



Microsoft News Centre Europe

Technology transforms the lives of migrants in Italy



Italian non-profit "Fondazione Mondo Digitale" (FMD) is committed to establishing an inclusive society, using education, innovation and shared values to benefit all citizens, regardless of background.

Mohamed, a 20 year old from Sierra Leone, has been living in Italy since December. An aspiring pharmacist, he previously studied medicine until he was forced out of school after his father passed away. After reaching his uncle in Libya, with his mother and four younger sisters, he was once again forced to leave his family and travel to Italy on his own. Mohamed now considers the Centro di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo (CARA) – the biggest center for asylum seekers in Europe – his home.

An increasing number of refugees and migrants need international protection, fleeing war, violence and persecution. Since the beginning of 2016, 70,000 refugees have arrived in Italy. Overcoming the language barrier is a major problem faced by the majority of migrants. Mohamed is well-educated but his inability to speak Italian confidently has been a huge challenge as he tries to settle into local life.



Enter Fondazione Mondo Digitale (FMD), an Italian non-profit committed to establishing an inclusive knowledge-based society through innovation, education and shared values. FMD is involved in a number of projects offering from digital literacy training initiatives for the elderly to technology sessions for aspiring entrepreneurs. As a key FMD partner, Microsoft has been providing support to ensure these activities reach as many people as possible through its networks and partnerships.

Helping migrants and refugees integrate into society is one of five areas FMD concentrates on and this aligns with the Europe 2020 initiative. Last month, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), launched a global awareness campaign, #WithRefugees, on World Refugee Day. Comunità di Sant'Egidio, Techsoup Italia, FMD and Microsoft supported this with "Technology for Solidarity", a two-day, multi-city event in Rome and Catania, dedicated to social integration. This included conferences, digital labs for inclusion and a football game for refugees and migrants together with students from the local high school.



At the University of Catania, 30 young school students taught 60 refugees the basics of IT. As an attendee of one of these workshops, Mohamed spoke of his experience, *"Learning Italian with FMD has given me the confidence as I start a new life here. Being able to speak with local people and feel a part of something means a lot to me. In my country I had never used a computer. Here, I met a new friend, Martina, who taught me to surf the web, use Wikipedia, search for news and work, and play football video games. Not only am I able to communicate with those who live far from us, but I'm also able to make new friends and find a job more easily."*

For 17 year old Francesco, one of many Italian student volunteers, technology has the power to help refugees connect with a new environment. *"Technology is a universal language for communicating with one another. In my opinion, integration means being together with no prejudice on language, culture or religion."*

These events have attracted huge participation, but FMD is only just starting. Alfonso Molina, Scientific Director of FMD, believes we need to *"decide what type of individuals we want to be and how we wish to live, in what type of country. We can choose to relinquish our duty to help those who suffer and have to abandon their countries, or we can choose to provide our best collective effort, face all challenges, and open a new route for hope."* Providing migrants and refugees in Italy with access to workshops, new skills and new friends, FMD is helping many more people to feel hopeful.