

Case Study 2: Torino's Associazione Apolié drop-in centre

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1. Context

National context

- Since 2000 Italy's GDP growth has been below the Euro-area average, and total factor productivity growth has been very weak, and at times, negative (OECD, 2005)
- The labour market is highly regulated and inflexible.
- Italy has experienced high levels of immigration in recent years, particularly from countries outside the European Union (EU). However, Italian immigration policy generally lacks clarity and the country is therefore struggling to cope with large-scale inflows. Official quotas are low¹ but the long coastline and proximity to North Africa make illegal entry relatively easy (OECD, 2005).
- The processes for registering and working are complicated and bureaucratic, and the tax system discourages entry into the formal labour market. Many immigrants remain clandestine and work informally (Cuttitta, 2008).
- The latest OECD report on Italy recommends that job-related training be the next priority reform to labour markets and social policies (OECD, 2005).

City context

- The city of Torino's population peaked at 1.2 million in 1975, and has since been in decline (IRES, 2006). It currently stands at just over 900,000 (ISTAT, 2007).
- Torino's industrial history, which began in the late 1800s, is rooted in the mechanical and engineering industries and dominated by the multi-national automotive firm Fiat (*Fabbrica Italiana di Automobili Torino*), founded in Torino in the 1890s. The company became Italy's largest private firm during the 'economic miracle' years of the 1960s and 70s, accounting for almost 5% of Italy's total GDP (Economist, 2005). At its zenith Fiat employed 140,000 people in Torino, and the city became known as Italy's 'one-company town'. Since the economic crisis in the late 1970s and 80s, employment in Fiat fell to barely 30,000 (Symcox and Cardoza, 2006).
- A regeneration effort began in earnest in 1993, spearheaded by the city's first directly elected mayor, Valentino Castellani (see Winkler, 2007).
- Unemployment in the Province of Torino² stood at 10.8% in 1994; by 2005 it had fallen to below 5% (IRES, 2006) (see Fig. 1).
- Immigration, particularly from non-EU countries, has increased dramatically since the 1980s. Figure 2 shows the changing origins of immigrants.³

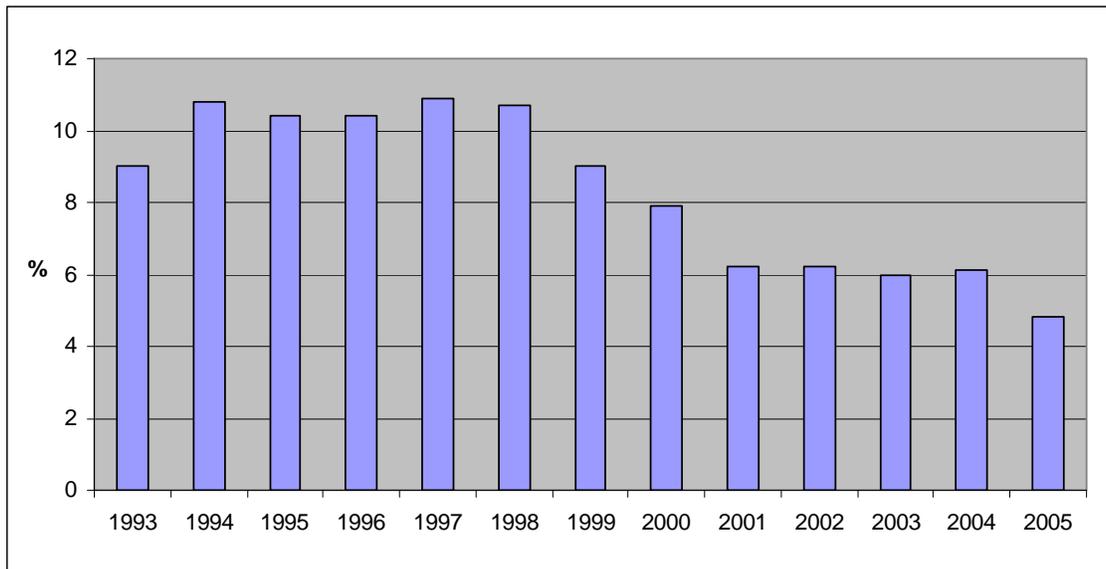
¹ For example, the official quota for non-EU migrants in 1999 was 58,000 (Cuttitta 2008, p. 43)

² The province surrounding Torino, which takes the city's name (Province of Torino), consists of 315 municipalities, has 2,236,941 inhabitants and covers an area of 6,830km², with a population density of 328 persons per km² (ISTAT, 2005).

