy, especially in the period when, thanks to the support of the Comboni Fathers and with the support of voluntary service, it has been possible to facilitate notions of information technology for resident women and also for some staff of the Shelter, which has also helped in the integration of workers, as one of the activities was the drafting of Curriculum Vitae, to boost job search.

As of 2017, with the creation of the Mother Assunta Training Centre, the sewing course was absorbed by the said Shelter and was widely qualified, with the donation of a startup kit, at the end of the course for each of the participants, what drives and allows the start of the activity as individual entrepreneurs, empowering students in the role of autonomous professionals, socially and financially, as will be better explained in the next chapter.

Finally, it is worth pointing out another positive and enriching experience of the Shelter, which was held in partnership with the

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, which carried out monitoring of women residents, with therapy through Art & Drama Therapy workshops. This program was developed over time also with other partnerships, among which, for example, Outreach Foundation and volunteers and university students from different faculties, especially valuing theater and the plastic arts, including mothers and children. Art & Drama Therapy, in addition to helping in the management of emotions and in the capacity of expression, is of great help in the healing processes of the pain and even traumas experienced in life and migratory journey.

### **3.5 Language courses**

Among the various workshops offered by the Bienvenu Shelter are the English courses for refugee women welcomed and/or accompanied. The classes took place for many years through a partnership between the Shelter and the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of Oakford, especially in the person and dedication, professionalism and tireless service of Sr. Justina Priess.

Teacher by profession, Sr. Justina had her first contact with migrants and refugees through Weltkirche, in the Department of Pastoral and Evangelization of the Diocese of Johannesburg, in the same period as the Sisters who led the opening of the Shelter and who worked in the Office of Pastoral Care for Refugees of the Archdiocese. In addition to being the focal point of English courses open to refugee people, Sister Justina was a journey partner for the Shelter Team. Testimonies left by her show that she considered that one of the best things she accomplished in her life was working with refugee people.

It was in the pastoral work of the local church that Sr. Justina met a refugee woman from Congo, who could not communicate in English. She welcomed her and realized her heart ship. In a period of 3 months, she contacted the Bishop at the time and called for more attention to be given to refugees. Between 1998 and 2001, she helped small groups of refugee women to learn English because, in her words, can't speak English: "takes away people's dignity", and "a woman who is not able to speak English becomes very vulnerable", in addition to being badly mistreated in the bureaucratic instances

of government when they did not have language proficiency. Her narrative records are illuminating:

I still believe, after 20 years, that a woman that is not able to speak enough about who she is, is so vulnerable. On two occasions, young children who had already picked up enough English had to translate to their mother for her to understand, which for me was very painful and very diminishing to the mother and a big responsibility for little boys of 10 and 11 years old as they explained what happened to their mom, telling how daddy was shot dead, as they have come from a war-torn area.

If I can tell you, in a language you understand – when you came to South Africa and you understand how you felt – I have empowered you. Although I can express the most important things, if I do not understand your question, there is no conversation and if I don't understand, I am helpless and exposed to being misinterpreted but the moment I have enough knowledge of the language I can say no or yes. This is how it was (Sr. Justina Priess – 28.11.2018).

Johannesburg has a very dense population of refugees, according to Sr. Justina; people think that there is 'gold' in this destiny, but for most people, this is an illusion that costs dearly, because those who seek refuge in South Africa do not have the privileges of those who migrate for business. The Dominican Sisters had a school called ICC – International Community Center, which closed for economic reasons. The space was then used for English courses in favor, especially, of the most vulnerable population, who could not afford to pay for courses to learn English.

As a work methodology, the Sister developed a book of basic information's for teaching English. According to her, materials that could be bought in bookstores taught how to spend their holidays in England or how to visit the London zoo but were unsuitable for refugee women who sought to save and rebuild their lives in South Africa. Thus, she developed a specific book dealing with everyday things, together with a team of 5 people, 4 of whom spoke English. The mixed team, together for 10 years, managed to teach English to 15,000 people.

In the first years, the women received signaled the difficulty of the language as a crucial obstacle in the efforts of insertion in the

local context. According to the testimony of Adília de Sousa, the project of Sr. Justina began when, together with the help provided by the emergency care of the residential shelter, it proved necessary to seek reinforcements to learn English.

Sr. Justina offered to do an English school, where we had our little library. She began by teaching the residents who were in the house at that time and some who came from outside. However, the women said they were learning English, they were succeeding, and other refugees, who did not live in the Shelter... then it was opened also for them, to the point that we had more than 50 people at that time to study English at the Bienvenu Shelter. And because she created her own basic English book, with what women needed most, like how to take a cab to the city or to the hospital, how to go to the doctor and describe what they felt, how to say they wanted to buy certain things, of food, anyway... and they soon learned English. There came a time when we had a group in the morning and another in the afternoon. We also had kids that we looked after to support mothers who had no one to leave them with during English class. Over time, the children also began to participate in the school there. Those who were lucky enough to go to school, after school came to the Shelter in the afternoon to do their homework, learn to read, learn to write in English and so was the beginning of English classes. For me it was a success because many of them only got a job after they learned to speak English, and mommies too, so they could go to school and accompany their children in everything they needed (26.01.2021).

As of 2015, English courses have been coordinated by the Department of Pastoral Care for Refugees of the Archdiocese of Johannesburg and, since then, language courses are offered in one of the rooms of the Cathedral. Many of the residents of the Bienvenu Shelter and students of the Mother Assunta Training Centre are routed to take the courses there, both for the basic level and for the advanced level, lasting 3 months each course.

At the Bienvenu Shelter, exclusive English classes were being structured for women residents, with the support of a volunteer professional, teacher by profession, who offers his service 2 times a week. Classes take place throughout the year. Each day there is a

new woman joining the group or another who stops attending classes because she is leaving the Bienvenu Shelter.

### **3.6 Outreach Program**

The empowerment of welcomed women and the promotion of their protagonism are guiding principles and cross-cutting references of everyday choices and concerns at the Bienvenu Shelter, in the reception and management of emergencies, in the search for lasting solutions to the problems and in the reflection on the pedagogical proposals for the accompaniment and assistance of the people welcomed.

In other words, the empowerment and protagonism of the welcomed women themselves and their sons and daughters inspire the actions and dedication of the day to day at the Bienvenu Shelter. These are parameters and criteria that determine the choices and activities developed, direct the actions directly and indirectly to the construction and strengthening of the autonomy of women welcomed in the shelter. In this sense, promoting the qualification and empowerment of each of the refugees received so that they can gain entry into the world of work is a crucial action in the process of empowerment and autonomy of women.

The Outreach Program – ORP is an integral part of the Bienvenu Shelter’s action methodology as it is an operative way to give sustainability to the work carried out with assisted women and so that the learning and achievements made are not lost once, they are integrated into the community. It consists in assuring the beneficiaries the support they still need to be able to support themselves and their children or their families.

The Program is a way that the Shelter has found to act in an integrated way in the local community, alleviating, among other factors, expressions of xenophobia against the community of migrants and refugees and giving sustainability to the life projects that the institutional shelter has allowed to elaborate and begin to materialize. The Outreach Program consists of a series of activities which are addressed to:

- To the women and children who leave the Bienvenu Shelter: access to vocational courses; support with food and clothing;

daycare for children; scholarships for school-age children; school equipment and uniform; socio-emotional support; articulations with entities that help in legal solutions regarding migration regularization; listening and guidance in cases of emotional suffering, grief or need for discernment about choices to be made; among many other supporting and accompanying actions, especially for the protagonists previously welcomed at the Shelter;

- To the community in general through the care of vulnerable families of refugees/migrants and South African families: access to daycare, food and clothing, as well as support in emergency cases; listening and guidance and follow-up with support for situations of greater vulnerability.

The interaction with the migration police in favor of refugee women that the Outreach Program has been able to implement has become a real practice of collaboration between the two entities, which favors a recognition by the police, the dignity of refugees and ensures ongoing communication between the local community and the Bienvenu Shelter. This strategy of establishing friendly contact with the local police benefits migrants and refugees in the sense that the Shelter becomes a reference point for care and support to these people, putting itself as a viable alternative of forwarding beyond the instances of control and security.

The constant return to the Shelter, and the team's follow-up visits to former residents and people who have already been assisted, created a kind of network, allowing constant access to information on the context in which they live and within the refugee community in Johannesburg. This allows the Shelter, enough agility, to provide support and intervene in situations of vulnerability and emergency that arise, and, at the same time, it enables the collection of information in a constant update in the form of an observatory of the reality of this population in the surroundings of the Shelter.

The network that was created spontaneously also fosters an environment of solidarity between women who have received assistance in the past and those who currently need assistance: "return some good I received" is how they explain their offer of help to the Shelter and, above all, to the women who have just arrived.

Through the Program, the Shelter maintains an affective and mutual bond with the former residents, among themselves and with the Shelter. This bond gives emotional sustainability to face the challenges of a life in a foreign land while becoming, in a certain way, a place where the community lives, an element so important for integration and so valued by African cultures.

For the Bienvenu Shelter, the Outreach Program has always existed, but has been structured over the years and has become a service that serves people who have not been assisted in Governmental programs, either due to lack of documentation, in the case of refugees, either in the case of persons not eligible for such support, or for other reasons. Efforts are made available to assist the most deprived people around the Shelter, whether they are migrants or refugees, or South African nationals.

The Shelter has a register of these families and, with the consolidation of this monitoring approach by the Team, people in the vicinity of the Shelter know that they can count on this support, which has become a reference. The search for help arrives there daily. There is a trust of the local community in relation to the Shelter, since it is common knowledge that help exists, in addition to food, as the Bienvenu Shelter also supports some funeral cases – as support for the family and help at the funeral itself, transportation in medical emergencies, listening and guidance in situations of emotional difficulties, among other services. With the Covid-19 pandemic, starting in March 2020, demands tripled, reaching almost 2,000 people monthly.

In the specific case of the follow-up to former residents, from the day they leave the shelter, their dossiers pass into the hands of the Team responsible for the Outreach Program. They are connected to the program for a minimum of 3 months. Each case is evaluated individually. After the given time of more active care, the monitoring methodology foresees that the monitoring goes to successive phases, of less active presence, but women are assured that the Shelter will be open doors in case of need. “Come again”, is what refugee women listen to.

Among the actions commonly implemented is the support for the referral of children with disabilities to specialized schools, management of emergency contingencies, psychological follow-up



and monitoring of backlogs with migration documentation, among other needs depending on each case.

In the Program registration is recorded the address of each former resident, with whom she will live, the child's school, among other information, for the continuity of support in transportation to school, support for renewal of documents, assistance with medicines, the feeding beyond the basic kit, the uniform, the tuition and the school material, the counselling with women and children and information or support for hospital emergencies.

Many women who do not know where their husband or family is, and who used to go to the Red Cross to try to get information about it, started to rely on this service and support for family meetings through the social service of the Bienvenu Shelter, that has been, over time, specializing in care strategies that help the welcomed people and also have this type of problem solved or at least routed for solution.

Migrants and refugees are the loneliest approached human beings, they haven't only left a house behind, and their feelings, they have left behind the family and their culture, and they are not wanted where they go and are often subjected to xenophobia. And this whole feeling of "I am nobody", "I cannot speak the language of the people", "they don't want me when I come", "I have dignity, but I cannot offer", is an extreme isolation, especially for those who have run away under dramatic circumstances.

In my opinion, the young women and all unaccompanied minors are certainly the most vulnerable of the migrants and they desperately need to make a new start in life as they could be tempted to agree to abuse and to immoral ways of making a living just because there is nothing else to do, so they inflict violence upon themselves (Sr. Justine Priess – 28.11.2018).

The welcomed women, as soon as they overcome the first days of reception and environment, while seeking immediate solutions to health needs, communication and documentation, among others, begin to worry about the preparation for the moment they may, outside the Bienvenu Shelter, to take care of their own lives and that of their children. Thus, from the first moments, among them and especially under the guidance and attention of the Shelter Team,

training activities are being carried out to favour the learning of knowledge and techniques that can assist them in sourcing an income and skills to favour successive labour insertion, such as art, cooking, cutting, and sewing, and crafts.

Such activities, however, if on the one hand they enriched the received women and empowered them for their trajectories and favoured self-esteem and motivation to face the challenges, also constituted a problem in the Shelter, because the spaces were limited and needed to be shared – for example, the use of the kitchen for the baking course and for preparing meals for residents. The experience of commitment in the mission of the Bienvenu Shelter and the unconditional dedication to support life with dignity and to provide a future of sustainability for each of the women who passed through the Shelter, opened the way for the realization of a project, that began as a dream and that came to fruition from 2017: The Mother Assunta Training Centre.

# CHAPTER 4



**We thank Bienvenu Shelter's sisters for providing the needs of migrants by offering us accommodation, nutritious meals, clothes, education for our children and access to health facilities.**

**You help us morally, materially, and financially. Thank you!**

**If you give me a fish, I will eat but if you teach me to fish, I will not be hungry anymore.**

**You teach us to fish when you train us in the different courses like baking, sewing, beauty and English courses.**

**Not only that, you give us the materials for practises when we finish the course.**

**We thank you!**

*(Awa – From Congo RDC – n.d.)*

## 4

# **MOTHER ASSUNTA TRAINING CENTRE**

Launched in 2017, the Mother Assunta Training Centre is a sign of the qualification of the actions and programs of the Bienvenu Shelter that can count on a wider and more adequate space for their activities of empowerment and professionalization of refugee women residents and people from the local community who participate in courses and other activities of orientation, training and skills development that favour real opportunities of job insertion and income generation for themselves and their families.

The work of training and preparation for insertion into the labour market that takes place in the spaces of the Shelter, commenced during the first years and the need grew. There came a time when the environment used for such activities no longer covered the demand. The spaces had to be shared for different purposes and were almost always crowded due to the increasing membership of the women served by the Bienvenu Shelter.

Recognizing the great impact that those professional training activities had on the lives of so many women and their families – fostering empowerment in their paths of autonomy – the direction of the Shelter, in reflection that involved the Team and external professionals and volunteers, decided to seek a proper space for these actions and projects. The space could also respond to the demands of many, such as families of former residents and residents of the neighbourhood, with priority being given to migrant women.

With the special cooperation of Mrs. Christien Heutink and her family, and the co-participation of the Association Round Table, who previously donated the house to the Congregation of the Scalabrinian Sisters to realize the Mother Assunta Centre, the project took

shape and the desire of the MSCS sisters to expand the space for the activities was shared with the people who knew and supported the organisation and its mission. Other donors were adding forces, especially the Friends of the Portuguese Community – Mr. Fernando Vicente and Family, Mr. Emidio and Family, Mr. Garcia and Family, Mr. Coelho and Family, Mr. José Tavares and Family, Mr. Ernesto Pinheiro and Family, *Academia da Ferrugem*, *Rochas Hardwere* – and other actors who have added ideas, resources and services for home renovation and adaptation of compartments to the needs of courses. “The acquisition of this house would not have been possible if it had not been for the generosity and gratuitousness of people who manifested themselves as signs of the providence of God, who does not leave us alone when in Him we trust and commit our projects” (Sr. Analita Candaten – Provincial Superior of the Province Christ the King – 08.11.2017).

What was a limited aspect of the reception of women in vulnerable situations has become a driving force of life and hope that generates action, reaction, and commitment from those who help, and, above all, the protagonists who are those who participate in the activities and who, in their passage through the Shelter, unleash their inner strength and strengthen their dreams, their projects and their desire for a better life.

On the occasion of the inauguration of the space, on 14 November 2017, the General Superior of the MSCS Sisters, Sr. Neusa de Fatima Mariano, expressed the joy that the whole MSCS Congregation felt for this initiative, highlighting the collegiate way in which the MSCS Sisters had embraced the project and pointing out that the Shelter responds to the mission of continuing to protect and defend the human and civil rights of migrants and refugees, especially women and children.

