



Valle d'Aosta (Italy)

Young migrants trained in beekeeping

Jean-Luc Janot, AEIDL

Since February 2016, fifteen young African asylum seekers have been learning about beekeeping as part of a project supported by the Leone Rosso cooperative in Châtillon, Valle d'Aosta. Three key words: solidarity, reciprocity and social innovation.



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"They are motivated and they understand everything very quickly," says Claire Alves Sobrinho, instructor in beekeeping, speaking about the fifteen young Africans who are working around her, busily building wooden hives. "This is just the beginning, we will of course follow the natural cycle of bees. The project will be expanded gradually as the weather conditions improve and we'll also have to monitor the hives and their residents more closely."

Since July 2015, the Valle d'Aosta region has received around 100 asylum seekers, whose reception and integration have been entrusted to various local organisations, including the [Leone Rosso cooperative](#) located in Châtillon (population: 5,000).

With €10 000 in regional funding, Leone Rosso's coordinator, Deborah Isoni, conceived the "Brave Bee" initiative, which initially aimed to facilitate the social and employment integration of young disabled people. In February 2016, the cooperative decided to open the project to asylum seekers.

"Brave Bee" is a beekeeping training project that combines theory (introduction to basic beekeeping techniques) and practice (building hives and other tools). Classes meet once a week and participation is on a voluntary basis.

"This training will enable asylum seekers to acquire specific know-how, and could even lead to a real job," says Cesare Marques, the president of Leone Rosso. "In beekeeping, with a small investment of 2,000-3,000 euros, a person can earn around 10,000 euros per season, and then increase the number of hives and thus increase production and income. In addition, even if we still use a little French and English to be understood, classes are taught in Italian, which allows participants to learn the language faster and thus accelerate their social integration."



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Reciprocity

"It is common sense and a spirit of reciprocity - 'do ut des', 'return what you have been given' - which inspired us to start the project," says Veronica Fantini, who coordinates the migrant strand of the initiative. "Honey is a 100% local resource and is very important for this valley. It promotes our territory and protects biodiversity. In addition to teaching new skills to these young people in despair, and getting them out of the inactivity engendered by their asylum seeker status, Bee Brave also allows us to increase our production, and therefore the project should be self-sustaining this year and maybe also next year."

It is a win-win project, which also perfectly complements another Leone Rosso initiative: the "Honey Rays" project, launched in 2015. The honey produced by the cooperative is marketed by disabled youth in the region. Last year, 300 jars of honey (500g sold for €6 each) were sold in this way. "Both projects should therefore strengthen and even finance each other, the Brave Bee production increasing what Honey Rays have available to sell", say Leone Rosso executives.

In the same vein, Leone Rosso is also about to launch another project, in the horticulture sector this time: "This is another 'reciprocity' project," says Francesco Buratti, the director of the cooperative. "Fruit and vegetable products will be given to the local food bank. Solidarity is a key value in a society that does not always accept difference."

(Sources: interview with **Cesare Marques**, Leone Rosso – article in [La Stampa](#) by **Francesca Soro**)

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