³ 'Immigrants' are defined here as migrants to Italy who do not hold Italian nationality.

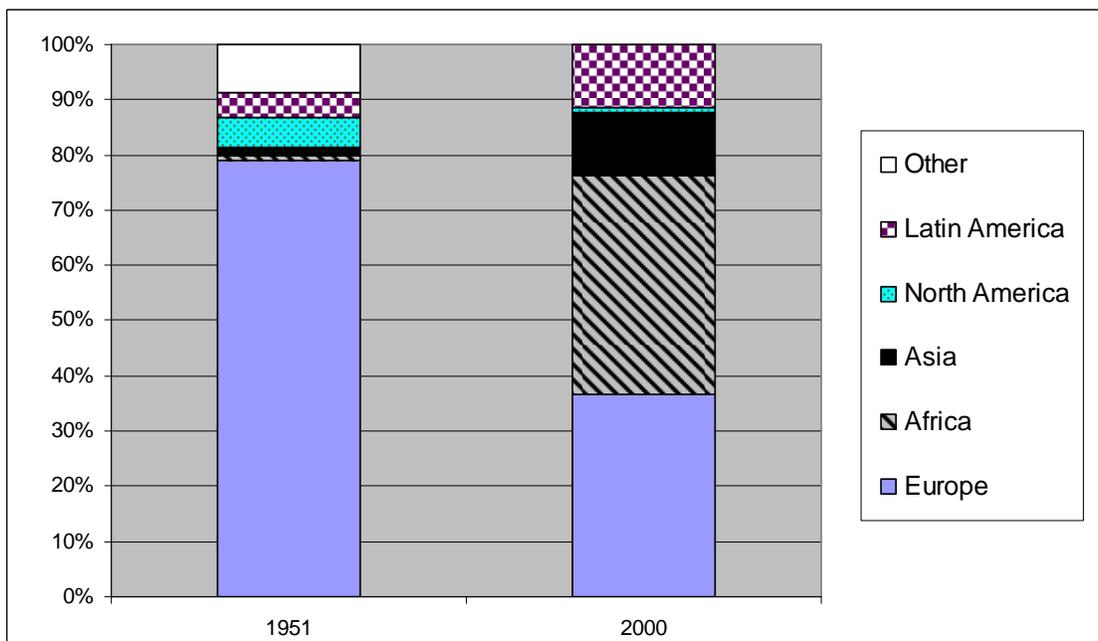
- During the early 1990s, Torino was still lacking a coherent integration policy for immigrants (Caponio *et al*, 2000). There were very few services in place to help immigrants gain a foot-hold in the city.
- The idea of a drop-in centre evolved from experiences in integration-related projects supported by the EU.

Figure 1: Unemployment rate, Province of Torino, 1993-2005



Sources: ISTAT; Osservatorio Regionale sul Mercato di Lavoro; IRES.

Figure 2: Foreigners⁴ resident in the Province of Torino, by region of origin, 1951 and 2000



Sources: ISTAT; IRES Piemonte.

⁴ 'Foreigners' are defined here as residents who do not hold Italian nationality.

The project neighbourhood

- Porta Palazzo is an inner-city neighbourhood of around 500,000m². Immigrants make up around 19% of the neighbourhood's 11,000 inhabitants, compared with an average of 4% for the city as a whole (Città di Torino, 2004).
- Since the early 1980s, the neighbourhood played host to growing flows of immigrants from North Africa and South America. More recently, the major nationalities have been Moroccan, Chinese, Senegalese and Romanian.
- The neighbourhood features the largest open-air street market in Europe, with over 1,000 licensed vendors trading and up to 40,000 visitors daily at peak times (see Figs. 3, 4 and 5).
- Unemployment and crime levels both stand significantly higher than the city average, with an unemployment rate of 12.8% in 2004 (Città di Torino, 2004).
- This neighbourhood was targeted in a city-wide neighbourhood regeneration plan, run by a newly-developed Neighbourhoods Unit founded in 1997 (see Winkler, 2007).

