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Accessibility
Socioeconomic Integration of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Italy

Ornella Caspani Medina

A Thesis in the Field of International Relations
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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Abstract

In 2015, more than one million people crossed the Mediterranean into Europe, fleeing their homes and dire situations in places like Syria, Libya, and Iraq in search of a better future. Due to its geographic position and proximity to the North African coast, Italy was one of the countries most affected by the unexpected arrival of asylum seekers crossing the Mediterranean Sea on their way to Europe. Although refugees are resilient people with marketable skills and strong motivations to build their livelihoods, their socioeconomic integration into host countries remains one of the main challenges.

In this thesis, I explore the barriers refugees must overcome to gain access to the Italian labor market. I performed a causal analysis to identify the root causes of these barriers so I could then assess potential solutions. Following my analysis, I framed a theory of change to test if these solutions would achieve the expected outcome of improving the socioeconomic integration of refugees in Italy.

I conclude with a set of concrete recommendations that the Italian government could implement. Restoring order and confidence in Italy’s migration system is essential for countering extremist narratives and providing an opportunity for migrants to better integrate in Italy while also benefiting Italian society.
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Definitions

Asylum Seeker: Person whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed.

Authorization to Stay for Humanitarian Reasons: Persons who are not eligible for international protection but are nonetheless protected against removal under the obligations that are imposed on all Member States by international refugee or human rights instruments. Examples of such categories include persons who are not removable on ill health grounds and unaccompanied minors.

Migrant: Person who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status.

Refugee: Person who is outside of their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, requires international protection.

Refugee Status: Protection granted to someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. (Art.1 of the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951, as amended by the New York Protocol of 31 January 1967.)
*Subsidiary Protection*: protection granted to a third-country national or a stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but have proved substantial grounds that if returned to his or her country of origin, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm.

Sources: UNHCR, 2013; European Directive 2011/95/EU.
<table>
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<th>Acronym</th>
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<tr>
<td>ANCI</td>
<td>National Association of Italian Municipalities</td>
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<td>AS</td>
<td>Asylum Seekers</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>CAS</td>
<td>Extraordinary Reception Centers</td>
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<td>Return Centers for Repatriation</td>
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<td>EU-28</td>
<td>EU’s 28 members</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>PES</td>
<td>Public Employment Services</td>
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<td>RAS</td>
<td>Refugees and asylum seekers</td>
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<td>SPRAR</td>
<td>Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees</td>
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<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>UPI</td>
<td>Union of Italian Provinces</td>
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During 2017, I spent a year working as a volunteer in a refugee center in Rome. My task was to help refugees and asylum seekers build their resumes as a tool to look for job opportunities, since Italy generously allows refugees and asylum seekers to work while they wait for a decision on their asylum application. I quickly realized this was not enough. Refugees and asylum seekers needed a full range of support to find a job: (1) first and foremost, learning to speak basic Italian; it is almost impossible to find a job if one cannot communicate; (2) assistance with building a proper resume and matching them with an appropriate job. By building a resume, I do not mean just describing on a piece of paper their previous work experience. I mean thoroughly considering what skills each asylum seeker possesses and determining occupations that match those skills; (3) help them to understand cultural norms, i.e., the basic unwritten rules that refugees and asylum seekers need to follow when engaging with people in a completely different place. These steps are not rocket science. They are what most of us would do if we moved to a new country where we had little in common with those in our new country or with their culture.

As refugees and asylum seekers began to follow these steps, they started looking for job opportunities. I helped them complete job applications, write emails and cover letters, and make telephone calls to potential employers. It was not easy. Sometimes we encountered anger and discrimination, but many times kindness and eagerness to help. Although I have never worked in human resources, I do have a major in business and ten
years of experience working in large companies. Nevertheless, it took little time to realize that some of these people had huge potential that would enable them to flourish if provided the right support.