Opening the Mother Assunta house as a training centre means having in your mind, and especially in your heart, the love for so many women who need to be welcomed, trained, and integrated so that they achieve their autonomy and integration into society and the world of work.

The whole congregation accompanies you, because this new Centre, an extension of the Bienvenu Shelter, responds to one

of the decisions of the XIII General Chapter, which emphasized the mission of giving protection and defending the human and civil rights of migrants and refugees, especially of women, since it is understood that the future of the family, and especially of children, is closely linked to the mission of women.

The mission that Blessed Assunta Marchetti began 122 years ago was God's providence; now it is up to us to continue her work, being sure that God continues to provide good for his little ones of the gospel.

I am sure that this work is a sign that God hears the cry of His people, as He heard it in the wilderness... (Sr. Neusa de Fátima Mariano – 13.11.2017).

The Mother Assunta Training Centre has assumed the mission of promoting self-sustainability through empowerment programs for women living in the Bienvenu Shelter and for other immigrant, refugee, or South African women, who belong to the local community. Its main focus is training through formal courses, with access to the necessary resources for learning. The donation of the material used during the course is a differential in the process of strengthening the processes of rebuilding life on South African soil, especially for women who are welcomed, who come out of extreme vulnerability and dependency, for progressive processes of autonomy and strengthening the ability to restart, reinventing themselves. Having a start-up kit with the necessary material to practice the learned profession is essential for success in the courses of autonomy of students. Migratory experiences help suffering and even traumatized people on their journeys to be protagonists of their lives and leaders of trajectories of hope and success for themselves and their families, thanks to human-spiritual, socio-cultural accompaniment, psychological and medical. The Training Centre was the missing piece, after the end of the welcome period at the Bienvenu Shelter, to unleash strengthened and embedded processes of the potentialities that can make a difference when the organisation is no longer in charge of the day to day needs, the courses and gifts received at the Shelter become livelihoods.

The need to expand the space has become a constant, in view of the development of the projects of the Bienvenu Shelter.

In October 2019 the second plan for a new extra hall was finished with a lot of thanks to Mr. Fernando Vicente and his workers. It was wonderful to see! And we are happy that we could make it financially possible to make this big step for the future of the Shelter and the Mother Assunta Training Centre (Christien Heutink – 16.12.2018).

The space, which is a multipurpose hall, was built in 2019 and opened in November. All works were supported by volunteer funders, as described above. This specific space was dedicated to the Heutink family, for having been the main financier.

The multipurpose hall has capacity for around 120 people and is used for the graduation celebrations of the courses, for the training meetings held with students on small businesses and other activities related to the life and dynamism of the actions of the Bienvenu Shelter and the Mother Assunta Training Centre. The space is also used for training and celebration activities with employees and residents.

In the year of the celebration of 20 years, in 2021, the space was expanded even more, responding to the needs and demands both organisational and regarding the constant effort to continue qualifying and expanding the activities and courses for the people served.

One of the projects aimed at professional qualification that had its operation enhanced by the Training Center is the Sewing Project, that offers basics of sewing for residents of the shelter and people living around the Bienvenu Shelter. Since its inception, the project has served more than 600 people from the community around the Shelter, between 2008 and 2020, as already indicated above, in chapter 2 of this volume.

Here we can't say: "we are here only to welcome you. We are also here to move you, promote". So, we have the Professional Training Center where they can learn professions. There are also those courses that we don't have here, but if they are proper for the person to do, we get out of here. If she is a younger mother who has had a little academic guidance, we try to give another course, it is also according to the state of the person and what we see that she will achieve. Then we offer what we have and listen to them, so they can be independent (Adília Pestana de Sousa, SLM – 14.12.2018).

In addition to the Sewing Project, the Mother Assunta Training Centre develops other actions that have benefited women and children welcomed in the Shelter, such as guidance and monitoring in the search for work insertion. The Mother Assunta Centre also supports the local community, with an important impact on the walk of people who consider the Bienvenu Shelter a part of their daily life.

## **4.1 Empowerment**

The Training Center is closely linked with the primary mission of the Bienvenu Welcome Shelter, a space to welcome, protect, promote and integrate, paraphrasing the words of Pope Francis, by expressing the internationally required task of the church and society in the face of the challenges of human mobility in the world today.

The woman who leaves her land, with or without children, in the search to save her life, protect herself and/or achieve life with dignity for herself and for her children, once welcomed in the Bienvenu Shelter no longer lives on the street, helpless. She, who is usually found and welcomed in an emergency and sometimes traumatic moment, has in the welcome embrace and in the silent respect of listening the beginning of a process that is triggered and does not end until she is unable, in terms of popular wisdom, “to cut the cord”. Thus, with the safe accommodation in the house, the protection and the opportunities of education and leisure for children, the referrals to bureaucratic practices, health and articulation with the family, immediately begin the procedures for elaboration, re-elaboration and/or consolidation of new plans for life, the near future and even dreams for the medium and long term.

And in this whole trajectory, there are the MSCS Sisters, their staff teams and the varied and multi-purpose network of people and organizations strengthening the empowerment that begins on arrival and is configured as a progressive process, not without ups and downs, through which inner strength gives its hands to hope and creativity, to advance in itineraries of autonomy and success, each in its own way, but all with respect and appreciation of who they are and who they can become. For this reason, empowerment is the word that inspired and determined the emergence and strengthening of the Mother Assunta Training Centre, as an addition of the Bienvenu Shelter.



Time at the Bienvenu Shelter for the women is short term, a few months in most cases. Therefore, it is imperative that the women learn new skills to generate an income upon exiting the shelter, to sow, an effort to produce fruits that are then multipliers of other conquests. For this reason, after the process of welcoming, providing initial care, assisting with language learning, psychological and legal support, combined with the potential of learning to manage jobs and generate an income, this type of process is adopted/ experienced in the context in which they are.

I came here, I was very sick, I was... until now I'm sick. I have a problem for high blood pressure and the Shelter was assisting me. My kids didn't go to school, didn't have documents. The shelter helped them to go to the project school, they are paying them now. I was given my papers last year, the Shelter also... I did a course of English for 6 months and the shelter helped me again to make a course for housekeeper, but no job. They helped me a lot and while I was sick, they have been taking care for me, for everything. The shelter... they paid for me the first month the rent, to go out they give me mattress, plates, some food, blankets, they helped me (Brunette – From Congo RDC).

Thus, the courses are a tool at the disposal of the welcomed women, so depending on the circumstances and the concrete cases, some make more of a class mode. Considering the long waiting list, the Centre gives priority to those most in need, as completing at least one of these courses is usually the only way to gain access to some form of income and be able to feed and/or feed their children, in a context where refugee women find it difficult to find employment in the formal labour market. It is a way to restart life upon leaving the Bienvenu Shelter, so a course is more than a course, but an empowerment strategy “with a view to self-sustainability and to help reduce the hunger, poverty and suffering of these women” (Sr. Marivane Chiesa – 27.01.2021).

Just as in the Bienvenu Shelter, in the Training Centre, the welcome is a constant feature present in care and relationships, as a criterion of collaboration in activities and, especially, as a way of life and work. The welcome is accompanied by appreciation, esteem, and valorisation of each person; because this is the way for the

trajectory of the Bienvenu Shelter becomes an effective opportunity for integration into the local context, space not always chosen, but real space where they can heal the wounds and look forward, raising their heads and resuming dreams and projects. It is not always easy to meet and work with people of different languages, cultures, and backgrounds, but it is possible to learn from lived experiences. At Mother Assunta Centre, the differences, and skills of each are valued, in programs that include human relations, entrepreneurship and marketing classes, personal presentation and financial management, as well as notions of savings and accounting, together with the specific technical lessons of the respective professions.

In their testimonies at the conclusion of the courses, on the occasion of the delivery of diplomas, there is never a lack of recognition for these and many other aspects of what is the life class that the courses of the Mother Assunta Training Centre ensure.

I always thank Bienvenu Shelter, helped me a lot, because when I think the way, my mind was stressed... but because of Bienvenu Shelter I calmed down; I started thinking normally. I learned English here, I could start think what could I do, what could I try, I learned things here, I learned sewing, and on top of that even the job now that I'm doing, so I just have to say: "Thank you"! to Bienvenu Shelter, and to the community of Scalabrinians Sisters that had this idea of putting this Shelter, because around here if the Shelter was not... many people are assisted by the Shelter, when we stay here, we are like a family, we know each other, we become like a family, we talk about Bienvenu Shelter, we remember... it is not easy to find a welcoming house that welcome you and give you everything that they give us, we need to thank (Juliette, from Congo RDC – 16.12.2018).

## **4.2 Livelihood courses offered**

The Mother Assunta Training Centre offers 4 different courses: Baking; Hairdressing; Beauty and Sewing. They are all easily accessible courses for the target audience for which they were organized, for short duration, have a market in the local context and require limited financial investment in order to have at their disposal the material or infrastructure necessary to be able to carry out the

activity after the completion of the courses, enabling professional exercise almost immediately to training, and are not very expensive courses, consequently, can be made possible even with limited resources.

The women who attend these courses are all people who need to work, need their own income for themselves and their families, which is fundamentally why they attend the courses, that are sufficiently well structured to allow participants to be ready to use what they have learned to move forward in their life reconstruction projects, taking steps in search of the results they want to achieve.

The Baking Course is the first option, because it is easy to learn recipes, with a very limited capital for the purchase of ingredients, such as bread: learning to make, sell the product in the informal market and already manage to start earning something for their livelihood and for the most urgent needs of the family.

Classes started in the kitchen of the Bienvenu Shelter from 2015. Adilia de Sousa, with the help of volunteers, taught residents twice a week to bake, freeze and decorate cakes. From the opening of the Training Centre, the course expanded, adding recipes of baked treats, as well as scones, cookies, cakes, doughnuts, *koeksusters* and bread.

The Hairdressing Course is related to the importance of hair care traditionally present in African cultures. This course teaches how to take care of your hair, be it a treatment, be it a style or a braid technique. There are always candidates for these courses because it is something related to the possibility of quick income and especially with self-esteem and beauty of African women.

As for the Hairdressing Course, the Beauty Course (manicure, pedicure and makeup) is related to the interest of the women served at the Bienvenu Shelter but is also influenced by the idea of beauty conveyed by the mainstream media, such as nail styles and makeup. Having the course and a small start-up kit, it is relatively easy to start an activity and start to have income autonomously. In terms of sustainability, for refugee women, it is a good business, which is viable even without having a specific place of work, can be developed on the sidewalk, in the home of customers or collaborating with another professional who already has a salon.

The Sewing Course, which had been offered since 2001, initially with the JRS and since 2003 at the headquarters of the Bienvenu Shelter, was transferred to the Mother Assunta Training Centre in 2017 and was consolidated with the contribution, above all, of the culture of Congolese women, which are the majority of the participants. The teachers are also, in its majority, Congolese. It is a very sought-after course, being the seam is, in general, made with African cloths.

The evolution of the Sewing Course is clear during these 20 years of experience. Initially, it was a more informal activity focusing on the sewing of children's clothing, currently achieving a focus on the professionalization process, which expanded the learning items and the level of qualification promised and achieved by the participants, especially from the donation of Kits for students who finished the course can autonomously start their work, which started from 2014. In the Training Centre it was also possible to advance, creating a second level, or advanced level, for the best students, selected by the team in dialogue with teachers, to expand and qualify learning in the profession of Seamstresses.

For all courses, the direction of the Bienvenu Shelter always has a long waiting list of women who want to enrol and participate, which is an indicator of the quality of the teaching that is transmitted, the effectiveness of the approach adopted and, also, the recognition and credibility of the organisation. At the end of 2020, there were 186 women on the waiting list: 30 for the course of Hairdressing, 36 for Baking, 38 for Sewing and 82 for the Beauty course

The courses offered in the Training Centre have the number of participants that the space entails, so it was so important to add efforts to progressively expand the capacity of welcoming and training more women, who have expressed so much interest and even the need to learn.

**Table 4.1** – Courses offered at the Training Centre between 2017 and 2020

<b>SKILLS TRAINING</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
<b>Baking</b>	36	37	52	53
<b>Beauty</b>	48	42	45	64
<b>Hairdressing</b>	-	25	38	20
<b>Sewing – Basic &amp; Advanced</b>	90	102	69	68
	<b>174</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>205</b>

Other options for courses are always welcomed in evaluation by the Direction of the Centre and the financiers who support the Project, such as the Catering course, whereas activities related to the production and sale of food have proved to be a promising choice for the local labour market and informal trade, and therefore an option to start the process of financial autonomy for many refugee women.

In addition to the courses organized and carried out at the Mother Assunta Training Centre, the Bienvenu Shelter occasionally offers women the opportunity to take part in other courses, for example the hotel management course, when there is the possibility and when they judge it to be an option that favours the insertion of the person in the labour market of Johannesburg.

Good day ladies and gentlemen

My name is Jade X. and today I would like to speak about how grateful I'm for this opportunity that has been given to me.

These baking lessons have helped me a lot. It has helped me rebuild my life and I'm not the only one who will benefit from this. The society will also benefit from this as by baking I will be helping to feed them.

The lessons give hope to many people, and I would like to ask Bienvenu to continue with these lessons. It is really a blessing to many.

I would like to thank my classmates for their friendliness and support. I would like to thank the teacher for her lessons and her patience with us and last and not least I and would like to thank Bienvenu for the opportunity given to us who had no hope. Thank you (Jade – 08.09.2021).

### 4.3 A step-by-step process

Some specific elements determine the promising strategies and facilitators of the impact of the courses of the Mother Assunta Training Centre. Among them:

- a) The choice of candidates, selected from a long waiting list, takes into account unique criteria such as: the actual need of the person; their psychophysical condition, not only to follow the whole course, but to practice the profession learned, after the conclusion of the classes; the previous skills; and the motivation;
- b) A team effort to prepare the courses, interview and definition of accepted candidates and diachronic monitoring of the results;
- c) Donation of all material necessary for participants to develop practical classes, avoiding excluding candidates who may not have the resources to provide material for their classes;
- e) Elaboration, with the assistance and supervision of the Mother Assunta Training Centre, of a Business Plan for each student, based on their business idea;
- f) Double assessment, practical and theoretical, during the development of the 3-month course;
- g) Delivery of the startup kit so that they can autonomously work and earn their own income at the end of the course.

The Centre organizes, together with the course, actions of visibility in the socio-cultural context, which reinforces the recognition of the diploma obtained and symbolically underlines the rescue of the dignity of the participants and, by representation, also of their respective communities or groups of ethnic and social affiliation. Among such actions is, for example, the sale of products produced by the students and a solemn celebration at the conclusion of each course, with photos and wide dissemination on social networks, which increases the impact in favor of women and the added value of their respective diplomas.

In a few years since the inauguration of the Mother Assunta Training Centre, there have been very positive indicators regarding

the capacity of the Training Centre to impact, helping to transform the lives and fortunes of many women, refugees and also immigrants or South Africans. Some who finish the Sewing Course, for example, joined to work together, in a shared space; others managed to get contracts with schools to make the learners' uniforms; and others the contract with the public sector to make the uniforms for the city cleaning staffs, just to mention a few cases.

In December 2019, as part of a project to recognize those actively involved in the municipality of Johannesburg for the ability to focus on the transformation of the local reality, the Bienvenu Shelter received the Prize, which explicitly cites the Outreach Program, highlighting its relevance and recognition for what the Mother Assunta Training Centre makes happen in the context around her through the presence and performance.

#### **4.4 Looking towards the future**

The Mother Assunta Training Centre has an indicator that challenges and permanently presses the Team: the waiting lists, which are fueled by the recognition the organization has received in Johannesburg and the opportunities it has favored for professionals trained through its courses.