Figure 3: Aerial view of the market



Source: Città di Torino.

Figure 4: The Porta Palazzo neighbourhood market in the Piazza della Repubblica square



2. Rationale: How the programme evolved

Immigrant integration training course

- Through its 'EMPLOYMENT' Community Initiative, the European Commission funded projects designed to integrate socially excluded people into the local labour market in the 1990s (EC, 2000).
- In 1998 a training course was created specifically for those working in the field of immigrant integration and employment. It was delivered through SMILE⁵, a vocational training agency aiming to integrate immigrants from non-European Union (EU) countries into the labour market, and supported by Italy's largest trade union CGIL⁶.
- One of the Torino course participants, Joseph Diahoue, a recent arrival from the Ivory Coast, had become aware of the critical lack of social services for immigrants in Torino, particularly nationals from non-EU countries.
- With other participants, Mr. Diahoue developed the idea of a drop-in centre. Although immigrants⁷ in the city face a multitude of social and legal problems, it was felt the centre needed a specific vocation and employment was widely acknowledged as the key driver of successful integration.
- In 1999 the course participants were looking for an opportunity to put their ideas into practice. Through a meeting with the director of a major regeneration programme in an ethnically mixed neighbourhood of central Torino, Mr Diahoue and his colleagues were invited to create their own association, Apolié, and run a drop-in centre under the auspices of the city's regeneration programme.

EU Urban Pilot Project 'The Gate' in Porta Palazzo⁸

- 'The Gate' project was set up to address the physical, social and economic problems of the run-down multicultural Porta Palazzo neighbourhood, in the historical centre of Torino.
- This project was funded by the EU and the municipality with contributions of €2.6m each, and with €1m of funding from the national government's Ministry of Public Works (see Box 1).
- It began in 1997 and was funded until 2001. It then became a Local Development Agency, with core funding from the municipality to continue its neighbourhood regeneration work.
- Torino bid for this project as part of its effort to develop its own urban regeneration policies (PLUS, 2004), particularly given the national government's lack of action on this front.
- The project targeted local economic development, improvements to security, community cohesion and physical regeneration. In the context of its work on economic development, The Gate agreed to fund the proposed drop-in centre in 2000. Further information on The Gate and Porta Palazzo is included in Box 1.

⁵ SMILE stands for Innovative Systems and Methodologies for Work and Education (*Sistemi e Metodologie Innovativi per il Lavoro e l'Éducazione*).

⁶ Italian General Confederation of Labour (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*)

⁷ 'Immigrants' refers to first-generation migrants.

⁸ The EU's Urban Pilot Projects sought to identify best practice for solving urban problems through project-based action at the local level.

Box 1: 'The Gate' neighbourhood regeneration project, Porta Palazzo EU Urban Pilot Project

1998-2001

10,000 inhabitants

EU: €2.58 million

Municipality: €2.58 million

State Ministry of Public Works: €1 million

Bank foundation⁹ CRT: €260,000

Bank foundation CSP: €260,000

Torino Chamber of Commerce: €260,000

- The project area was a decaying inner-city market square which became a focal point for the city's growing non-EU immigrant population.
- The project was managed and implemented by the Porta Palazzo Project Committee, an independent non-profit body involving decision-makers from both public and private sectors.
- The project focused on the social and economic integration of both market vendors and residents. It was piloted by a committee of representatives from the public and private sectors.
- Decision-making was participatory and local residents were regularly consulted. This neighbourhood project illustrates Torino's commitment to working with and developing the skills of its immigrants.

After its EU funding ended, The Gate became a Local Development Agency in 2003 and continues its work in the Porta Palazzo neighbourhood with funding from the municipality and a local bank foundation.

Apolié's drop-in centre

- The drop-in centre, which is the main activity of the Associazione Apolié, began operating in 2000.
- It became independent of 'The Gate' project in 2003, and was henceforth able to develop a wider range of services.

Brief description of set-up and facilities

- The drop-in centre is currently open three days a week, and employs three employment counsellors, one enterprise counsellor, one legal consultant and one 'cultural mediator'.
- Facilities available to job-seekers include telephones and computers – all related activity is supervised by the staff.
- The association is legally prevented from matching users to specific jobs or dialoguing with businesses. Its current status allows it only to offer guidance to job-seekers. It has been actively seeking accreditation from the Province to expand its direct employment activities since 2002. The association's director hopes that accreditation will be awarded by 2008 at the latest.