For these reasons, I decided to more systematically explore how to support refugees and asylum seekers in their efforts to achieve socioeconomic integration. Through this effort, I also identified means and methods for the Italian government to improve its current reception and integration processes in order to better support this goal.
Paul, a 24 four-year-old Nigerian victim of human trafficking and Ali, 32-year-old Afghan mechanic, are two different types of refugees, yet both were welcomed to Italy and offered international protection. But the type of assistance they need differs dramatically. While Paul needs longer-term psychological care, Ali would benefit from repairing trucks as quickly as he can, which he did before being forced to flee war.

Paul and Ali are fictional characters, but their cases reflect a pressing need in the Italian immigration system: reception and integration programs should be appropriately targeted and tailored. This approach would help increase the refugees’ chances of assimilation in Italy and more efficiently use the resources allocated to this cause.

Moreover, given the political situation currently taking place in Italy, where populist far-right nationalist movements are gaining popularity by leveraging the failure of refugee integration programs and stoking fear among the population, it is essential to restore order and confidence in Italy’s migration system by taking steps to counter extremist narratives and provide opportunities for migrants to integrate better in Italy, while also benefiting Italian society as a whole.

Methodology and Literature Review

To answer the question, “What is the best, most systematic way for refugees and asylum seekers in Italy to achieve socioeconomic integration?” I used a combination of
statistical measurements combined with an in-depth exploration of primary and secondary sources. I consulted research from distinguished scholars on the subject of integration such as Ana Damas de Matos and Thomas Liebig,¹ Christian Dustmann and Joseph Gorlach,² Zubaida Haque,³ and Georges Lemaitre,⁴ among others, as well as discussion papers that provided added information, seeking to learn what are the main factors for successful socioeconomic integration.

I also explored numerous information sources from best-in-class countries that are experienced with refugee integration, including Australia, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, as well as carefully articulated reports from the European Union and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). To learn from Italy, I consulted official documents from the Italian government and studied the legal framework to understand the obligations of the government when receiving asylum seekers in Italy. I looked through official reports from immigrant reception facilities and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For quantitative information, I consulted surveys and data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),

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the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and statistics from the EU and the OECD.
Chapter II

The Problem

In 2015, more than one million people crossed the Mediterranean into Europe, fleeing their homes and dire situations in places like Syria, Libya, and Iraq, in search of a better future. While this is only a fraction of the numbers who remain displaced within the region, it represents a spike in refugees on European soil of a scale not witnessed since the Second World War.

![Figure 1. Main Sea Migration Routes.](image)

Source: Chwastyk and Williams, 2015.

Due to its geographical position and its proximity to the North African coast, Italy was one of the countries most affected by the unexpected arrival of asylum seekers
crossing the Mediterranean Sea on their way to Europe.\(^5\) Between 2014 and 2016, this route became more prominent as the possibility of crossing via other routes to the European Union (EU) gradually faded. Political turmoil in countries like Libya caused a general weakening of borders and coastal control, opening opportunities to people-smuggling organizations.\(^6\) From 2014 to 2018, 650,000 asylum seekers arrived in Italy.\(^7\)

Based on data from the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance, during the same period, expenditures for the reception of refugees and asylum seekers amounted to over 10 billion euros.\(^8\)

Italy differs sharply from other destination countries such as Germany, Sweden, or the United Kingdom, due to its challenging economic and labor market conditions, and weaker institutional capacities for labor market integration.\(^9\) Why then do asylum seekers choose to remain in Italy? The answer is simple: because they do not have another choice. This is largely due to the Dublin Regulation, signed in 1990, which states that the first country an asylum seeker enters upon his/her arrival in Europe is where he/she is required to apply for asylum. The Dublin Regulation limits possibilities for refugees to integrate elsewhere by imposing legally binding restrictions that prevent them from

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working longer than three months in any other European country other than the country of arrival. UNHCR has argued on numerous occasions that this interferes with the legal rights and personal welfare of asylum seekers, including the right to a fair examination of their asylum claim and, where recognized, to adequate protection. At the same time it produces an uneven distribution of asylum seekers among countries within the EU.