Thus, in addition to investing the Sewing course with the Advanced Level and the types of courses, including Catering, the creation of more rooms aims to enable the reception of more classes participating in the courses. This expansion was something that proved necessary and was happening by the impact of the results of the Mother Assunta Training Centre and by the recognition of the benefits of this work to its recipients, by donors and funders, from near and far.

Arriving in the year 2021 with a new and bigger space for the Beauty course, despite the Pandemic, which limited the actions under Government Directives, the Bienvenu Shelter has only reason to celebrate and be thankful.

The donors and friends who arrive to visit the Mother Assunta Training Centre are always welcome, at any time, being able to see with their own eyes the progress and style of the classes, being able

to interact with teachers and students. It is difficult to leave without tasting a delicious cake with coffee prepared with love and affection in the kitchen of the Centre.



# CHAPTER 5



**Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Please receive our biggest gratitude and appreciation.  
We are so gratefully for your kindness  
and love you are shown to us in this grate women's day.**

**The Lord is full of wonderful things like you! [...]**

**You are the best, we are humbled.  
Sometimes the simplest things near the most  
we appreciate the gifts and the thoughts behind it.  
Your thoughtfulness is a gift we will always treasure.**

**May the love you're snow to us  
go back to you multiplied.**

**Thanks a bunch!**

**God bless you.**

*(Edite – From Angola - 19.02.2021)*

## 5

# REFUGEE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The women welcomed in the Bienvenu Shelter, are usually single mothers, carrying alone the responsibility to raise and support their children. Most are refugees, and there are cases of migrants and South Africans who are also accepted because they are in a situation of serious vulnerability.

Many experienced torture, the death of close family members, friends, or members of their communities. There are numerous cases of women who, at some point in their lives, have suffered some kind of violence. Many have been victims of sexual violence and some of human trafficking networks. The number of adolescents with a low level of education and who have been victims of some type of abuse is high, and not infrequently there are cases where they are carriers of the HIV virus. Due to the structural conditions of their places of origin and/or their family situations at the origin or in the trajectories of displacement, many of the women welcomed have few professional skills that favour the employment in Johannesburg.

For those who come from other countries, the migratory condition and lack of control of the local language often put them and their children at risk. Added to this is the fact that in order to maintain and care for your family's loved ones, especially in the case of refugees, the difficulties in finding a job or starting small income generation businesses for the family's livelihood are enormous.

Because they are refugee women and mothers, often unable to share the responsibility for the care and education of children with another family member, they are usually in solidarity with each other and do not lose their strength, despite the huge open wounds they carry with them. At the Bienvenu Shelter they are welcomed without

reservation, with their stories, their emotional situation, their toils and their potentialities and abilities. Without pietisms, with immense respect and total trust in the capacity and dignity of each one, the welcomed women and their children can speak and can testify that it is possible, yes, to react, to resume the path, transform adversities and obstacles on a basis of support to rebuild life.

And the Bienvenu Shelter has stories and memories to witness to the world, and especially to every suffering woman who is welcomed, that it is possible to start over and that in the shelter there is space and there are people who know how to support this possibility and who dare to bet on the ability to dream again and on creativity to make happen beautiful stories of overcoming and empowering. Therefore, this chapter presents some of these trajectories, as a way to echo their voices and their viewpoints.

## **5.1. Grace, the educator**

The story of Grace, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of the Congo is representative of many other stories from these 20 years, which the Bienvenu Shelter helped to write.

She, who had never thought she would one day have to flee her country to save her own life, arrived in Johannesburg in 2001, unable to communicate in the local language. With her twin sons, she slept the first night on the floor of the Park Station bus station in South Africa's largest city. Upon awakening, on the second day, she decided that she should walk to explore the surroundings of that environment, despite warnings from people she met at the bus station itself that she could be arrested for being without documents. Walking around, she heard people speaking her language, French, and was elated to be able to hear a familiar language. It was her countrymen who warned her that the place she should go to get her papers was the Home Affairs department.

On the same day, Grace experienced a peculiar encounter by recognizing a familiar face amid the crowd of the bus station: was a former school friend and, mentioning the name of the school to this person, the two recalled that in fact they had studied together, many years ago, in the Congo. She then told her situation to her colleague, who soon told her there was no space in her current home to welcome

her, as it was a residence shared by many people and with little space. Despite this, she took her home to offer at least one meal and a bathroom. Upon arriving, Grace in fact found that there were many people there; some were sleeping between the rooms. Her roommate said if that's the case, she could stay if she could afford it. Grace brought with her nothing but a few personal belongings and her two children. Faced with this, her colleague was touched by the situation, because "leaving Grace back at Park Station would be the same thing as leaving her on the street". It was then that in an agreement between the residents, starring her colleague, it was decided that they could welcome Grace and her children for at least a week.

Now that her temporarily housing problem was solved, Grace began to seek a way to get her documentation. Her experience in the department of Home Affairs was very painful: long queues, staying overnight to be able to be attended to, in addition to the inhuman treatment given to her, who did not consider the emotional stressful situation too strong at such a delicate time. Despite these difficulties, it was at Home Affairs that she was indicated to visit the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), an institution dedicated to the guidance of refugees who needed help. At JRS there was a short list of shelters where she could apply for admission. The one that attracted the most attention was the Bienvenu Shelter, for the possibility of learning the English language through language teaching programs. Fortunately, there was a vacancy and the referral to the Bienvenu Shelter was successful. According to her: "when we arrived, we are like 'finally! We have a bed; we have a bed!' I was relaxed, a feel that this is like the first home in South Africa and then, we started our life there" (11.12.2018).

From that moment on Grace became part of the history and life of the Bienvenu Shelter, where she lived with her children for about a year, when she obtained assistance to rent a place of residence. Even after leaving the shelter, she maintained a bond with the Shelter which for her was her first home in South Africa. She offered to work there, first helping in the care of the environment and later as a Creche assistant. With encouragement from the organisation, she studied and became a teacher in the Creche for refugee children. She has always wanted to give back in some way the service received in her time as a resident at Bienvenu Shelter: "I said I need to help them,

now I'm here, but later I will have the opportunity to help, I have to make a difference in their lives" (11.12.2018).

Grace's story reflects on the one hand part of the situations experienced by many of the refugee women welcomed at the Bienvenu Shelter and, on the other hand, how the organisation has performed various support services that assist in training, professional qualification and, consequently, in the integration of these women and their families in Johannesburg.

## **5.2 Khelly, the hard worker**

The first time Khelly went to South Africa, she was accompanied by her grandparents in 2006, after her parents died in her native Zambia. During the interview she granted us, Khelly did not give details of her life in her home country, but reported that she suffered cases of torture, which caused her family members to mobilize so that she could get out of there. Despite this, after arriving in South Africa, she no longer received the support of her family for the regularization of her documents. She spent some years counting on a churches' help, when in 2010, pregnant, she was taken to the Bienvenu Shelter and gave birth to her child. Unable to register him because her passport had been stolen, the role of the Bienvenu Shelter in legal assistance was essential.

The Shelter paid everything to me to get my documents, while my family did nothing. So, if it was not [the] Shelter I'd be until now without passport. In Zambia, when I got out, I had 14, in Zambia when you have 14 you can't have an ID... If it wasn't shelter, I don't know which country I'd have to go, because I couldn't go to Zambia they'd reject me, I couldn't go to South Africa, they'd reject me, so where can I be? If it wasn't the shelter to go fix my documents, so shelter did help me a lot (12.12.2018).

Khelly also reported the difficulties she had experienced on the streets of Johannesburg. Several times she had been stopped by police officials seeking to stop undocumented migrants. On one occasion, she was harassed by an agent and was afraid to react and suffer consequences. During the police approaches, she always tried to speak the Sotho language, one of the 11 national languages

of South Africa that, luckily, she learned from her South African grandfather. The agents usually communicated in Zulu, a language widely spoken in Johannesburg, but Khelly was afraid to continue the conversation in that language fearing that her accent would denounce her as a foreigner. She was always “prepared to lie to the authorities to continue her life”, stating that she came from Freestate, a state where the Sotho language is spoken by the majority of the population. In this way, the police believed she was South African, and the treatment changed, as the risk of being deported decreased.

After 8 years of her arrival in the city, Khelly could look back and testify as a teenage victim of torture, alone, woman and foreigner, who had arrived helpless in 2010, that she had managed to rebuild her life, relearned to dream and fight for her dreams. Khelly left South Africa in 2019 and moved to Malawi, on the border with Zambia, her home country, to live with her husband and children. Her husband, as he was unemployed, traveled first with the 2 small children to start building a house and prepare the minimum conditions to welcome his wife. In turn, she continued working for a few more months and saved money to also migrate. From the news sent to the Bienvenu Shelter, it is known that they faced many difficulties to re-start their lives again, but they managed to overcome this and eventually settled in the land they chose to live and care for their family.

### **5.3 Josy, the caregiver**

Josy is a Congolese refugee who arrived in South Africa in early 2002 fleeing war and the whole situation of danger and poverty in her country. Upon arriving in Johannesburg with her husband, a son and pregnant, she had nowhere to go. It was the Jesuit Refugee Service that directed her to a shelter, where she could stay. According to her, it was a shelter that did not provide breakfast and did not have many activities of legal advice. Once she requested refuge, she was sent to the Bienvenu Shelter where she spent approximately 10 months.

For the refugee, the reception of the Bienvenu Shelter brought peace to her life, because she was living on the streets, even being able to stay in another shelter before, while seeking a space where to start life again, with dignity. Her emotional state was very stressful, and she reports that she did not feel her mind “working well”.

[...] You tell yourself: ‘where am I going to go? Where am I going to go?’. Because where I come from and I’m running away from war and here I am... no one see me, no one to welcome me, I don’t have the place to sleep, my head was up and down, plus I was pregnant, it was not a good feeling. Then when they directed me to this place, they welcomed me by the sister, I felt all that bad coming down, I felt that peace and joy, they welcomed me so well! The sister told the house mother to give me the bed and everything, blanket, all the necessary the basic, they give me food for my child as well, I felt my mind started working again (16.12.2018).

In her account of her experience as a refugee, Josy says she realized the need to migrate by noticing “death coming to you” during the war. Seeing so many people fleeing their home country, she decided it was the best thing to do to save her own life. Although she did not regret it, she said that still in her home country, many people she spoke to, promised a life that was not the one she found in South Africa. The promises of wealth, housing and peace did not materialize, and the difficulties were greater than expected.

One of the great challenges for her and her husband was language, as many other refugees’ report, when they narrate their trajectories. “When a person does not know the language, the treatment changes”, says Josy. In fact, enabling women and children to learn English has become a commitment at the Bienvenu Shelter, a fundamental part of the actions provided by the Shelter to leverage life reconstruction efforts, through which the Bienvenu Shelter Team becomes part of the hope pathways of women and children living in the house.

After Josy left the Shelter, her son continued attending daycare and she continued her training activities, participating in the Sewing Course, which she had started when she was a resident. These activities helped her make small sales to support herself in the months following her departure from Bienvenu Shelter. Even after getting a job and moving away with her husband and children, she used to visit and pass by to greet the Sisters, staff and volunteers.

In one of her visits, she was informed that a daycare for babies would be opened, the Mother Assunta Baby Room, and that there would be a job vacancy for this new service that the Bienvenu Shelter was implementing. She was so happy to be able to return on the

condition of giving back to the organisation that helped her during the most difficult times of her integration into the new country. She was told that there would be a high demand for babies arriving and that mothers needed the service to go out and look for jobs and learn new skills. Her relationship with the residents was very friendly, as some already knew her, and so it was much easier for them to leave their babies with Josy, a refugee mother too, now an educator and caregiver at the Baby Room.

The importance for Josy of working with refugees is in the sense of trying to make the impression that refugees have when arriving in the new country – that they are not welcome, that they are a threat and that they are not “human beings” – can be reversed in an attention that considers them worthy of rights, equal to any other human being in the country. The services offered, such as the Baby Room that the Bienvenu Shelter has designed, became essential so that refugees could develop themselves and create new life projects for themselves and their families.

Josy emphasizes the need for the Bienvenu Shelter to continue its work, as it does not see a possibility for improvement in the migration and refuge situation on the continent. “There was a time that we thought would stop [the migratory flow], but we see that it remains strong, one hour is for natural disasters, another for wars...”.

When asked about the government and civil society in the role of protecting refugees in the country, Josy says that it still remains to be recognized by a portion of the population and government that those refugees are not a threat, that they are not wrong people in their choices, but rather that they are contributing to the country’s growth.

What we see... maybe there will be more refugees until the peace comes to the world, but the way we see things are still coming worse, the war is not finished, today is here, tomorrow is here, so we just wish that God gives more resources for them to welcome more people, more women (17.12.2018).

#### **5.4 Brunette, Bienvenu Shelter – Always welcoming**

Brunette is a Congolese refugee who was first welcomed at the Bienvenu Shelter between May 2015 and March 2016. She



subsequently returned to the shelter in 2018 due to her psychosocial and economic vulnerability. This is a case that required a longer term stay to the standard period of 3 to 6 months as she required more attention from the Team. Her story is of a lot of overcoming and strength and, thanks to the support received, she was able to survive to tell her trajectory.

She arrived in South Africa in 2013. Before that, she lived in Goma, a city in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that borders Rwanda. Her husband was the son of a Congolese man with a Rwandan mother, which according to her was a factor of xenophobia faced by the family. In May 2013, her husband was arrested by the Congolese government, accused of being part of the March 23 Movement (or Congolese Revolutionary Army), a military rebel group operating primarily in North Kivu Province, whose capital is Goma. According to Brunette, her husband was innocent; even so, after arbitrary arrest, government forces raided her home in search of the “weapons her husband hid from the rebels”, which she said did not exist. At the time she was pregnant and was threatened with imprisonment. A month and three weeks later, after the birth of the baby, police forces arrested her. During two days in prison, she sought news of her husband, without success. Her family said they had killed him, but by the time of the interview for this publication in December 2018, she still had hopes of finding him alive. Her brother helped her escape from jail and the city, with two of her three children, the youngest, because the eldest had gone to school the day before and had not returned. She said she “suddenly found herself in South Africa”, in a state of shock and without many clear memories due to strong emotions.

In her first months in Johannesburg, Brunette lived in places where she could find work as a maid, until her then-boss, in 2014, with whom she had confidence, raped her, and threatened to kill her if he was denounced by her. After the crime, a well-known from Zimbabwe offered her brother’s room for her stay, as he was traveling. Upon returning from the journey, the brother of her well-known also committed the crime from which she had just fled. The sexual rape occurred in the room that had been given to her as refuge. Then she was again a victim of this crime, and also threatened with death if she

reported it, she became psychotic due to all of the trauma and could not explain how she came to be hospitalized in a psychiatric clinic. Assistance was sought through the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), partner of the Bienvenu Shelter, which is a non-governmental organisation that collaborates offering psycho-social support and assistance, especially for persons suffering from trauma.

According to Brunette, from the moment she obtained assistance from CSVR and consequently from Bienvenu Shelter, things improved in various ways. At the time, she was experiencing high blood pressure problems, in addition to psychological conditions that also required medications. She couldn't eat or sleep. Her children were not enrolled in any school and the procedure for obtaining recognition of refugee status was not followed up. Thanks to the support of the Bienvenu Shelter she obtained medical assistance to treat her health problems. Her children started school and she obtained refugee documents in South Africa. Furthermore, she was able to learn English through the classes taught by the Shelter Staff, completed a course in domestic work and child minding in order for her to find work. Upon exiting her first stay at the Bienvenu Shelter, she was assisted with rent for the first month in order for her to restart in a new home and also received dishes, cutlery and blankets. This support was needed to stabilize her in the city.

In 2018, she returned to the Shelter, due to health problems and conflicts with people who shared the house where she lived with her children, which caused threats to her and her family. The lack of information about the whereabouts of her husband, arrested by the DRC police, and of her missing eldest daughter, increased her psychological vulnerability and this is an example of a case of extreme sensitivity that the Shelter received and continues to monitor, even at a distance.