3. Aim

- The Centre has the core aim of improving employment and enterprise creation rates, primarily among the largely immigrant population of Porta Palazzo.¹⁰

⁹ CRT: Cassa di Risparmio di Torino. CSP: Compagnia San Paolo (CSP).

See Box 2 for an explanation of the role of bank foundations in Italy.

4. Means: How the programme is financed

- Through its link with The Gate, Apolié received core funding from the Province of Torino and the bank foundation Compagnia San Paolo (co-funders of 'The Gate' project) until 2004. (Further information on the role of bank foundations in funding social programmes is included in Box 2.)
- Since 2005 it has received 75% of its core funding from the bank foundation Compagnia San Paolo, which plays an active role in supporting local development projects and is part of The Gate's committee (see Box 2).
- Founder and director Joseph Diadoué describes the Associazione this way: "We were born as a result of 'The Gate' – between 2000 and 2002 we worked under their auspices, within their project. We went independent from 2003, and began to develop our own projects" (*Author's translation*).
- The association's finances for 2006, which covered the funding for five employees and one consultant, all part time, were as follows:

Figure 5: Apolié's funding sources for the year 2006

Funding Body	Amount
Compagnia San Paolo (CSP)	€30,000
Province of Torino	€8,400
Apolié [own resources]	€9,904
TOTAL	€48,304

Source: Apolié, 2007.

Box 2: The role of bank foundations in funding social programmes in Italy and in Torino specifically

- Many of Italy's savings banks have long histories and deep roots in their local communities, and a tradition of charitable work.
- In 1990 the Amato Law transformed these savings banks into for-profit corporations, shares were transferred to a non-profit foundation.
- These foundations use the proceeds to invest in the local community.
- Foundations have since become major players in civic, cultural and economic development in the areas where they are based.
- Torino has two main foundations, the Compagnia San Paolo (CSP) and the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Torino (CRT).
- The CSP is Europe's fourth-biggest bank foundation with total assets of €7.75 billion, and is a major funder of many of Torino's municipal recovery projects (especially those related to culture and hi-tech industrial development).
- In the period 2001-2004, the CSP spent a total of €437 million in Torino.

¹⁰ Although the centre is based in the Porta Palazzo neighbourhood and most of its users live there, it operates an open door policy and welcomes users from other neighbourhoods.

5. Target Beneficiaries

- The project targets job-seekers of all ages, backgrounds and nationalities in the Porta Palazzo neighbourhood.

6. Challenges and Responses

Particular barriers faced by the centre relate to the informal, sub-legal or illegal nature of much available work for immigrants, who are often low-skilled. The centre encourages the legalisation of informal work but attempts at creating a recognised co-operative among market stall holders failed because the stall-holders felt they could not meet the formal costs such as taxes, associated with acquiring legal status.

The centre's director explains that women from 'traditional', usually African backgrounds also faced barriers to employment relating to childcare. Here he describes the way these barriers are tackled staff:

“During the conversations with the cultural mediator, people talk about all their life problems that are barriers to working. We heard many women saying they couldn't work because their husbands were strict with them and they had to be at home to cook and look after the children. But it came out that with only one salary, the husband wasn't able to support his family. So the woman had to work too. We know most of the husbands already, and we call them into the centre. Then we run an informal 'couple counselling' session where we discuss the options for both partners to work while the kids are looked after. Childcare is a big problem. There are no official structures for providing it in Italy.” (*Author's translation*)

Box 3 sets out the main challenges faced by Apolié's drop-in centre (based on the problems faced by its users), and the responses it has developed.