In 2014, irregular entries into Italy reached a historic peak (170,100), accounting for over 60% of total illegal crossings into the EU.\(^{10}\) Syrian citizens constituted the predominant nationality of arrivals in Italy that year (followed by Afghan and Iraqi citizens).\(^{11}\) From 2014 to 2016 the ethnic composition changed, shifting to asylum seekers coming from sub-Saharan countries. Among these, most were Nigerian citizens (about one-fifth of the applications filled), Gambian, Malians and Senegalese comprising 9.5%, 8.0%, and 6.9% of the total, respectively.\(^{12}\)

Refugees that arrive in Italy are younger (81.7% are between 18 and 34, while only 52% of migrants into the EU-28 countries are in this age group). They are predominantly male (87.8% into Italy, compared to 70.2% into the EU).\(^{13}\) The level of formal schooling among migrants coming to Italy is quite low (an average of 7.5 years of


\(^{11}\) Policy on EU refugee quotas: refugees can be relocated from Italy (and Greece) to other EU countries. However, the quantity has been minimal (12,700 in 3 years) and can apply only to applicants for whom their average recognition rate of international protection is above 75%. Currently, three nationalities have such high recognition rates: Syrians, Eritreans, and Iraqis. See: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/press-material/docs/state_of_play_-_relocation_en.pdf.


education). However, many speak one or two European languages such as English or French. Even though their skills are limited, they have experience in manual labor industries and the agricultural sector.\textsuperscript{14} Consequently, if these young people can be helped to overcome their traumatic experiences in fleeing their former countries and their turbulent journey to Europe, they can contribute to the host country’s economy.

\textsuperscript{14} Achilli, et al., International Organization for Migration, 37-40.
Chapter III
The Opportunity

Refugees are resilient people with marketable skills and a strong motivation to rebuild their livelihoods. Their desire to create a better life makes them ambitious, committed, and enthusiastic, demonstrating a strong work ethic and a willingness to learn—all qualities that employers highly value.15

Benefits of Integrating Refugees into the EU

For host countries, there are many benefits of welcoming and integrating refugees. Contrary to common belief, and according to economic data, refugees do not take over native population jobs. Instead, they tend to replace the local population in jobs that the local population is no longer attracted to, such as low-skilled and informal jobs, particularly in the service sector: hotels, restaurant, tourism-related services, as well as labor-intensive jobs with high seasonal fluctuations in sectors like farming and construction.16 In their absence, these sectors would probably face severe labor shortages,17 which occur when there is a demand for labor in a particular occupation but a

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lack of workers to perform that job. This can happen for various reasons: lack of qualified workers, worker preferences, a regional mismatch, or lack of information about job vacancies.

From a demographic perspective, the grim reality for Europeans is that the number of working-age people in the EU-28 is shrinking while the number of those retired is expanding. Data show that the median age of the EU-28 population is currently of 43.1 years; in Italy that number is 46.3 years—the worst ratio within the EU. Consistently low levels of fertility over many years have contributed to population aging, as fewer births lead to a decline in the number of young people in the total population.18 This change in the demographic composition of the EU will lead to rising demand for household and care services, as the demand for more low-skilled service jobs will emerge but will not be met by the shrinking native population of working age. At the same time, the refugee newcomers will contribute their taxes to the fiscal, pension, and welfare systems.

Although the benefits of integrating refugees can be many, it is important to highlight that when refugees have the same qualifications as natives, there may be an adverse effect on a segment of the host population, potentially contributing to unemployment. This has been the case in Turkey where Syrian refugees have displaced native workers in the informal sector.19 However, if productivity increases due to the


more efficient allocation of labor, then the demand for resident labor increases.\textsuperscript{20} In the case of Italy, from 2015 and throughout 2016, the increase in foreign employees showed a connection with the growth in native employment. This research found that non-nationals were not competing with nationals for jobs; instead, they replaced the local workforce in trades where younger generations were no longer interested, thus freeing them to move into upscale job opportunities.\textsuperscript{21}

Finally, it is important to note that refugees that arrive at a host country with a set of qualifications may lose their skills if they remain outside the formal labor market for a long time. This de-qualification undermines their future job prospects and potential contribution to the host country’s economic growth.\textsuperscript{22}