To the shelter I just say thank you, I just say thank you because they take care of me, they just give me place to sleep ... When I'm here they are helping me for accommodation, they are giving me free food. If I get sick, they give me rands to go to the hospital, transport, they give me transport to go to Home Affairs to get my documents.

That's because I say, I can't forget shelter, they helped me a lot because, I think, if was not the shelter, I've already died. I remember last time, I was in shelter, the way I collapsed I didn't know what happened; I fell and all the sisters they moved me... I didn't understand what happened and what they did, they saved my life (02.12.2018).

## **5.5 Highlighting special cases within the Organisation**

By registering in this volume the most important achievements of the 20 years of opening of the Bienvenu Shelter, the main source of data and information related to the experiences is the Shelter itself, its documents and especially the people who work, as employees or as volunteers, that with their memory, their dedication, their love offered and welcoming smile, allow to record facts and signs that remained in the memory of the organisation, so that many other people know the greatness of this work, how much good it performs and how through many small gestures, great results have been achieved. This helps in recognition and motivation when difficulties are burdened with discouragement and fear.

In the beginning, many people who were refugees were victims of human trafficking, and we did not know! They ran away to save their lives and their children's. Arriving here they no longer found their husband, they did not understand the language and they had no one to turn to, or someone they knew. So, there was a lot of conflict with the police. When they were found as refugees, at first it was very difficult, because they were always being caught by the police and put in jail. I remember that Sr. Melanie and I spent a lot of time going to the jail to get our women [whom we had welcomed at the Shelter]. One because they had removed their documents saying that they were not valid, second because they said that they could not walk on the street, or because they could not work... they could not study, they had no right to anything. The document they had did not entitle them to anything. Those who came along with the refugees and were victims of trafficking sometimes suffered for months, because they arrived here, after being trafficked, deceived by false promises.

They usually went to rooms where they were left to stay, and men abused them. When they were able to escape, poor, with shame, with the pain and with the abuse they had suffered, they did not even know how to defend themselves to the police and to the people who had to help them. It was again a psychological abuse, because they were not well attended, because they did not know how to explain themselves. Then, when news like this came to us, through the police who brought them, it took two, three weeks, sometimes four, so that they started to trust us and tell us everything they went through (Adília Pestana de Sousa, SLM – 11.02.2021).

In the speeches and in the memories, for those who look back and experienced step by step this trajectory, some stories have featured, and this volume is an opportunity to also share some of them. Using pseudonyms, here are some stories, narrated and listened to with humble gratitude and admiration, as well as with unity, compassion and solidarity, especially for the victims of human trafficking.

- **Sandra.** She was trafficked from Mozambique. She had been sold by her grandmother to a Johannesburg gentleman after her mother died. The girl left for South Africa, with a man much older than her, with the promise of a job to send money to her grandmother, who stayed in Mozambique. She was abused and she got pregnant. Fortunately, this case ended up in court, the man was arrested, and the Bienvenu Shelter was able to reunite the girl with her family, in Mozambique, with the support of the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters who worked there to make contact with the family. It was a beautiful ending. But it didn't end there, despite the psychological work, the supervision, the counseling. The grandmother, successively, returned to sell her a second time. As soon as the girl arrived again in South Africa, she immediately sought out the Bienvenu Shelter, on the first occasion she managed to escape. Once again, the return to Mozambique was organized, this time to be welcomed by another family who assumed the responsibility to accompany and support her in the medium and long term.

- **Susy.** She fled Uganda with her mother, as her father had disappeared in one of the attacks at the place where she lived. She suffered violence and came to us with several injuries, including to her genital parts. During the escape journey, at the border, the Red Cross helped her, giving stitches in the cuts on her body, but they had used a very thick nylon thread, to the point that after a few months she still felt pain and had wounds, because the thread was still in her body. Rescued and assisted by the Bienvenu Shelter, through which she had the medical treatment she needed, and managed to survive. Meanwhile her mother didn't know, but she was ill at an advanced stage. She was treated in Johannesburg, where she died of liver cancer. It was a human trafficking case, both victims, because the mother managed to infiltrate to help her daughter, but then both fell into that network. Susy was later accompanied for a long time by the Bienvenu Shelter.
- **Marta.** She arrived at the Shelter with 5 children, all of them of a young age. The eldest was about 7 years old. She had a period of personalized accompaniment; she was not well. Then, with the help of the Red Cross, she met her husband and the two began to find a home where their family could meet again. While waiting, Marta started working in a shop that sold ready-to-eat food. Her husband also found a job, but she suddenly disappeared. That happens too!
- **Mary.** She arrived at the Bienvenu Shelter asking for help because she had nowhere to live. She said that she had spent two days without eating and that she had spent a long time in a queue trying to get refugee documents in South Africa. With her baby on her back, she did not remove him from there at any time and was respected about it by the entire Shelter Team. At night she ate and went to sleep, and when she got up, she was already with the baby on her back again. When the team went to check on him, they noticed he was deceased. Mary could not understand that it was necessary to make the funeral. It was a very painful situation. She, as a foreigner, had to wait all day for the ambulance to remove her baby's body. In fact, she had spent so many hours in the sun waiting to be seen at Home Affairs that the child, who did

not eat and drank nothing in those two days, died. Sufferings and life lessons that taught the Shelter team to be strong and humble, to welcome every situation. Unfortunately, situations like that of Mary, in which her son comes to die have been repeated on many occasions throughout the history of the Bienvenu Shelter.

- **Lucienne.** She was the mother of twins. One of the twins, one day, was no longer with her mother. She only carried one of the twins on her back. That day there were visitors in the Shelter and the Team, when accompanying the person to visit the house, noticed the other twin lying in the cradle in an unusual position. As soon as the visitors left, they went to check the situation of the baby: she had died. The mother did not notice what was happening. With the help of a volunteer from Germany who worked at the Shelter, the mother had to be taken to the hospital, then to proceed with the baby's funeral. "I think that for so much suffering that those mothers went through, so much torture... we actually deal with a lot of mommies who go through torture; so the torture is so much that they don't even feel that pain when something else bad happens in their life", Adília says, narrating about the psychological impacts that the situations that some of the refugee women in the home go through and how this, in extreme cases, has an impact on the care of children and the acceptance of situations such as death.
- **Godine.** She arrived in Johannesburg from Rwanda, still a minor, with a South African family, with whom her parents had made an agreement – a sum of money, for a certain time, in exchange for the services she would provide for children in that family, in South Africa. According to the agreement, she would send money monthly to her family in Rwanda. Godine took care of the two children of the family, but also of her own baby, with whom she had left home, carrying her on her back. She was around 16 when, after months, she arrived at the Bienvenu Shelter. For three months they travelled through the mountains and the woods to try to reach South Africa, starving, taking risks. Someone died on the way. Upon arriving at the Bienvenu Shelter she was

malnourished, for a month locked in a house caring for the two children, unable to go outside, closed at home. She was sick and was taken care of by no one. The meeting with the Shelter transformed her life.

One last highlight that was handed as a letter:

Lisa this is my way I found to thank you.

Sometimes simple gestures impress us the most as they not only remain in our memories but also touch our hearts. I was nervous about going to the gynaecologist, afraid of discovering a disease, and you and Adilia made it easy. You even give me your perfume; I'll never forget that.

Every day I felt real support here and I sincerely thank you. You are beautiful inside and out and I admire you so much. I ask God to bless you every day and protect you always.

The results came out and I am clean, it was a relief. One part of me is happy but the other isn't as a future in Mozambique may not exist, but everything is in God's hands. When I leave, I will take you in my heart, you are a blessing from God to me, thank you so much (Sandra – From a city in Mozambique – 13.01.2021).

## 5.6 The Refugee Woman

External factors that induce displacements limit, but do not eliminate, the agency and the protagonism of its actors. With the exception, perhaps, of human trafficking cases in general, war conflicts, persecution, widespread human rights violations, climate events, domestic violence, food insecurity are external factors that have a profound impact, but do not fully determine the survival strategies of millions of people moving to other lands, as a possible strategy. Human mobility, in this perspective, becomes one of the possible strategies to overcome adverse situations (Inglês, 2017).

Applying this reflection specifically to the case of the refugee woman, such as those who are housed in the Bienvenu Shelter, as noted in the story of Grace and the other women whose stories are recorded in summary form in this volume. Whether it's fleeing

conflict or persecution in the country of origin, food insecurity and a complete lack of prospects for the future, or even having no choice as to which country to go in, hoping for refuge, the stories of life and resilience, pain and rebuilding life (Wildner, 2019), without cancelling or denying atrocities and forced trajectories, reinforce the meaning and greatness of the mission of the Bienvenu Shelter: the women who need it most, even weakened by the dramatic situations that may have passed or be going through, finding a space of life and positive and vitalizing relationships, that solidarize and nourish mind and spirit. They are able to overcome adversity, by themselves and by their people. The few narratives recorded in this volume are placed as testimonies, signaling a world of gratitude and overcoming, which words and pages could not contain or relate.

Violence, in all its manifestations, does not only concern the country of origin, but also all the mobility and immobility of the routes and in the country of arrival itself. The trajectories of migrants and search for refuge do not end with the arrival in the foreign country that reproduces the idea of international aid for those seeking shelter and protection; the arrival only changes and reconfigures the struggles, the fears, risks and solutions to the demands and needs of those who move. For those experiencing situations of vulnerability, solidarity, the information that situates and guides, the dialogue that makes communication possible is part of the gestures and signs that make a difference to the resumption of life paths or abandonment and levels of violation of dignity and even risk of life. This type of situation forged the emergence of the Bienvenu Shelter, and its performance is a witness and recognized as primordial and essential.

Paraphrasing expressions that express the feelings and attitudes of the caregivers who work at the Bienvenu Shelter and in its activities: “May God bless those who welcome, guide, listen, pray together, weep together, embrace, respect silence, offer support and gifts, feed and even laugh, who wait, help to speak, to react, to forgive, to forget, to remember, to rename... to love”.

The classification of women staying at the Bienvenu Shelter in the category of “refugees” does not exhaust the complexity of their life experiences. The woman who fled a particular country because of a conflict or some other type of violence is also the woman who has suffered violence, sometimes even worse, in the countries of



transit and arrival; who has experienced malnutrition as a result of climate events or economic crises; who seeks a possible future for herself and her family, with decent work and professional training; who longs for access to minimum health and education services for their children; who finds it difficult to enter the country of arrival like any other migrant and even like the nationals, who sometimes suffers because of language or documentation, but, still, there are challenges to be woman-mother-foreign-working; and, above all, who interprets herself as the subject of her history who, despite the experience she has passed, seeks ways to rebuild a life, a “home”, a social space of familiarity and success, for herself and for her own, always looking with hope to the future, much more than can be relied upon in the past.



# CHAPTER 6



## **Bienvenu Shelter**

**I just want to say thank you so much for helping me.  
I was a stranger and you welcomed me  
and gave me a place to sleep and ate the food.**

**I am so much grateful for welcoming me and accepting to  
help me.**

**Continue to do the good work  
as you have done for me and others.**

**May God bless you.**

**Thanks.**

*(Shaly – From Ethiopia - 15.09.2017)*

## 6

# CHALLENGES WITHIN THE ORGANISATION

Historically, the Bienvenu Shelter went through different stages of receiving refugee women, in its various roles.

The first phase, in the early 2000s, during the first years of operation, was marked by the reception of large families, women who arrived in the city in order to find their husbands in search of family reunification and many others who fled the contexts of bloody wars, seeking a safe place for themselves and their children. With the end of Apartheid, the arrival of people seeking refuge and also of immigrant flows with life projects in South Africa has intensified, by the opening of borders and the general situation on the continent, that also favoured the displacement of population contingents from several countries. Some women were successful in reuniting the family thanks to the network of contacts and support between asylum seekers and refugees, which was, and remains, very strong.

Adília de Sousa and her family were at the side of the MSCS Sisters from the first day they arrived in South Africa. She was present in the mission developed by the Bienvenu Shelter since its inception and came to assume the executive direction twice. Adília de Sousa, who was the director of the Shelter, briefly reports on the arrival of these women in Johannesburg in search of a better life and survival in that city that is traditionally known as the “city of gold”<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Expression used in allusion to the historically constructed social imaginary, which has Johannesburg as a prosperous place, capable of offering better living conditions.

[...] So at that time it was very striking because they felt disoriented in a city like this. The dream was to get to Johannesburg because it was the city of gold and the city from a perspective of a better life, but when they got here, they couldn't speak the language, couldn't speak English, couldn't even take a taxi because they couldn't tell where they were going. They wanted to go to the hospital, they wanted to say that their back hurt or their belly, [but] they couldn't even say that they had to trust the person there who had to try to understand them, it's a lot... difficult, then they were arrested at any time even with the documents in hand, it was a time that we were every week in jail, we went to pick up the women, it was very difficult the legal part (16.12.2018).

However, not infrequently, women faced great barriers in their daily life in the city, especially with regard to the domain of language, with consequences that made access to health and justice even more difficult, for example. In this context, the work of the MSCS Sisters and the Bienvenu Shelter in support of these foreign women was increasingly necessary.

A second phase occurred around 2009 and 2010, when it was perceived that the women who arrived at the Shelter had more information than before, because they had contact with people who had returned or influenced them, somehow, to trace their migration project to South Africa.

Important to realize that the social imaginary that South Africa is a country of opportunities also feeds an immigration culture and reveals a sustained process through social networks (Muanamoha, 2008, p. 203) supporting the adaptation process as well as the migratory dynamics of entry and exit from South Africa for both men and women.

At that time, there was also an increase in the number of people of other nationalities in the city, such as those of the Democratic Republic of the Congo – DRC, Burundi, and Sudan, and consequently the increase of support networks between them. According to the memory of the members of the Bienvenu Shelter Team, the intensification of these flows to Johannesburg has helped to build links between the people who arrived and, consequently, also the expansion of support and solidarity networks, what made the situation of refugee women “a little better” because they “found someone who spoke their language”.

Even at this stage, it was clear that crossing borders has become increasingly dangerous. There were reports of deaths of refugee women attempting to cross mountains or parks, such as Kruger National Park. Such risks and their tragic consequences left many children orphaned. Many women arrived at the Bienvenu Shelter in need of psychological assistance due to the traumas suffered as a result of the experiences in these crossings. It was a time of increase in the number of unaccompanied children, which challenged not only the Bienvenu Shelter, but other organizations that also worked with the subject in the region.

In its current phase, considered as “third phase”, the institution provides medium-time accommodation, education and empowerment projects for migrant and refugee women and children, as well as nutritional support, in addition to activities related to integration support, or for a possible return to their countries of origin, but the delicate situations at the human-psychological and even physical level caused by the sufferings in the course, remains present, with greater or lesser incidence.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, as of 2020, the situation of women has somehow worsened. The fact that they had to be isolated, obeying social detachment, allowed many of them to relive the traumas they still carry within themselves. The images on television with police and military taking care of order in the city, for example, triggered, in many of them, pains and feelings that caused much suffering. In response, the Shelter has increased psychological support care and actions to promote these women’s access to services of listening, guidance, and mental health care. During the Pandemic period, fewer women and children were admitted to the Shelter, but care was intensified, and attention work redoubled, as will be deepened in chapter 7.

## **6.1 Networking**

Since its foundation the Shelter guides its work from the perspective of networking. In this sense, throughout its history there have been institutions that, in a permanent and systematic way, articulated around the work of the Shelter, have contributed to the implementation of actions directed to migrant and refugee women

and children. Networking puts in perspective the holistic approach that aims to promote people in their potentialities, thus helping to overcome the situations of vulnerability arising from their migratory status or as a result of their trajectories and the mishaps of the path.