Box 3: Challenges and responses

Challenges	Responses
Helping job-seekers achieve basic work-readiness	<p>Developing an on-site service for dealing with the two most commonly-occurring issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureaucratic obstacles. The association has hired a part-time legal consultant to assist users in the renewal of their visas (<i>permesso di soggiorno</i>) and work permits; the length of this bureaucratic process often prevents immigrant job-seekers from working, but the lawyer is able to conduct basic checks with the issuing agency to speed up the process. • Housing issues. Increasing numbers of users are homeless. The association is working on a new project, in collaboration with municipalities surrounding Torino which can offer affordable housing options, to create an employment programme that comes with a housing option.
<p>Overcoming the cultural barriers faced by immigrant workers who don't:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak Italian • Understand the Italian system 	<p>'Cultural mediators' (<i>mediatore interculturale</i>) talk with users experiencing these difficulties and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess the skills and needs of the users; • explain the system as it applies to them, and discuss the job options available; and • support the users in a job-search and help with the first attempted job applications.
Overcoming cultural barriers associated with working	Through their good personal relationships with centre users, staff are able to discuss and often resolve cultural issues such as male immigrants' unwillingness to allow their wives to work. Staff explain the advantages of formal work and help find practical solutions to other difficulties such as childcare.
Users' difficulties in accessing employment information	<p>The drop-in centre provides a wide range of printed information on available jobs, and an employment counsellor is always on hand to guide users in their search.</p> <p>The centre gives job-seekers access to computers and telephones (most do not own these), which they may use to identify and respond to job advertisements.</p>
The high proportion of immigrants who work informally / illegally (with low pay and few rights)	During the initial consultation, the employment counsellor explains the benefits of working legally. Where appropriate, the idea of forming a cooperative with other centre users is suggested (see below for more). ¹¹
Helping job-seekers acquire skills for specific jobs ¹²	<p>Brokering basic skills training through links with a provider network.</p> <p>The association has forged a strong link with an EU-funded network of training providers to whom it can refer job-seekers for skills training. It collaborates with most accredited training agencies in the city-region.</p> <p>It also feeds back requests for particular types of training to the network, and helps formulate new training programmes that better meet users' needs.</p>

¹¹ For example, many of the female users work informally as cleaning staff. They are encouraged to form a cooperative, and the benefits of basic employment rights and improved job security are explained.

¹² The regional government provides official training courses, but most of these are targeted at people under the age of 24; in 2006, 72% of the centre's users were aged over 25.

Challenges (ctd)	Responses (ctd)
Preparing inexperienced job-seekers for the job-search	<p>The drop-in centre aims to give job-seekers all the information and skills necessary for them to find suitable, sustainable employment.</p> <p>One-to-one interviews with advisors are scheduled for each individual. These begin with a simple conversation about the job-seeker's educational and working career, their current experience and their aspirations. This identifies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific experience and skills; • work interests; and • areas requiring further development (see 'brokering basic skills training', below). <p>The identified skills and interests are used to guide the job-search.</p>
Preparing job-seekers for submitting applications	<p>The job-seeker is carefully supported in writing a CV and covering letters based on information shared during the initial consultation, and the counsellor / adviser supervises and monitors application-related telephone calls and sending of emails in order to help when needed.</p>
Helping job-seekers gain access to and experience of skills and careers	<p>Linking up with another EU-funded network which organises internships.</p>
Overcoming the resource and information limitations of a small, on-the-ground association.	<p>Formation of a network of projects and services dedicated to employment promotion, 'Extranet.Work', funded by the EU. Apolié is the lead partner. This network:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gathers and shares information on the employment needs of businesses in the city; • is building up a database of users and their characteristics to inform future work and recommendations; and • gathers its eight member organisations to share best practice on a monthly basis.
Helping users who want to start their own businesses ¹³	<p>The centre has employed an enterprise counsellor to advise and support users who express a desire to become an entrepreneur. It can thus conduct basic feasibility assessments and give close support during the first steps in entrepreneurship:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial scoping and advice: The enterprise counsellor discusses the realities of running your own business with the potential entrepreneur, and together they evaluate the feasibility of the business idea. • Assistance: In the drafting of business plans. • Coordination: If the user wants to set up a cooperative or go into partnership, the counsellor uses the centre's database to identify and contact potential business partners with similar skills and/or interests. The centre can be used as the meeting-place for these groups, with centre staff on hand to advise and facilitate. • Funding: It links potential entrepreneurs to organisations that provide support and help identify sources of funding.¹⁴

¹³ This is often a good solution for immigrants, many of whom are well-educated and have difficulty finding employment because of basic problems such as lack of physical stamina (which is required for many of the basic jobs available to them, such as factory work, construction etc.) They are attracted to running a business by advantages such as improved job security and the potential for better pay. Growing numbers of users are expressing an interest in starting their own businesses or cooperatives.

