Study visit to Italy to share best practices on the protection and vulnerabilities of refugees at the local level

A study visit to Italy took place on 13-17 April 2026 to share best practices on the protection and particular vulnerabilities of migrants at the local level, as part of a project supporting a new institutional framework and a coordinated approach to the integration of migrants in Portugal. The project aims to support the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA) in ensuring that migrant communities have access to efficient and personalised integration services.

The study visit took place in the framework of a project providing technical assistance to Portugal to strengthen its decentralised response to situations involving the protection and particular vulnerability of migrants, including capacity-building of local authorities aiming to ensure that frontline staff are adequately equipped with the necessary skills to respond on the ground, and that case management and referral procedures are clearly defined and implemented.

The IOM had set up a working group dedicated to the local protection response for migrant communities in Portugal, in coordination with AIMA, the Social Security Institute (I.S.S.) and the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities (ANMP).

Italy provided a particularly relevant context for Portugal, given its long experience in responding to mixed migration flows and its well-established multi-level governance structure for the reception and protection of migrants; it has developed a decentralised model for the reception and assistance of the most vulnerable people, which directly involves local authorities, civil society and regional institutions.

The study visit had the following main objectives:

- Technical meetings with experts in social welfare, vulnerability and protection, in particular with local stakeholders, which provided a practical insight into protection- and vulnerability-sensitive approaches, operational tools and mechanisms, as well as models for coordination and the integrated delivery of services

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- Field observation of multi-level coordination systems relating to the protection, vulnerability and reception of migrants, where good practices in coordination, governance and standardised multi-level procedures were observed, including field visits to municipal departments, reception facilities/centres and mobile street units which apply real-time mechanisms for identification, referral and case management.

The visit involved the following Italian representatives:

- Ministry of the Interior
- ANCI, the National Association of Italian Municipalities (“Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani”)
- CITTALIA, ANCI’s Foundation for Social Policies on Reception, Integration and Citizenship
- LGNet (Local Governance Network)
- Municipality of Rome, in particular the Social Services and the Social Operations Centre (“Sala Operativa Sociale”)
- The City of Milan, in particular the Milano Welcome Centre, a public service run by the City of Milan that provides support to foreign residents, asylum seekers and refugees, acting as a one-stop, open, free and multilingual service centre, especially for new arrivals
- Sammartini Centre, a reception and initial support facility run by the Municipality of Milan, designed for people in highly vulnerable situations, including migrants, asylum seekers and people experiencing homelessness; and the Mobile Teams, outreach teams run by the City Council that operate directly in the community to reach vulnerable groups

The lessons learnt and exchange of practices during the five-day study visit will support the basis for the development of the “Practical Municipal Guide for the Protection of Migrants in Portugal”, which will serve as a practical reference tool, contributing to greater harmonisation, efficiency and quality in the protection responses across the network of municipalities in Portugal.

Source(s)

- International Organization for Migration (23 April, 2026), Visita de estudo a Itália para partilha e observação de boas práticas sobre proteção e especial vulnerabilidade de pessoas migrantes ao nível local [Study visit to Italy to share and observe best practices regarding the protection and particular vulnerability of migrants at local level],

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