The dialogue between organisations that care for migrants and refugees is indispensable throughout the world, but it is especially so in the African context, marked by situations where armed conflicts persist and the advance of systemic poverty in many countries. “I think the situation now is critical, the number of people without regular documents is increasing and people are not fleeing away just from wars, but also from hunger”, says Federica Micoli, lawyer at the NGO Lawyers for Human Rights, a partner organization that works with women assisted at the Bienvenu Shelter.

Networking integrates a wide range of organizations, professionals, and groups, as it is a strategy that is part of the essential broad, cross-sectional, and holistic approach to care for people hosted by the Bienvenu Shelter, because alone the Shelter would not reach. On the one hand, joint action is essential to achieve the solutions that women and foster children need; and on the other hand, it is strategic, because women temporarily welcomed into the Shelter, the more they receive knowledge of people, organizations and potential opportunities and support that the city can offer when they leave, the greater the chance of success in their new endeavour, in the effort to consolidate themselves into a new project of life in autonomy and freedom.

Today I was exchanging correspondence with the Wits centre for reproductive health, they do a lot of work with HIV people, women, but not only, for example now we are trying to bring them here because our clients are one of those categories of high risk of contracting HIV, so if we have a good relationship with that Centre we can refer them there both for counselling and for medication but also we have now in the Bienvenu is an active participant to the forum and giving contributions in terms of ideas (Federica Micoli – 17.12.2018).

Many organizations participate in the life and mission of the Bienvenu Shelter. There is a wide range of interactions on which the

Shelter supports itself and through which the Bienvenu Shelter Team can count in its dedication in favour of the life and protagonism of refugee women and children.

A list of partners, donors and funders of the Bienvenu Shelter is at the end of this volume. The following are some articulations that, besides being important and fundamental for the work developed, elucidate a methodology of work quite proper of the Shelter in general, and of the Scalabrinian Sisters in particular.

A fundamental inter-organisational articulation that spanned the 20 years of this history, but that was fundamental especially in the early years of the institution, was the collaboration between the Bienvenu Shelter and the Johannesburg Police/Jeepe Police Station – “Adopt a Cop”.

This partnership was decisive for the protection of the Shelter and its professionals, especially in situations of threats by criminals, whose victims were protected and helped by the Bienvenu Shelter, for example. Similarly, this bilateral relationship was crucial because it turned into an opportunity to save many lives of women and children. When they, seeking public agencies, especially to obtain migratory documentation or in cases of being arrested or rescued from human trafficking networks, countless times the agents themselves identify the need and guide to seek the Bienvenu Shelter.

The police often bring to the Shelter women and children in extreme necessity of help and protection. In this collaboration, mutual ties of esteem and support were created in interpersonal relationships that strengthen both sides, which favour a more comprehensive and perhaps more humanized service, including at night-time; it also favours solutions of extremely complex cases, such as the management of situations related to trafficking in persons, which requires links including with embassies, Interpol, and other transnational organisations. Also, the local police usually, annually, in the week of protection of the child, which is held in June, provide training for children of the Creche on traffic guidelines, children’s rights and related issues.

On the other hand, the establishment of a propositional relationship with public sector departments is one of the challenges that the Bienvenu Shelter and its partners face. One of the difficulties



is, for example, the time taken to process the request for refuge. While legislation ensures that the request of each refugee must be processed by the government within six months, there are situations of accompanied applicants who wait for a much longer period than this. The problem is that the number of requests is very high and there is a lack of adequate structures for monitoring the processes. In this context, the work carried out at the Shelter becomes essential for assisted persons. In addition to the legal support provided by the Bienvenu Shelter, especially in partnership with the NGO Lawyers for Human Rights and other professionals, the Team is engaged to mitigate the impacts that the difficulties of processing migration regularization have on the mental health of refugees. This type of assistance is only possible through an articulated work with other institutions, especially in the face of an increasingly complex picture of migration and refuge in the South African context.

Many of the refugee women and children arrive at the Bienvenu Shelter without migratory documentation and, with the support of partnerships, the work done aims to “advocate for them to make sure they get the right documentation and the right advice, and also that the children have birth certificates in order for them to be legalized to go to school” (Federica Micoli – 17.12.2018).

It was from the perspective of networking that it became possible to prioritize the idea of mental health during work with people in vulnerable situations due to migratory trajectories and processes. This work includes the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV), Sophiatown and the NGO Lawyers for Human Rights, which actively operate so that other institutions, as well as government agencies, also look at the topic of mental health, especially when there’s a history of trauma.

By working together with the network called Psychosocial Rights Forum, a group of organizations related to the care of people in vulnerable situations in Johannesburg, in which the Bienvenu Shelter participates, is able to expand the support it can give to the people received, with projects and activities such as individual psychological, psychiatric, and legal assistance or for groups of welcomed persons.

Still within the scope of psychosocial support, the partnership of the Bienvenu Shelter with the NGO Sophiatown – Community

Psychological Services is another important articulation for the attention to the people welcomed and/or accompanied. The Sophiatown is

an organization that offers counselling services to people in emotional distress. Many of the refugee women in the shelter and their children arrive, traumatized from tense situations in their country of origin. Sophiatown has a clinic in the same neighbourhood as the Shelter and any mental health cases that may require psychiatric and psychologic services, the clinic can assist. They also offer group therapy to children and women, where they can express their feelings, their culture, backgrounds etc. (Lisa de Sousa – 17.12.2018).

The positive relationships and interactions created, maintained, and strengthened between the Bienvenu Shelter and a number of organizations that operate in the territory is a precious resource of empowerment and qualification of action in favour of and in support of families, especially refugee women and their sons and daughters.

The bilateral collaboration between the Bienvenu Shelter and the Department of Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees of the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, which takes place in different ways, has spanned the 20 years of the Shelter. It is a partnership that strengthens both parties for a common mission, the witness of God's love for people in mobility. This partnership fostered the articulation and participation of local communities, many parishes, and different actors in the city in the reception, accompaniment, support and protection of migrants and refugees. In the words of Sr. Marizete Garbin, Coordinator of Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees Department, since January 2019, the Bienvenu Shelter, through its capillary work in the lives of so many women and children, "makes happen the miracle of life, which blossoms, grows and bears fruit, building and sewing stories of hearts that pump for the yearning of the freedom of life" (Sr. Marizete Garbin – Coordinator of Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees Department – 22.12.2019).

## 6.2 Spirituality

The action of the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters is identified, in fact, by a vision of the human being from its inalienable dignity and the primacy of the human being above any other process, good or priority. This is a feature of the spirituality that animates and guides life and choices, commitment, and all action in favour of and together with refugee women and children who are welcomed and supported by the Bienvenu Shelter, also permeating the work dynamics of the organisations in which they operate and the teams that support them. And this vision permeates actions and projects, with a way of being that inspires the way of planning and executing the programs and projects through which services are taking shape and life stories are gaining strength and success.

The house offers spiritual activities, like praying... These activities are helping because all the women, when they come here, they got problems, they are stressed, they never come happy, so the spiritual activities help them to understand a bit by bit, they start being happy, start also laughing... (Juliette, from Congo RDC – 16.12.2018).

Rooted as a force that comes from the top and the deepest of their vocation, the Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters who run the Bienvenu Shelter add their knowledge and services, their dedication, and their efforts to the commitment of many people and organizations who, with them, made (and still do) this story happen. Christian spirituality, which is inspired, configured and strengthened in faith in Jesus Christ and in countless forms of unity with brothers and sisters who live the same identity, is combined with longings, visions, projects, feelings and identities of all who come to build and advance this project, expanding it more and more, to the extent of the love that is given and the needs of refugee women and children who knock at the door, and their families and many friends, neighbours, acquaintances and strangers, who join in the footsteps of this journey.

Precisely because of this same faith that identifies them, the managers of the Bienvenu Shelter and all the people who join this mission, know how to recognize, welcome, value and integrate people and values, identity traits and expressions of life and faith,

of the religions and belongings that every welcomed woman or child brings with it, with respect, affection, and openness, of minds and hearts, of physical spaces and times, in the day to day and in the structure of the property.

Mourning, feasts, and prayers always have the right of presence and manifestation, because they are part of the processes through which we become who we are and that for refugee women in a foreign land has particular value, especially in the paths marked by traumas, how migration and refuge paths can be. With humility and great responsibility, the spirituality of all people and the individuality of each one intersects, to ensure that after 20 years, the celebration is an expression of gratitude and dedication, for the shelter continues and refugee mothers and their children continue to arrive and leave.

Since 2014, every year after completion of the audit, the United Nations body that administers the United Nations voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture issues a Certificate, which every visitor sees exposed in the spaces of the Bienvenu Shelter. In fact, for almost a decade the Shelter has been serving victims of torture and is part of the United Nations-supported organizations in this specific attention, trying to mitigate and heal traumas and anonymous wounds, hidden in faces of African women. Thus, today they can be and seem citizens with dignity, thanks to the encounter with this house and the people who, through friendship or service, in the Shelter or in partner organizations, helped them to reconcile, to treat the traumas and to resume faith in life and to stand on the road towards the future.

Referring to the greatest challenges in the role of as a social worker at the Shelter, Sr. Lidia Danyluk, of the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena in Okford, expressed this:

The biggest challenge is to be humble, and really believe that I don't have the power to answer all the questions and to solve all the problems of the refugee. I am just one chain, a network work helps, and not to be arrogant and think: 'I can't solve all the problems.' Even when they cry is just to sit with them and sometimes, I feel like I am crucified with them. I cannot move, you know, because I don't have the solution for you; your problem is so big for me... So, it's to be humble and remain with the heart free in the sense that feeling guilty for the suffering of many migrants doesn't help me and doesn't help them (12.12.2018).

One of the strategies of this significant value of the performance of the Shelter is the individualized care that is reserved to each person, adult, or child.

I had the experience of people, women who were traumatized, raped, but with the grace of God they could again build their inner strength and be able to go on with their life. There are others that with... you cannot compare the suffering, but that cannot elaborate that and remain as they say... blocked, cannot follow their path. It depends on the mental structure you have and the inner strength of the person. We can give them everything we can but, if they don't have this inner strength, they're going to faint again. Some people need much more time to heal internally, when they begin to talk to others and share the suffering they had and do not cry as they cried in the beginning, this in a sign that they are strengthened (Sr. Lidia Danyluk – Social Worker – 12.12.2018).

Although the Bienvenu Shelter – and the mission as a whole – is characterized by the specific and specialized attention to refugee women and children, a profile of subjects highly exposed to risks and traumas in previous trajectories upon arrival at the Shelter, their needs are listened to and understood, and it is here that they have the capacity to decide on one's own life and on the small and large choices of one's own trajectory, to self-determination and to contribute to the success of one's own trajectory and even that of one's loved ones, are assured, promoted and widely encouraged.

### **6.3 Resilience, difficulties and opportunities**

The wonders of a narrative that celebrates the 20 years of journey, results and consolidation of a project that started small and little configured, cannot silence some nods to the struggles and obstacles encountered, normally faced, sometimes without success but always with learning.

There are difficulties that are part of the Shelter's own identity, its organisational profile, and its target audience. These are curves of the path, where sometimes slow down the step not to be unbalanced

and, at the same time, are waves, in which fall, to get up and start again or resist, to take breath and strengthen the processes that make the Bienvenu Shelter what it is: life space for many people, no matter how much, and how, this can be challenging. Faith and hope, love in giving, affection and attention given and received permanently, with the humility of knowing how to recognize what is possible and with what resources and what strategies, and what is not possible, we need to ask for help and yet a solution may be impossible, at least in the medium term.

Ongoing human trafficking cases and cases of residents with mental ill health are very challenging to both residents and staff. These cases are extremely complex and require much human resources and time dealing with. Accessing psychiatric services continues to be a challenge for migrant and refugee women even with staff accompanying them to appointments (Lisa de Sousa – C.O.O. – 05.10.2020).

And there are difficulties that are intrinsically part of the coexistence between different cultures, in different countries, with even divergent values on crucial aspects of life such as pain, grief, birth and the use of money (to remember only some of the themes that suffered tensions) misunderstandings and questionable choices, among women and also among people who integrated at different times the management team and other who built the great and praiseworthy story of the Bienvenu Shelter.

A ticket, delivered by women living in the shelter in February 2020, after a situation of stress in living together, is exemplary as to the level of reciprocal welcome and as to the quality of the educational proposal that the management of the Shelter can transmit on a daily basis:

We are writing this letter to accept our mistakes of how have acted lately. E humbly acknowledge our short comings and are willing to make amends. We know the consequences we have caused the Shelter and the house at large. We apologize for the distress we have caused.

We are willing to fix our problems despite of our indifferences and we have taken steps to forgive and resolve the burning matters.

We take full responsibilities of our actions and behaviour, we promise to change, and humbly ask for your forgiveness and a chance to prove ourselves.

We know more than ever how blessed we are to call this Shelter our home. Thank you for your love and continued support. From All mothers (Cathy – From South Africa – 16.02.2020).

The host woman or child is a sign: there has been a failure or perhaps many; there has probably been a threat, or perhaps many; there has been greater pain and suffering than her ability and resources to overcome these and other factors. It's there, it's been taken in for 3, maybe 6 months, but it's a welcome that means: "Come, you are no longer alone, we are with you, and you will react, you will overcome, you can". From the bottom of their difficulties and even their traumas, women and children at the Bienvenu Shelter are sufficiently protected and supported to put into action the baggage of their ancestors and the seeds of warriors that each brings from the soul of Mother Africa; to unleash the reaction we call resilience, the ability to proceed without surrendering and without falling down, using the elements of pain itself as leverage to resume the path and move forward normally better than before.

The weaknesses that have already been faced in these 20 years, related to the organizational profile, have been happening and being overcome with the love and determination of the Scalabrinian Missionaries who have the responsibility of managing the Shelter and with affection, the gifts, professionalism, and mercy of many people, who loving this mission, embrace them every time the challenges appear and help them to row to the other side, to follow the journey.

Financial limitations, changes in the Team, struggles experienced by the death of close people are among the biggest obstacles, but none of them was able to stop the Project, which in this time has been through many changes, always growing, fitting in the structure and the attention offered, always faithful to the mission for which it arose and for which it receives support and recognition, local, national, and international.

Especially in the early years, the financial difficulties, and the lack of resources in general, was a cause of suffering for all those concerned, who were overcome with faith and dedication, but that deserve registration at the time of stopping to look at the path taken and remember the steps taken.

The lack of resources and, more specifically, of money to cover needs was decisive, for example, in the impossibility of hiring professionals for all the necessary functions, thus having to burden those in the Shelter by accumulating functions and, safely, especially compromising management processes, because the focus and top priority have always been, and remains, the people, their well-being, the answers to their needs, their protection and their life. To this end, where the Shelter did not have what the host needed, it was the partner organisations, local and international volunteers, friends, donors, funders who helped to advance, strengthen the organisation, to support their human resources and ‘to bounce back’, starting again after each failure, of every distressing lack of resources, which sometimes even focused on the ability to respond to challenges.

The attention paid to the care of refugee women welcomed at the Bienvenu Shelter is also a mark of professionalism and strategy for sustainability, in relation to the quality of work and also to living conditions and well-being, is fundamental to the good performance of the Team that develops the programs and projects of the Shelter:

Bienvenu Shelter has and continues to grow, evolve, and develop. One of the main and key priorities of the Bienvenu Shelter is that of ensuring we have the right team in place that can follow the Charism of the Mission.

Over the last ten years, and as we saw the Organization growing further, we worked hard in ensuring that all staffs had the correct training, guidance and support provided in order to carry out their duties and most importantly that we all worked in a Professional manner. Staffs receive regular support meetings with the C.O.O./H. R and an end of year staff appraisal takes priority. Staff receive regular debriefing sessions, as a team and individual debriefings are organized when required. Team building days are held three times per year off site whereby staffs get together, reflect, and relax which is of great importance.