¹⁴ These include the organisation Start Up Your Own Business (*Mettersi in Proprio*), which provides a wide-ranging support service for would-be entrepreneurs. It is funded by provincial and regional authorities, the national government and the EU.

7. Outcomes

- The drop-in centre received 730 users during the calendar year of 2006: an average of 5 every day the centre was open. Some were return users.

Figure 6: User numbers at Apolié drop-in centre

User figures for 2006			
Age	Gender	Number of users	% who are immigrants
16-24	Female	26	84
	Male	122	79
Over 25	Female	259	82
	Male	323	81
TOTAL		730	

Source: Apolié, 2007.

Note: This data includes returning users from 2005, who make up 37% of the total.

- A survey of 100 users conducted in December 2006 showed that 75% had found work.¹⁵
- During 2006, two associations and two cooperatives were created with the help of centre staff.
 - One association, *Associazione Indifferenza*, consists of four members working on educational inclusion projects for the children of immigrants in the local school system, in collaboration with a network of local schools.
 - The other association, *Associazione GIUSSUR*¹⁶ (which is formed but not yet operational and is currently tendering for funding), consists of three young Moroccan immigrants who will advise immigrants who want to improve their skills through further study, at either high school or university level.
 - The cooperatives, *Italia Multiservice s.c.r.l.* and *La Gunter s.c.r.l.*, consist of three and nine members respectively, and both provide porterage and cleaning services.

¹⁵ According to the centre's director, follow-up information on whether users have found jobs is difficult to compile. This is because users' only contact details are usually their mobile phone numbers (which often change). To get around this, the centre conducts surveys.

¹⁶ *Giussur* means 'bridges' in Arabic.

8. Key Success Factors

- **A person-focused approach.** The association's director explained that the centre has 'a very active relationship' with its users. This means support can be personalised. Advantages of this approach include:
 - Deeper understanding of users' multiple needs (which are often misunderstood). With this, the association is able to develop ideas for more responsive programmes and policies.
 - Staff members' ability to identify and tackle other personal difficulties which users experience that are not directly linked to the job-search (eg. childcare), but which are often key to achieving job-readiness.
- **Membership of a training provider network.** This allows the association, which cannot deliver training itself (due to Italian legislation), to represent the needs of its users and work with the training providers to develop appropriate training programmes that meet these needs.
- **Flexible service.** The organisation responds to the needs of its users. Its open door approach and its willingness to recognise and broker cultural difficulties make it possible to overcome very significant hurdles facing foreigners, who rarely engage with official public service bodies.
- **Added value of Porta Palazzo Market and Area regeneration.** The City of Torino and the public more generally support and encourage the neighbourhood's market, which relies strongly on informal immigrant initiatives.
- **Leadership.** The emergence of a local organiser and entrepreneur from an immigrant-focused training course has rooted the project in the local community in a unique fashion. Because of his background, the centre's director understands the socio-cultural issues many of the centre's users are facing.
- **External funding and support.** This specially targeted small-scale project requires significant input per person assisted, but this helps it reach vulnerable and marginal minority populations.

9. Concluding thoughts on skills

Most of the centre's users are informal workers, who are both illegal in their status and unprotected. They find it difficult to break into formal job markets without help as they are unable to navigate the system, see how their qualifications would fit, assess and plan their skills needs and access training opportunities. Within the informal sector they also lack access to more conventional networks. One of the main skills they need, therefore, and which the centre helps them to acquire, is how to operate within the formal job market. By familiarising users with the complexities of the Italian employment market and its mechanisms, the centre develops users' 'access skills', i.e. the socio-cultural skills necessary to access both employment and training opportunities. These skills include confidence, cultural understanding and self-presentation.

Users are encouraged to make career plans and identify commensurate skills needed for the jobs to which they aspire; the centre then tries to connect them to training that will equip them with these skills, thereby leading to sustainable careers.

Annex

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Interviewees

Joseph Diahoue	Director	Associazione Apolié
Daniela Gregnanin	Director, Political and Social Projects	Compagnia San Paolo