

IPA – Italian Prisoners abroad, Project update



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The situation of Italian prisoners abroad remains of great concern for the Italian Ministry of Justice even if 2019 has been characterized by a small decrease in the number of detainees held abroad. According to the latest available information of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (July 2019), there are 2,113 Italians imprisoned around the world.

Concerning the geographical distribution, 1611 inmates are spending time in prison facilities within the European Union and just 8 of them are awaiting extradition. There are no available data regarding the number of people that are in the position to ask for the application of FD 2008/909 or of FD 2009/829 as well as of people that have already asked for their application and are waiting for the transfer.

With regard to non – EU Countries, data from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs underline the presence of 120 Italians (only 3 of them are awaiting extradition) in non- EU Countries and 250 in the Americas (40 in Peru, 36 in Argentina, and 40 in Brazil). Italian nationals are also detained in the Middle Eastern and African Countries, amongst them, 11 are imprisoned in Morocco and 9 in the Arab Emirates.

In addition to such figures, there are 90 people held in custody in Asia and Australia and 4 in the Sub-Sahara Countries.

Statistically, drug-related offences are the main causes of the detention for Italian prisoners abroad, followed by crimes against property and crimes against person. Since its foundation, in October 2013, IPA – Italian Prisoners Abroad – has provided support to 12

people detained in Spain, Germany, Australia and Argentina and is now working to provide assistance to 2 prisoners in Spain, 1 in Australia and 1 in Argentina.

After a rather lengthy journey to establish itself as a valuable support for people facing detention far from home and for their families, IPA is now able to respond to such requests mainly originating online through the website of *Associazione Carcere e Territorio*, the charity which runs the IPA project.

Even if the number of people supported is relatively still small, we are working relentlessly to promote our activities with the aim to reach the largest possible number of people and families in need.

The majority of our work is undertaken by volunteers associated with *Associazione Carcere e Territorio*. It was only in 2017 that we gained monetary support through a grant from the Valdese Church and we are currently looking for further financial backing for the year 2020.

Notwithstanding financial constraints, all the actions of the project are run continuously, irrespectively of funding allocations

The most relevant part of the support offered by IPA concerns the management of prisoners' family's necessities and worries: typically, family members are not always fully able to understand the judicial situation faced by their relative and navigate the complex legal system. In many instances they are not fully aware of the opportunities available to them such as asking for a diplomatic representative in the foreign Country or for a representative from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy.

Sometimes, they are even scared about the probable consequences of any institutional diplomatic involvement and they rely on the skills and expertise of a competent mediator who can explain them how to organize their partaking in the judicial environment. IPA acts, in this instance, as the mediator.

When it comes to collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it has to be said that, a part for the positive formal declaration of intents to actively cooperate to this project, there has been no further direct contact in the last year. Indeed, when in need, the IPA team

has always looked for a direct contact with the Italian Embassies abroad that normally are very opened to a positive and useful collaboration.

It also worth to present a new and unexpected evolution of the IPA project that in the last two years has determined the development of the project in a broader sense. Probably as an attempt to answer to a not well officially covered need of support, IPA has indeed become a well-known support for the application of FD 2008/909 and a quite large number of foreign nationals detained in Italian prisons ask for our intervention to manage the request of transfer to their Country of origin and help them ease the pain of being moved to an unknown and new situation.

As a consequence of the newly acquired field of expertise, even some national and international Ngos (mainly from Romania), ask IPA to assist them with regard to the application of the transfer of prisoners and also with the practicalities of such transfer. Also, it is worth highlighting here that the collaboration with foreign diplomacy in Italy appeared to be the most valuable support for the positive application of the required measure. Furthermore, when possible, the request of support to foreign universities is of great help to collect useful information about the local prison system, with the aim to share them with the interested person.