To ensure the effective running of the Organization, we needed to look into the structure, and it was essential that Policies and procedures for each department and for the Organization as a whole were put in place. These policies and procedures are reviewed and updated on a regular basis according to the needs of the shelter (Lisa De Sousa – C.O.O./Human Resources – 28.02.2021).

The management of the Shelter, with the support of partner organizations and professionals, has a special attention with actions aimed at caring for those who care; an effort that is always renewed, as it is always difficult to maintain systematically, due to the large workflow and the challenges and unforeseen that the Team has to solve every day. In addition to the human-spiritual accompaniment that is routine in the Shelter, there is a specific training of the Team of professionals of different profiles who work in the Bienvenu Shelter and the Training Centre, supported by a network of clinical and psychotherapeutic support.



# CHAPTER 7



**Hello, Bienvenu Shelter Management**

**I would like to thank you for welcoming me when I was homeless with my little baby – I really appreciate your support, kindness, and being so caring – your help was what I mostly needed, and you did so without doubts.**

**Thanks once again for listening to my story and allowed me to be part of your family.**

**I'm happy and forever happy to you all.**

**Even though I'm moving out 20 of January 2019 you will still be in my heart, thank you from the bottom of my heart – love you all  
Bienvenu Management – and I would also ask for a favor for my following needs if you could please help me!**

*(Laura – From Zimbabwe – 11.01.2019)*

## **ACCEPTANCE AND CARE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

On January 30, 2020, the world's population received with apprehension the statement of the World Health Organization (WHO) that the outbreak of what at the time was called the New Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) had been established as a public health emergency of international importance. At the time, there were confirmed cases in nineteen countries, but with transmission between humans detected in only five.

In South Africa the first confirmed case was that of a man returning with his family from a trip from Milan – Italy, on March 1 of that year. Confirmation of the positive test was announced by the government on 05. Two days later, another person who was on the trip also presented the same result.

On March 15, 2020, there were confirmed cases in four of the nine provinces of the country. On that date President Cyril Ramaphosa made a statement announcing the first community broadcasts in the country and declaring a national state of disaster, followed by a series of measures such as travel restrictions and the closure of schools from 18 March.

On the 23rd it was announced the Lockdown in the country, with alert level 5, maximum level from the day 27 March, when it was confirmed the first death in the country by Covid-19.

In the testimony of Social Mother Agnes Makaringe, one of the greatest difficulties faced during the pandemic was exactly the surprise and the sudden character of the spread of infection and restrictive measures to try to contain more infection among the population: “we didn’t understand what Covid was and while watching TV, we saw people becoming ill and dying which frightened us all and although some people did not really believe that Covid was a threat, we were

all afraid of Covid coming into the Shelter” (Agnes Makaringe – House Mother – 28.02.2021).

By immediately adopting all measures emanating from government authorities, the greatest difficulty came to be the fact that the team needs to stay at home, or need to miss work because they have been infected; or, because they need to be quarantined:

there were too many people to look after on my own and it was difficult to control them and their movements – not knowing what they were doing while I was busy elsewhere (e.g., cooking). [...] It is not easy to work with people for such a long and unbroken period of time. I prayed to God, asking him what to do, how to act and react. I spoke to my daughter, often, as family is very important, and she encouraged me to continue and to be strong – in faith as well as emotionally and mentally” (Agnes Makaringe – House Mother – 28.02.2021).

After a start of rapid escalation, in the months of March and April, from May 2020 the country began to experience a gradual decline of the alert state, arriving in the month of September to level 1. The difficulties continued to be challenging for the team, with other impacts and concerns imposed by the pandemic, in addition to the pace of work, such as fear of infections, concern for family members, the very isolation in the house with resident women and children and doubts about how to deal with needs and emergencies, among others.

However, by December 2020, South Africa would be facing a second wave of infections and would begin the year 2021 with rising alert levels, with high numbers of infections and deaths.

According to data available on the site<sup>5</sup>, South Africa recorded 1,057,161 cases in COVID-19 until 31 December 2020, with 28,921 deaths in the same period, registering an upward trend in active cases, having reached a maximum number of 239,799 active cases as of 11 January 2021; on the following 19 January South Africa reached the highest daily death toll for Covid-19 with 839 dead.

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<sup>5</sup> Available information at: <<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/south-africa/>>. Accessed 17.03.2021.

## **7.1 The Bienvenu Shelter during the covid-19 pandemic**

In the final stretch to reach the 20 years of the Bienvenu Shelter, the pandemic represented many challenges for the institution, for residents and for all those actively involved participating in the life of the Shelter: staff, management, volunteers, donors and community around. As of March 2020, with the restrictive measures issued by national and local authorities, the Shelter immediately sought to adapt to the established rules, taking the utmost care for the lives of all persons involved, especially residents and the Team.

In lockdown periods at levels 4 and 5, the board and staff were not allowed to be present in the building, but the Housemother, Agnes Makaringe, who remained in the house full-time, on duty and as a reference for residents, made the Bienvenu Shelter the home she never leaves. She was present with the women and children, taking care more directly of the needs of the sheltered people, without being absent and always in communication and articulation with the direction of the Shelter.

I tried to keep the residents busy wherever possible with various household tasks and packing vegetables to be given out to Outreach Program.

Residents wanted to go out and look for work so I had to explain to them – more than once – why they could not do so and encouraged them to listen carefully to the Presidents speeches.

It was not easy to check on everyone, at all times, especially those who wished to visit the Friends.

Bienvenu Shelter is my home and I work from my heart. The Management and staff encourage and assist me, and I like working with them all... even with the Residents, although it can be challenging at times (Agnes Makaringe – 28.02.2021).

With much dialogue, the management of the Shelter was establishing rules and adapting spaces and procedures, including formally, for the entire workflow of the Bienvenu Shelter, as well as the Mother Assunta Training Centre. New procedures were created, and an Operational Restructuring was established; a document containing the policy to deal with COVID-19 at the Bienvenu Shelter

was promulgated. At no time were the activities totally paralyzed because the Shelter never closed. It had to be adequate, but despite the difficulties that the moment multiplied, the needs of women and children who could be newly received, or those who were still receiving, speaks louder.

We offered shelter at the Bienvenu Shelter to women so that they have the freedom to be themselves; and from one moment to the next, with the pandemic, they were prisoners inside the Shelter. The human contact, the lack of contact, the lack of being closer... I think all this was a learning experience, yes, but it was very hard, because to them, when they arrive at the Shelter, we teach, we do everything possible to share [everything], to be together, to accept that sometimes they come from the same country, but from different culture, from different tribe and from one moment to the next we have to ask: stay away from each other, do not approach, anyway... (Adília Pestana de Sousa, SLM – 02.02.2021).

Even during restriction periods at level 4 or 5, Management maintained regular telephone contacts with residents. Among the most urgent needs was to maintain a positive attitude and animated spirits, faced with the difficult situation of being in strict quarantine, locked in the same building, many people of different nationalities, customs and cultural matrices.

With the Teams working from home, the challenges in the house increased even more, especially because the coexistence between people of different nationalities and cultures, besides being usually demanding and challenging, was intensified by the impossibility of leaving the shelter. Mental health worsened, many had emotional crises and it was necessary to seek help to manage these situations. Because the cause of cluster restrictions some activities such as counselling were not possible. It was done online, through zoom, individual or group, but the results were not the same.

We were very, very strict in obeying government restrictions to protect residents and we had no case of COVID-19 in 2020 among women and their children. We only had infected people

among the members of the management and staff of the Shelter. We restructured the house to have reserved space in case of need. The new ones in the house were for 14 days in isolation, without contact with other residents (Sr. Marivane Chiesa – 30.01.2021).

Several residents who received mental health care showed signs of worsening of their psychological conditions during the lockdown period. A factor of special tension were many soldiers who came to occupy the streets, which aroused traumatic associations in many people in post-trauma situations. The Shelter staff needed to ensure that support was provided in this regard. The psychosocial support obviously could not take place physically, so it was carried out through Zoom, which, in the perception of the professionals of the Shelter was not as effective as the one-to-one face sessions, but it was what was possible to do, given the restrictions.

In a report presented on 22 February 2021 by Lisa de Sousa, C.O.O of the Bienvenu Shelter, at the UN Dialogue Session to the Board members in Geneva on the impact of the pandemic on survivors of torture, it is possible to have an overview of what was the performance of the Bienvenu Shelter during the 10 months of pandemic, in 2020:

When Government declared lock down in March 2020, movement was clamped down and no daily activities could take place. Businesses closed, employment for many was terminated and hopes and dreams of self-sustainability stopped.

Mothers and their children residing at the Shelter were not able to go out under Government directives although indoor activities were in place, boredom did begin to set in and conflicts amongst residents were unavoidable.

Our mothers who underwent extreme torture, again felt imprisoned and their trauma symptoms increased. Memories of their trauma was also revisited by the influx of policing and armed soldiers patrolling. Women often would revisit their torture regularly through nightmares. This was also worsened by HA offices being closed and no renewal of documents could be sought.

For residents of the Shelter who have been tortured and who need long-term mental health, psychosocial support has become



impossible. Many were threatened with eviction as they could no longer pay rents due them not being able to sell their skills learned through livelihood programs. Many went hungry as they were unable too also access the shelter for support as they were fearful of being on the streets (Lisa de Sousa – Report presented on the Online Dialogue 53<sup>rd</sup> Policy Session – Review of the funds COVID-19 Response Strategy, by invitation of the Humanitarian Funds Torture and Contemporary Forms of Slavery – Human Rights Council and Treaties Division – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights –22.02.2021).

When the alert level on restrictions to contain the spread of COVID-19 virus fell from level four to level three, and a certain degree of movement became possible, even if still restricted, the coordinators went back in person to the Shelter, in a regime still cautious, going back and forth a few times a week, as happened, for example, between May and June 2020. For employees whose service allowed the dynamics of work at home were maintained. During the lockdown periods, after the first weeks of emergency, the Bienvenu Shelter requested and obtained a government authorization that allowed the Management and some professionals, in case of justified need, a certain movement in favor of the people served by the Shelter, what helped in the service and also in the emotional management for all involved in the programs of the Bienvenu Shelter and the Training Center.

In accordance with the rules issued by the authorities of the country, it was necessary to reduce the number of residents, receiving a smaller number, from forty-five to thirty-five, due to the mandatory social distance and the structure of the rooms, since many dwellings are shared and it was necessary to reserve space for 14 days isolation for new residents, in addition to the room for possible cases of infection, which was not necessary to use, as emphasizes Lisa de Sousa: “We were blessed, since we had no resident, mother or child, who contracted the virus, and I believe the reason is because we were strict with the protocols” (01.02.2021).

When, as of September 2020, the emergency level dropped from level three to level two, it was possible to begin to resume the work of the Team at the Shelter, gradually. There were new trainings for employees regarding restrictions and alert levels, including

procedures in case of symptoms. At first the residents were in lockdown, but as the alert levels were allowing mobility, they started to leave the shelter. When residents left and returned, they adopted the necessary care and procedures to avoid putting other residents at risk.

With the pandemic it was no longer possible to admit community children in the Baby Room, which started serving only children who lived in the shelter. New ways of teaching children were also adopted, obeying the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. With regard to the Crèche for children 3-6 years, it was decided to close it temporarily, since the restrictions for the return of children proved very challenging and costly and there was not enough room to meet the government's determinations in terms of distancing.

The admissions of new residents were suspended at first, and when it was possible to resume, the new admissions needed to do a Covid test, whenever possible, beyond the period of isolation, before they could be integrated into the house with the other mothers.

## **7.2 The social impacts of the pandemic in and around the Shelter**

Many were the impacts of the pandemic in the Shelter, in its professionals, its way of working and, especially, in the people served within and around the Shelter. The biggest impact, decidedly, was the suffering caused to people who had nothing to eat, who lost jobs, income and even housing, due to the impossibility of paying rent. The desperation of the people around the Shelter, and their hope of being able to rely on the Bienvenu Shelter to survive, was overwhelming and determined the search for help from donors, as well as the establishment of efficiency and effective collaborative networks to respond to the challenges that the population, especially migrants and refugees, was going through.

The report of the Director of the Bienvenu Shelter is revealing:

For me the most important point regarding our response to the challenges of the Pandemic was the collaboration we made together, which was with the Department of Pastoral Care for

Refugees and Migrants of the Archdiocese of Johannesburg and the Bienvenu Shelter. This collaboration took place when the Pandemic started, it was March 2020, and at the end of March everything suddenly closed... And now, what are we going to do? And people knocking at the door asking for help. The people mean the women, the former residents mostly, because they were inside the house, they couldn't walk in the street, the police wouldn't let them, they couldn't work, and at the end of the month, how to pay the rent? The kids couldn't go to school either. They were starting to have a lot of problems, and we were worried about them because we knew they didn't have any food. It was there that we met, Adília and I by the Bienvenu Shelter; Sr. Marizete Garbin and Fr. Jean-Marie Did'Ho Kuzituka by the Department of Pastoral Care for Refugees of the Archdiocese. We sat down and said: Here we're going to have to help each other. We're not going to make it alone. So, what were we doing? We planned of how to work collaboratively in fundraising and implementation during the emergency period. It was there that we began to contact friends and donors, presenting the situation of migrants and refugees around us and request financial or material support. And that's when we had a very great strength and had a fantastic response... the generous hands began to multiply. We have managed to mobilize a lot of financial and material resources in a short time, only for aid in the Outreach Program. And the first project that we implemented together was in May 2020, with resources coming from CAF SA (Charities Aid Foundation Southern Africa). Then together, Sr. Marizete and her team and we with our team worked hand in hand. And that's how we're still working together on the Outreach Program (Sr. Marivane Chiesa – 27.02.2021).

The partnership between the Bienvenu Shelter and the Department for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Refugees of the Archdiocese of Johannesburg during the Pandemic has expanded and consolidated a collaboration that dates back to the years of the foundation of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Service for migrants and refugees. In fact, according to Sr. Marizete Garbin – Coordinator of the Pastoral Department, the reciprocal support between the two organizations has enhanced the performance of Pastoral with the possibility of more effective responses to the challenges of dozens of migrant and refugee women and, at the same time, strengthened

the Bienvenu Shelter, through organisational support, which includes donors and collaboration with other local church bodies. “The Shelter was born as a need identified by the pastoral service to refugees/women of the Archdiocese: Now we share what we can, what we have” (Sr. Marivane Chiesa – 22.02.2021).

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have 30 women, per course, that the Pastoral for Migrants and Refugees sends to participate in each of the 4 vocational courses offered by the Mother Assunta Training Centre: Sewing, Baking, Beauty and Hairdressing. The Pastoral Department has vacancies reserved for refugee women assisted by the direct service. The Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees contributes to the cost of the courses, thus also supporting the Bienvenu Shelter. In the Training Centre the teachers are very qualified, and the students leave the courses very well-prepared, achieving employment with greater probability. Women assisted by the Pastoral, when they do not know the local language, first learn English and after they know the language, can be routed to the courses. And women who, eventually, find themselves in situations of high vulnerability can be routed by the Pastoral to be welcomed at the Bienvenu Shelter (Sr. Marizete Garbin – 22.02.2021).

It was important for the team of the Shelter to realize that the crisis in Covid affects the souls of the people also served by the limitations imposed on ritual and cultural aspects. In many cultural matrices of the African continent, the moment of mourning implies rituals in which people close to the family come together, share the same space, talk, share feelings. Thus, in the pandemic, with the impossibility of being with family members to experience the mourning for the death of relatives and friends, another layer weighed on people, and more difficult was life.

Mourning is traditionally celebrated together. They talk about what happened, they share, they bring some donation, they support each other, you know... They are very supportive among themselves. When it is about death they are really together! But during that Covid, there is no time! No time and way to be together! And this is very hard (Sr. Marivane – 21.02.2021).

Despite the specific difficulties of continuity of the services and programs of the Shelter, with the Pandemic some new services and profiles of users were emerging and demanding adequate responses from the Shelter's Management and its Team, among them the victims of domestic violence, discrimination against migrants and refugees in local society, especially accessing health services, and the increase in cases of trafficking in persons.

