

Preliminary report on the Community response to the Covid-19 Emergency – 5 July 2020

THE NUMBERS

The requests received

The project Community Response to the Covid-19 Emergency officially started three months ago, on the 6th of April 2020. Since then, the commitment of the volunteers of Nomit has never stopped, and neither has the crisis the temporary migrants have been facing. On the 5th of July, 213 people have registered their request through the online form/survey and have been contacted via phone calls. Considering that it has not been possible to get in touch with 7 of them, a total of 206 requests have been effectively processed.

Notwithstanding the number of requests has been decreasing over the last month, the situation that Italians with temporary visas are coping with remains tough. Towards the middle of June the condition of a few of the recipients was showing signs of a slight improvement: some were going back to work, at least for a few shifts, following the lifting of the restrictions for the hospitality sector; others had been able to get some relief from the contribution for international students or from the withdrawal of their superannuation. Nonetheless, the reinforced lockdown due to start on the 9th of July is destined to worsen the conditions of the Italians on temporary visas, who have already had to live through months of unemployment or underemployment, financial and psychological distress. Everything considered, the situation of emergency is more pressing than ever. Indeed, the people who have requested support over the last month are facing critical hardship. Others asked for the \$100 donation after having refused it in the first stage. All of this shows that the situation is getting worse.

Of the 213 people who have registered with the project, 142 reside in Victoria, 29 in NSW, 15 in WA, 22 in QLD, 3 in SA and 2 in TAS. The main increase during the month of June has been of people from NSW and QLD. The main factor behind this is that the Father Atanasio Charitable Fund ceased its program on the 8th of June.

Regarding the statistical breakdown in terms of visas, 108 of the people requesting support are Working Holiday Makers, 77 hold a student visa, 25 a partner or skilled visa, only 3 of them are still here on a tourist visa. The main increase of requests in terms of types of visas is among the Working Holiday Visa, growing from 78 to 108.

The funds redistributed to the community so far

From the 14th of April, when the first donation was paid, to the 5th of July, a total of 183 Italians with temporary visas have received economic support, up from 144 on the 30th of May. 180 Lampo (\$100 donations) have been distributed so far, increasing from 142 on the 30th of May. In total, 177 people have received the \$100 payment.

Mano, a free loan scheme, started on the 1st of May. As at the 5th of July, 45 people have benefitted from it. It may be worth considering that during the same period 48 Manos were approved, but that 3 of the recipients turned down the aid a few days after the approval since they had just found a job and they asked for the loan to be allocated to someone facing an even more challenging situation than theirs. This proves the honesty and, above all, the community spirit shown by the people we have been in contact with and which is a great achievement of the RceCovid-19 project.

In a nutshell, \$40,500 has been distributed to the community up until the 5th of July, \$18,000 in the form of \$100 Lampo donations and \$22,500 through the Free Loan Scheme called Mano.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The crisis has been worsening (even before the announcement of the new lockdown)

The spurious hopes of economic recovery and of improvement in the conditions for the Italians with temporary visas are crumbling under the looming lockdown due to start on the 9th of July. Nonetheless, the situation had not actually started to improve before the new lockdown was announced. Those that went back to work, indeed, only did so for a few shifts; the ones that were looking for a job were struggling to find one because of the high demand and for the distorting effect of Jobkeeper, since employers try to use eligible employees, making it more difficult for temporary visa holders to guarantee themselves a decent income.

The people that have asked for assistance during the last month have gone through three hard months of unemployment or of underemployment, eating away at their savings and struggling to meet living costs: this makes their difficult situations even worse.

Over the last month the requests received from working holiday makers have increased more than those from other visas: this could be due to the fact that the working holiday makers have been hit more than others by the uncertainties generated by the political decisions of every State, by the slow recovery of the tourism sector affected by the closure of borders and by the seasonality of farm jobs. Moreover, while international students were eligible for one payment by the State, working holiday makers could only access the limited amount available from their superannuation.

People holding a student, sponsor or partner visa are among the recipients of support from Nomit: these people face the most critical financial difficulty. They are individuals, couples and young families who have been living off their savings over the last months, who are penalized by work limitations and long visa processing times. These people have gone through years of sacrifice and hard work to build a life in Australia and now find themselves alone on the frontline of the crisis.

For these people it is particularly hard to ask for help since they have always worked and provided for themselves. Therefore, they usually leave it until they are in dire circumstances before looking for assistance.

Necessity of institutional engagement

The ongoing crisis is having enormous effects on the lives of many people: the uncertainty spread by the emergency legislation and the late and inadequate measures of support put in place by the State and Federal governments has been threatening the social and economic security and the future of a whole generation of young workers, families and migrants.

In particular, the psychological stress many people have been experiencing is a matter of great concern, even more so because there is a risk it will be neglected due to the pressing necessity of livelihood. More than three months of unemployment and difficulty to find a job never experienced before; the shrinking pool of alternatives; the job insecurity and the vulnerability to harassment in the workplace: all these factors contribute to the psychological stress that these people experience. In fact, some of the most recent recipients of the free loan scheme Mano had experienced harassment in the workplace. Nomit

ensure that they were put in contact with the Migrant Workers Centre and Hospovoice to have their options for protection from exploitation and discrimination explained to them.

The externalization of the cost caused by the choice to let a private system govern health services, combined with short term visa policies have made this crisis have a disproportionate effect on a whole class of workers who are discriminated against, on a generation stuck in the loop of job insecurity, on a group of citizens with limited rights.

The Board of Nomit expresses its concerns about the continuation of this crisis and the prolonged effects on the most vulnerable parts of Australian society. Therefore, as a Board we call for an immediate and real commitment both from Italian and Australian institutions to support temporary visa holders. The efforts of Nomit will continue in the difficult months ahead; nonetheless, it is also up to established institutions to put in place dedicated measures to provide temporary visa holders with economic, housing and psychological support, adequate for this unprecedented crisis.