The Bienvenu Shelter, designed for migrants and newly arrived refugees, set up on the basis of the particularities in terms of the services offered to this population specifically during the Pandemic, needed to make the profile of people served partially more flexible, considering the extreme need for care for South African women, victims of domestic violence, the lack of places in the centers for this profile of users and for the protection of life, which always emerges in the first place. Working with such different types of publics in the shelter requires great care and has not lacked attention and monitoring of each of the cases attended. In the evaluation of Sr. Marivane, the large number of South African women who began to turn to the Bienvenu Shelter in times of pandemic is also due to the fact that the national structures for this support are full, unable to meet the demand, especially with the increase of cases that the lockdown generated. Even so, the Shelter, in addition to welcoming some women, routed others so that they were welcomed in Shelters of the network of articulation of services of which it is part.

One of the most painful social impacts of the pandemic on the public served by the Bienvenu Shelter was in relation to access to health. Migrant and refugee women experienced more difficulty than before when access was already difficult. The Bienvenu Shelter team noted a worrying backlog of cases in which healthcare facilities turned down people with asylum or refuge documentation for no other reason than xenophobia against that population, including, there were cases of health services that charged these women for consultations and medicines and deliveries, even though the services are free in public hospitals.

Finally, the Shelter team also identified an increase in human trafficking cases, possibly related to the pandemic's impact on the local economy. With the dynamics and complexity of the situation during the Covid pandemic, the Shelter Team recorded at the same

time an increase in the complexity and bureaucratization of cases involving victims of human trafficking, making the process more difficult and painful with statements, police reports, appointments, interviews. All this demands great effort in time and energy on the part of the professionals and the direction of the Shelter.

### **7.3 The Outreach Program**

During the first months of the pandemic, throughout 2020, much of the work of the Shelter was dedicated to the community, especially in supporting former residents, who were suffering greatly from not being able to work, due to lockdown, and could not sustain themselves.

As a student from Baking, it has been very tough for me, as before the COVID, I was able to make scones and fat cakes to sell every day. This money gave me enough to pay rent and feed myself and 3 children. When we hit lock down, I was crying as now how can I survive. When I received my food parcel, it was such a happy day for me. My prayers had been answered. I decided that with the items of flour and sugar, I would be able to use them to bake again and then sell. This gave me hope as I could then provide, with my small money, food for my children. Thank you! (Elizabeth – From Zimbabwe – 16.09.220).

Even those who had graduated from the programs offered by the Training Centre could not apply their skills to put food on their tables, which represented another great challenge. Many families were threatened with eviction for not being able to pay the rent and daily survival already represented a struggle for most former residents, many of them long-term follow-up patients in mental health, survivors of trauma and/or torture.

During the pandemic we did great work through the Outreach Program. This Outreach was actually an experience for life. There were people who, because of the pandemic, could not work, did not have a salary, did not even have money to buy the basics to eat and when they came to receive the basket of

food they knelt down, they prayed, they gave us blessings, they... tears fell down their faces, others sang, others were just thrilled, it was actually a difficult experience [...] as for me was to learn once more the need of the other, because each one went through different needs (Adília Pestana de Sousa, SLM – 02.02.2021). Since coming to South Africa, I have really struggled to survive. Having 6 children isn't easy and now my eldest is about to give birth. During lock down I wasn't even able to sell clothes which were my means of feeding my family. God was looking down on me that day and answered my prayers. With no bread left in the house, all my children would go hungry. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for saving me. I could buy pap and sauce and we could all go to bed happy and blessed (Rose – From Congo DRC).

Many new donors appeared in the moment of need, which moved the team at the Bienvenu Shelter, as well as the donations that the Shelter received from its traditional donors. Faced with the urgency caused by the pandemic, the Shelter was able to help with food parcels, sanitizers and toiletries, with help to pay rent, with food and clothing vouchers, among other items.

In the first months of emergency, everyone was ready to help, it was something new, unlike anything they knew. It was not possible to know how long the situation would last, and many short-term projects to help those who needed help to survive were funded and executed, all lasting three, four months. The implementation of such projects, along with local fundraising campaigns, especially food campaigns by the Portuguese community in Johannesburg, has helped more than 18,000 people who have received donations, reaching more than 72,000 indirect beneficiaries. Sr. Marivane describes the experience:

We were blessed by new donors, very useful aids, as the demands and needs of people continued to grow. We had to provide for the basic needs, think about the shelter, women and children living there, and also about the people in the local community who counted on us. With the passage of time, emotional stress was increased by the permanence of the pandemic situation, of social isolation... and now, after a year, many local organizations have reduced aid, others have stopped supporting. The situation for

the population only worsened and social support was decreasing, including the possibilities of psychological and psychiatric support through the public health system (15.01.20201).

The Bienvenu Shelter and the Pastoral Care for Refugees of the Archdiocese know the population with whom they work in the different activities and initiatives and have joined forces to obtain resources and finance actions to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and provide emergency aid to fighting hunger. This need was fundamental for migrants and refugees, who rarely have resources from local public policies. When there was the first lockdown, still in March 2020, government determinations required everything to be closed, for 15 days. For two weeks: “the people gave the alarm, asking for and begging for help. After lockdown what emerged was a lack of food because many lost their jobs, and due to xenophobia, the first to lose jobs were refugees” (Sr. Marizete Garbin – 13.02.2021).

Initially, through the articulations of the Pastoral for Migrants and Refugees, it was possible to count on the entrepreneurs of agricultural production, especially Portuguese, to whom later international and local organizations joined, who supported with resources to respond to other challenges. Thirteen trucks of vegetables were received, which were distributed to the families of the community around the Bienvenu Shelter and to vulnerable people, including migrants and refugees, from 17 parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Johannesburg. Such donations reached a total of 8,966 **assisted families, reaching** 37,128 indirect beneficiaries. All donations were registered with name, contact, signature, and number of people living with whom the donation was received. Past the peak of lockdown, as witness Sr. Marizete: “we resume English courses, literacy and training courses, to give them the tools they needed for their independence” (13.02.2021).

In addition to the distribution of vegetables, other types of assisted needs were: material needs, food, food vouchers, food parcels; assistance with rent/accommodation; Skills Training Assistance – when the levels of restriction allowed; Education support for children – uniform assistance (clothing vouchers) and transport; Sanitisers/toiletries; Medical assistance and help in accessing medical services; Mental Health and Psychosocial support



– emotional support, counselling, therapy, psychiatric treatment. All this coverage in the assistance was only possible thanks to the collaboration of a wide network of organizations and people, who supported and commiserated it, mobilizing resources and helping in the development of actions. Migrant communities were also involved in solidarity actions, especially the communities of Congo, Burundi, Somalia, Mozambique and Malawi.

I was praying, praying every day for a miracle, just for me to feed my 6 children. They were going to bed hungry and all I could do was give them hot water with sugar. This virus has taken everything away from me and my family. When I received the phone call to come and collect vouchers, my prayers were answered. I went straight to the shop and was able to get the food I needed. That evening I knew that as a family we could all eat together again as we were Blessed. My children would not go to bed hungry which made me feel proud as a mother (Judite – From Angola).

The total number of people personally assisted with emergency assistance projects between March and December 2020 was 18,008, and through these people were reached 72,974 Indirect beneficiaries, according to archives of the Pastoral.

Sending regular reports to the Archbishop of the Archdiocese and to the Apostolic Nuncio on the situation and on what the partnership between the Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees and the Bienvenu Shelter has achieved, favored wide knowledge and recognition of the work in favor of people in serious need for their survival. They were Scalabrinian Missionary Sisters and mobilized collaborators, representing, and at the same time sensitizing, the local church for the cause of human mobility, especially its actors who are going through situations of vulnerability.

This had a great impact for the work of collaboration, mutual help and presence in communities, in parishes, with migrant groups. It was possible to “reach out to those who needed it most, with a very concrete response bringing food, among other things, in addition to the presence of faith with participation in the celebration with migrants, some help for them at a time when they needed it most” (Sr. Marivane Chiesa – 22.02.2021).

**Table 7.1** – Number of donations and recipients of vouchers and items of basic needs

<b>Distributed items</b>	<b>Beneficiaries</b>	<b>Supported by</b>
Food Parcels	2.438 people assisted	Chubby Chums; Woolworths; Parishes of Our Lady of Lourdes – Rivonia; Our Lady of Fatima Parish – Benoni; Burundian Community; Portuguese Community; Comboni Missionaries; Dominican Sisters of Oakford; Magdalene & Friends; Holy Family Sisters; Sr. Justina Priess & Friends
Food Vouchers	2.350 people assisted	CAF SA; Caritas SA; Misesan Cara; Weltkirche; FinMark Trust and UNVFVT; Misereor
Clothing Vouchers	1.166 people assisted	Caritas SA, UNVFVT and Weltkirche
Sanitizers & hygiene kits	2.690 people assisted	Caritas SA; CRS; UNVFVT; UNHCR; Misereor; Weltkirche & Misesan Cara
Rent support	40 mothers received assistance (some of the mothers received rent up to 3 months period, totalling 68 months assistance)	Heutink Family; Holy Family Sisters
Small business support	12 mothers	Magdalene & Friends

**Fonte:** Elaboration with data from the accountability reports of emergency projects to support the population in the pandemic of the Department of Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees and the Bienvenu Shelter.

## **7.4 The impact the pandemic had on the staff team at the Shelter**

On the part of the Team, the specific situation of a pandemic with unpredictable evolution was an important aspect.

The Pandemic evolved day after day, and it was not possible to program anything, because from one moment to another the level of restriction could go from 3 to 4 or to 5 and everything would have to close again. Something that no one could control and so we had to adapt. And our focus on keeping people safe was maintained, always (Lisa de Sousa – 16.02.2021).

The management of the Bienvenu Shelter, as well as its employees and volunteers, always work with love and commitment to offer dignified and humane conditions to refugee women and their children. But their work dynamic was also impacted by the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 and by the desperation of the people around the Shelter, who needed help, which at times caused concerns.

During the days of lockdown, we had the mommies calling, saying that they were closed at home, that they had no food to give to their children, that they didn't know what they were going to do, because each of them stopped selling at the informal market on the roads, since they couldn't do it anymore, the children could not go to school or to the Creche. This made life difficult for children, for mothers and for us, because we too had our hands tied and could not help them. That was a really big challenge, to think that our work was starting to change, but we had to keep going, and feel that love, that love of work, that desire to go out there and help... then the distribution of food... many of them had not even how to pay the rent at the end of the month, had to leave the houses. Trying to help in these things was... I think it was a big challenge and we did it, we did it. And women, always with that face of... tomorrow will be better! But tomorrow was coming, and it was still the same and we don't know until when this pandemic... I think it was a challenge not only for the Bienvenu Shelter, but for everyone, right! (Adília Pestana de Sousa, SLM – 17.01.2021).

Great challenges were also imposed because of social isolation during the pandemic period. The notion of altered time is a relevant aspect in this scenario, especially in periods of intense lockdown, which locks people in their homes, confined in a bubble, stunned by the news and uncertainties. “I think one of the strong things that I experienced in the pandemic was the fear that I felt that I had never felt before, was the fear that some of the mommies might get sick or lose the mother and have to keep their kids with us, or vice versa. I think that was the part that most scared me” (Adília Pestana de Sousa – 22.02.2021).

Another difficulty highlighted concerns precisely the need to work amid the uncertainty that pandemic time generates, making planning impossible and requiring the forced adjustment of work dynamics to understand that it is necessary to workday by day, that you’re not in control and things can suddenly change. Therefore, in a global pandemic like this there is no control and planning possible. Lisa, C.O.O. of the Bienvenu Shelter, makes considerations about herself and the team:

I think last year (2020), we were able to cope better with the situation. We had hoped that the situation would last only a short period of time. And even if we couldn’t plan, we did what we could.

[...] This year (2021), things appear more difficult because we no longer have emergency support, and everyone is somewhat more stressed. We are at a high point in the numbers of contagion in the country, people are now dealing with dying relatives. This is too heavy. Reality is really hitting us (Lisa de Sousa – 07.01.2021).

Finally, another concern for the management of the Shelter is in relation to the financing of its Programs. The needs of the public remain great, especially in the case of families who are no longer residents of the Bienvenu Shelter, but who need support to maintain a roof over their head, health care and childcare, among many other challenges. Another emerging need is the support with financial resources for projects that go beyond emergency actions, and that the forecast is that they will intensify in the pandemic, to address the challenges that women residents and former residents need to manage in their journey and that of their loved ones.

In July 2020, when the Team was beginning to situate itself in the sea of challenges that the pandemic was presenting, a text was prepared to put on the Bienvenu Shelter website, in which was recorded the situation of the moment and the hope that tried to look forward. Next, the full text, as a testimony of resistance and resilience:

### **Where love and solidarity speak louder than the Pandemic**

Bienvenu Shelter, a sanctuary to Migrants and Displaced Women and their children, a safe and secure environment in which to heal and restart lives. During these last few months, the challenges of COVID-19, with the Global crisis and Government Directives to lock down, we had, to say the least, extreme concerns for the sustainability of the Mission. Once again Bienvenu Shelter was challenged with the large amount of people needing assistance, all of them knowing how much we really care for those in desperate need.

With prayers, hope and the love and support of dear donors and friends, these concerns were soon lifted, and we have been so blessed by so many giving essential donations during these months to enable us to continue and remain safe in serving our people.

We have also had so many new donors contacting us directly, asking how they can help the mothers and children, getting information about our services from friends, Facebook, and our website.

We have truly been overwhelmed by the generosity of others and with this, we have also been able to serve not just our mothers and children but the surrounding community, providing them with food parcels, food vouchers, vegetables on a regular basis, blankets, warm clothing, and sanitary packs.

In partnership with Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees. Archdiocese of Johannesburg, over these last months, we have provided food parcels to the neediest in our local community, largely comprising of ex-residents and our crèche children.

We are very grateful to serve the most vulnerable mothers and their children with love and the dignity they so deserve.

We cannot predict what the coming months have in store for us all and we need to prepare for a new and different type of normal, which too will bring its own challenges – spiritually, emotionally,

logistical, and financial, to name but a few, but with the love donors have shown over these months, we are United together and remain positive in serving the most vulnerable in great need.

We thank each and every one of you and pray for you and your families. To you and those with you every blessing! (Words published on Bienvenu Shelter Website – July 2020)

Once again, the words from the Housemother is eloquent about how the Team lived and served in the Bienvenu Shelter in the first long year of the pandemic:

I wish to thank, especially, Sr. Marivane, who was at the Shelter on most days which was a Blessing to me, and Lisa, our C.O.O., who kept in daily contact via telephone calls and WhatsApp messages and Adilia, the Project Manager who called me and assisted with various issues wherever she was able to.

Also, during lock-down, thanks to Bienvenu Shelter who continued supplying food to ex-residents and those in the local community (Agnes Makaringe – 28.02.2021).

## **7.5 The Mother Assunta Training Centre during the pandemic**

Compared to the work carried out at the Bienvenu Shelter, the impacts of the pandemic on the dynamics of the Mother Assunta Training Centre were perhaps less complicated to assimilate. This fact is partly due to the public served by the Training Centre, which is of women in the community, which makes it easier to orient about the restrictions, social distancing and other rules that are a requirement under Government Directives.

The dynamics of the rules of coexistence are very similar to that of a school, which allowed the program to go well, even in times of the pandemic, following strictly the health restrictions and guidelines of the local authorities and the good practices that experience and science have been teaching over the months living with the pandemic.

The Training Center only closed its doors during the periods when Lockdown was established, at levels 4 and 5, which were

short extended periods. It was possible to follow the courses, despite COVID-19, strictly adapting to the guidelines established, reducing the number of enrollments by half, observing the social distance, increasing the intervals between classes, adopting the use of alcohol gel and taking care with contact and physical proximity, reinforcing the practice of washing hands, checking the symptoms and, in case of need, making the referrals to clinics for care<sup>6</sup>.

When the June 2020 Lockdown took place, 98 students were attending courses, which were immediately resumed, when the restrictions allowed. The difficulty is that by finishing the courses, they still cannot be sure of getting a job, even though they are able to seek a job placement or undertake from the skills and knowledge they have acquired.

When I left Bienvenu Shelter, I was happy that I had learned skills during my stay. I graduated from Training and was doing so well selling scones early morning to people going to work. The money from this helped me and my 2 children survive. During these months, it has been so hard as I didn't have any money. Both my children are sick, and they need to eat to take medicine. We were saved by the family of Bienvenu when we came to collect the vouchers to get food. My children can now have strength to eat nicely and take their medicine (Katharine – from Zimbabwe).

As a conclusion to these pages that tried to collect some of what was the experience of the COVID-19 Pandemic period in 2020, and in part of 2021, for those involved, who give life to the Bienvenu Shelter and for the people who count on the Shelter in their journey, remains the testimony of gratitude and recognition recorded by Lisa de Sousa – C.O.O of the Shelter:

We have done that, and we are very, very grateful to all our donors and I think that last year [2020] our Donors became like our family, like real family. They looked at me too, I'm here at work and they watch over me, I'm a human being, I have

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<sup>6</sup> Until the eve of the publication of this book, many classes of migrant mothers and refugees continue to qualify themselves.

feelings... this gave us more motivation and encouragement, you know, for us to carry on, you know... I received phone calls or even messages on the phone: Lisa, are you ok? Is everything ok in the Shelter? Are residents fine? I just want to wish you a beautiful day, you know... This is really important, this really, really matters... Knowing we all are in it together, it helps. Beautiful things happen! (22.02.2021).

And about how she lived in this period, in the direction and service of the Shelter and its Mission, the Sister and Director of the Shelter, Marivane Chiesa, underlines the

concern always present with women and children living in the Shelter, with staff... so that everyone was fine. The day I got the message from one of the staff saying, "I'm sorry I did the Covid test, and the result came back positive" then began the distress and feeling that the pandemic was actually getting closer to us. But God protected us and sustained us on that path.

We received human support from the Donors, emails and phone calls saying: Keep safe! Take care of yourself! Continue to be strong! Received lots of... united in prayer. Gratitude on the part of the beneficiaries, expressed through so many gestures, the work assumed by the Team... everything was force! God's Providence really protected and guided us all throughout this covid-19 pandemic. Gratitude for the witness of life given, through the welcome, service, tireless work of so many who continue to build the Scalabrinian mission with migrants and refugees. For all we have received from the Lord God, our many thanks (12.02.2021).

Our sincere gratitude to All  
for the unwavering support  
during these difficult times.

May the Lord, Giver of all good things, shower  
rich blessings and wellbeing on All.

Thank you!

*Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees Team*  
*Bienvenu Shelter Team*



***Dear Director and Staff of the Bienvenu Shelter***

*I am writing this letter on behalf of me and my family, to thank you for all the help we have been receiving for the past 12 (twelve) years. From the year of 2008.*

*We came to South Africa homeless and hungry but received a warm welcome from you. Thank you, Bienvenu Shelter, for the 6 months accommodation we received in (year) 2000. Since then, you're helping, and outreaching hand has not ceased in supporting my family in our darkest days. We are very grateful that even when we left your shelter you still continued to help us with clothing, food parcels and vouchers till these present days.*

*We thank you for your hard work and the love and care you have always shown upon our family. Thank you for always remembering us for every little you have.*

*For all the kindness, love, patience, faith in our family; generosity, humility, hard work, support, accommodation, and advice; we say thank you and may God bless you and keep you, may the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious to you; may he lift his countenance upon you all and give you peace. We pray for more strength to your elbow.*

*To all the staff, associates, teachers, etc.... your caring heart may continue to help those out there who are in greater need just as you have helped us.*

*May God's protective hand be upon you till your last days and may he grant you long life. We pray that God's unending love and peace continue to dwell within your households. May God be the centre of your lives and all you do. I and my family will always be grateful and keep you in our prayers.*

*Yours truly.*

*(Ester – From Congo RDC – 17.07.2020)*

## FINAL REMARKS

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### HOPE FOR A POSITIVE FUTURE

The stories of solidarity and overcoming merge life trajectories of the MSCS Sisters, of a multitude of collaborators and volunteers, and of refugee and South African women and children who were welcomed and who, in the process of overcoming the vulnerabilities they faced, were building together with the Bienvenu Shelter a story of their lives and their future. There are about 3,600 people, among women and children, that the organisation has directly welcomed throughout its 20 years of existence.

The trajectory of the Bienvenu Shelter is a history, above all, the agency capacity of these refugee women who, when they are welcomed, flourish and then embrace the cause of the Shelter, reaching the power to trigger processes of transformation in their lives and in their families. Many of them return to the Shelter, donating themselves and contributing so that others can be welcomed, protected, empowered, and supported in their new trajectories, in which they will rebuild their lives and relaunch their dreams and projects

The realization of the mission of the Bienvenu Shelter, which aims at a comprehensive service, on the one hand offers and seeks to meet the priority needs, sometimes basic needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, medicine, documentation, among others, and, on the other hand, takes care of the psycho-emotional restoration, training and economic-professional autonomy, education of children and so on.

Due to the wide range of aspects and dimensions of the human being that welcome and care comprise, there is a much larger process, which is the human-spiritual integration of the human being and, at

the same time, intercultural integration in local society in general, and sometimes also in the ecclesial context. In these articulations there is a broad network of civil and governmental institutions, as well as solidarity between the local community and migrant and refugee women, and vice versa; but also, between migrant and refugee families themselves, and from them with the South-Africans who also experience the same vulnerability or who have experienced similar situations.

To all this dynamism of life, it should be noted that in the broad network of volunteers and donors of goods and services are included generations of migrants/refugees already established for many years in South Africa and who have succeeded over these years a favourable condition for building bridges of solidarity today – with the support and articulation of the Bienvenu Shelter – for recent migrants/refugees who are in a vulnerable condition.

After 20 years of hard work in structuring the entity, buildings, including the organization of material resources and spaces, the look of gratitude is mixed with the look of the heart that defines priorities. Looking forward, what inspires and summons us is the Scalabrinian Charism, which is, at the same time, a call, and a mandate by which we begin this work, by which we give life and in which we nourish ourselves to continue loving, serving, and advancing without fear throughout this journey.

The celebration of 20 years takes place at a time of convergence of efforts to advance in the capacity of financial sustainability. As an expressive step, already in 2021 is being organized a Charity Shop, which starts small, but is born loaded with dreams and with the forecast of expansion as the possibilities and results allow. The activity of organizing, preparing and selling used clothes and other items also involves the women themselves welcomed into the house, as one of the positive activities, of care and healing. At the same time, the Charity Shop aims to extend the reach of the actions of the Training Center and the optimization of its results.

In the words of Sr. Marivane Chiesa, Director who is in charge of the organisation at the turn of 20, there is a confident look both on the trajectory so far and for the future:

I think in these 20 years, we've come this far with the grace of God and the help of so many generous people. The project has grown a lot, it is at a beautiful level, recognized at the level of the municipality, at the level of the partner organizations, at the level of the city as well, it has reached a level that what we wanted is already very good. Now is to maintain, care, take care of infrastructure, take care of maintenance. Take care of the training, always more for the question of qualifying, help to qualify the employees, attend well to the women who arrive at the shelter, at the Training Centre, the students... I think this is our differential! (Sr. Marivane Chiesa – 01.02.2021).



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## PARTNERS, DONORS AND SUPPORTERS DURING THESE 20 YEARS

The Bienvenu Shelter works with the collaboration of many organizations, local, regional, and international. Many of these organizations are from the ecclesial milieu, especially parishes, but also schools of different inspirations support by articulations, services and also donations: **Partners & Donors: Catholic Parishes, especially:** Cathedral Christ The King – Johannesburg; Our Lady of Lourdes – Rivonia; St. Therese – Alberton; St. Patrick – La Rochelle; Holy Angels – Bez Valley; St Therese – Rosebank; St. Dominique – Welkom, Free State **and Schools:** St Augustine of Canterbury, St. Helens, UK; St. Dominicks School; Marist Brothers School, Linmayer; Lusito School; Jeppe girls School; Three2Six School; St Benedicts College; Bertrams Primary School; Observatory Primary School; Eastgate High school; Troyeville Primary School; Dominican Convent School, Troyeville.

In the impossibility of ensuring a complete list of PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS, it was decided to list the organizations that collaborated helping the Bienvenu Shelter to carry out its mission in recent years:

- Apostolic Nunciature to South Africa
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
- High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Catholic Archdiocese of Johannesburg
- City of Johannesburg
- Directors Circle
- Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR-Clinic)
- Comboni Lay Missionaries



- Department of Social Development - Human Trafficking Section
- Department of Home Affairs – DHA
- Doctors without Borders
- Denis Institute, Pretoria
- Embassies & Consulates
- Focolare Community
- Future Families – NPO
- Hand in Hand Southern Africa
- Hawks
- Hospitals: Baragwanath; Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital; Coronation Hospital; Tara Centre; Helen Joseph Hospital; St. Johns Ambulance
- Jeppe Police Station “Adopt a Cop”
- Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)
- Lawyer for Human Rights – LHR
- Lar St. Isabelle, Old Age Home
- Local Clinics: Hilbrow Clinic; Bez Valley Clinic;
- IOM International Organization for Migrants
- Pastoral Care for Migrants and Refugees Department of the Catholic Archdiocese of Johannesburg
- Psychosocial Rights Forum
- Portuguese Forum
- Remar South Africa
- RED CROSS
- Southern African Bishops Conference – SACBC
- SACBC Migrants and Refugees Office
- SACBC Trafficking in Persons Office
- Sophiatown Community Psychological Services (Sophiatown)
- Scalabrini Institute of Human Mobility in Africa (SIHMA)
- Shelters: Mother Theresa Home – Missionaries of Charity Mother Teresa; Bethany Home; Nazareth House, Mercy House, Future Families, Ykaya Le Themba
- University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg – (Wits)

University)

- Witz Centre for Reproductive Health
- Social Media: Radios: 94.7, Veritas, 702; Newspaper: Seculo of Johannesburg, The STAR, A voz Portuguesa, AD News – Archdiocese of Johannesburg; TV: RTP; SABC.

As a sign of recognition for the gifts and all the support received over the 20 years of its history, the Bienvenu Shelter then records, ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE MADE DONATIONS OF MATERIAL PROPERTY OR FINANCIAL RESOURCES to support projects and initiatives for persons welcomed or assisted.

Besides the local, national and international organizations that punctually, periodically or systematically supported the Bienvenu Shelter and its projects, hundreds of people, perhaps thousands, individually or with families and groups of friends, made this reality happen, grow and consolidate itself. Financial and material aid, as well as countless hours and voluntary efforts combined in listening, dialogues, services and presence, are countless and priceless. Through all the support received, it was not just possible to ensure sustainability during those 20 years, but also to expand the spaces, to qualify the services offered, increase the capacity to respond to the demands of refugee women and other welcomed persons and the scope of the incidence in the context in which it is situated.

Over the years, the Shelter has been equipping itself with internal procedures to ensure that all donations are well received, well appreciated and the people and institutions that make them are recognized and valued. Thus, every donation is formally registered, every donor receives a letter of thanks for their support, and every year also receives, physically or virtually, a Certificate of Appreciation. In some way, the welcomed people, the Shelter Team, and external supporters form a great family, which grows, transforms, but does not lose the bonds of love that the solidarity meeting made happen.

The following list presents, in alphabetical order, the names of the Organizations of which the Management at the Bienvenu Shelter in 2021 has record, as recognition and gratitude of the importance of these supporters and their contributions to the history of the Bienvenu Shelter. The data collected in 2021 indicate the names of the following

donors, who symbolically also record gratitude and recognition to all and all persons, institutions, and anonymous donations, who are in the heart of God:

- Academia da Ferrugem
- Academia do Bacalhau
- Academia dos Mafiosos da Caridade, South Africa
- Antonio Braz Trust
- Ann Wigley
- Armona Electrical
- Bembom Bakeries
- Buzzy Buzz
- Charities Aid Foundation Southern Africa (CAF SA)
- CARITAS SA
- Caixa Bank
- Catholic Chinese Welfare Association
- CEI - Italian Bishops Conference
- Comunidade Portuguesa, with special gratitude to: Mr. Antonio Braz (in memoria); Dr. Luisa Frago; Mr. Edward Braz; Mr. Ernesto Pinheiro & Family; Mrs. Paula Savio; Mrs. Sandra De Pontes; De Sousa Family; Marques, Dr. Carlos & Mrs. Susana; Mr. Nelson Reis; Mrs. Matilde de Abreu; Mr. Tony Marques; Mrs. Vera Nazareth; Mrs. Ester & Sr. Tony; Mr. Fernando Vicente & Family; Mr. Emidio and Mrs. Maria; Mr. Garcia & Family; Mr. Coelho & Family; Mr. Simões & Mrs. Helena, Mrs. Irene & Mrs. Ana.
- Conrad Hilton Fund for Sisters
- Chubby Chums
- CWL (Catholic Women's League)
- CWL (Catholic Women's League Adoptions)
- Congregations: Comboni Missionary Priests; Holy Family Sisters; Dominican Sisters of Oakford; Franciscan Missionaries of Mary - FMM Sisters; Mercy Sisters and Assumption Sisters

- David – nappies, Alberton
- Foods Forward
- FINMARK TRUST
- Furtak Tiling
- Garcia Shopfitters
- Gavin Johnson
- HEUTINK FAMILY, Holland
- Hells Angels Motorbikes
- H R B Security
- JHB East Rottary Club
- JR Meat Wholesalers
- Kindermissionwek, Germany
- Knights of Da Gama Various Councils
- Kirche in Not – Germany
- Katerina Hellene Antoniadis
- Lesego Mosele
- Limegreen Sourcing Solutions
- Luso cycling Primrose
- Magdalena & Friends, Germany
- Manson Plumbing
- Morning Fresh Bakery
- MVR Services
- National Lottery – LOTTO
- Nando and Elsa Foundation
- New Generation
- Papal Foundation
- Pyrotech
- Pick'n Pay Malbarton
- Pick'n Pay Darras Centre
- Portuguese Forum
- Pioneer Foods
- Pinheiro Construction

- Priess Family
- Princessa Bakery & Coffee Shop
- Redskins Golf
- R F. Monitoring
- Rovirod Development
- Round Table Edenvale 63#
- Santa Shoe Box
- St Francis of Assisi – Organisation
- Sunshine Centre, Craighall
- Soule2Soule Foods
- Silo
- Sophia Relief Services
- The 100% Foundation
- Tulisa Meat Market
- Tiber Construction
- Timbuktu in the Valley

We have the humility to recognize, beforehand, that surely other organizations, perhaps even in anonymity, have added and integrated this great support network. The hundreds or even thousands of individuals who support the Bienvenu Shelter with their donations and their services, many of which are present and supporting from the beginning, from before March 2001, for reasons of respect for one's right to privacy and for unity with the many anonymous donors, their names are written in the heart of God and in the book of life, have all the recognition and gratitude and blessings of all those who have benefited from the gifts received – women, children, families. Special thanks to the Portuguese Community of Johannesburg for their presence, support, affection, dedication, and solidarity.



**CSEM - Centro Scalabriniano de Estudos Migratórios**



csembrasil



CSEM Brasília



[www.csem.org.br](http://www.csem.org.br)



**Bienvenu Shelter**

*For Refugee Women and their Children*



Bienvenu Shelter



[www.bienvenushelter.org](http://www.bienvenushelter.org)

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