\section*{Defining Integration}

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines refugee integration as:

\begin{quote}
A dynamic and multifaceted two-way process which requires efforts by all parties concerned, including a preparedness on the part of refugees to adapt to the host society without having to forego their own cultural identity, and a corresponding readiness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome refugees and meet the needs of a diverse population.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{22} Münz, et al., What are the Migrants’ Contributions to Employment and Growth?” 10.
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\textsuperscript{23} UNHCR Executive Committee, “Conclusion on Local Integration,” No. 104 (LVI), 2005.
\end{flushright}
As the definition states, there is a wide array of factors to take into consideration for the topic of refugee integration: providing a fair and efficient asylum process; followed by dignified accommodation and access to education and health services; to integration measures such as teaching the host country’s language, coaching, and vocational training in order for refugees to access job opportunities.24

Scholars Alastair Ager and Alison Strang developed a framework for examining integration measures for refugees relative to four overall themes called “markers and means,” which are not only important individually but also collectively because they allow for other means of integration.25 Although all the dimensions outlined in their framework are important, my research focused on the employment dimension. In this regard, throughout this document, I refer to the term socioeconominc integration to mean the capacity of refugees and asylum seekers to access employment opportunities (whether formal or informal, full-time and part-time, internships, etc.) and explore the key variables that can influence or contribute to the access of employment opportunities.

24 The emphasis on these factors can be traced back to the 1951 Geneva Convention, with its specification of social rights for refugees in terms of employment, social welfare, education, and housing (United Nations, 1951).

Employment is consistently identified as a critical component of integration success, since it is tied to other measures of social integration: promoting economic independence, encouraging social connections by interacting with country nationals, learning the country’s cultural norms, providing opportunities to develop language skills, restoring self-esteem, and encouraging autonomy.  

When refugees are asked what makes them feel integrated, employment is one of the two main concerns.  

In the EU and other

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27 UNHCR, “A New Beginning,” 76.
advanced economies, refugees have, on average, lower labor force participation rates, employment rates, and wages than natives.\textsuperscript{28}

The economic integration of refugees in the recipient countries’ labor markets typically tends to be slow; the earning and employment gaps are pronounced in the years immediately after arrival and diminish with time spent in the host country, as they improve their language skills, obtain more relevant job experience in the host country and build a personal network that can facilitate access to employment.\textsuperscript{29}

\textbf{Figure 3. Employment Rate of Refugees vs. Native-Born Population.}

Source: OECD, 2018.


\textsuperscript{29} Georges Lemaître, The Integration of Immigrants into the Labour Market: The Case of Sweden. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 48, OECD 2007: 16
In this regard, labor market integration should be viewed as a spectrum, with labor market exclusion on one end, improving to more or less tolerated informal employment, to formal qualifications of the worker on the other end.

Figure 4. Share of Employed Migrants in Temporary Employment.
Source: OECD, 2018.

Figure 5. Phases of Effective Integration of Refugees.
Source: OECD, 2018
Barriers to Integration

The socioeconomic integration of refugees and asylum seekers is one of the main challenges for host countries. According to the literature I reviewed, the poor performance of refugees in the labor market can be only partially attributed to their lack of qualification or skills. There is consensus among scholars that the following variables have a vast influence over refugees’ employment outcomes.

Language

The most significant barrier that prevents refugees and asylum seekers from starting to work in the host country is language. The lack of language skills restricts social interaction and economic activity. The UNHCR notes: “The individual, no matter their former status, is invariably grounded, made dependent, and isolated by their lack of language.” Knowledge of the host-country language is a powerful determinant of labor market outcomes. In a study on labor market integration from the EU, going from beginner to intermediate level of language doubles the employment rate of refugees. In a similar study from the OECD, findings show that there is a gain in employment of 28 percentage points for refugees who have a basic to intermediate knowledge of the host

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31 UNHCR, A New Beginning, 89.

Therefore, the better the command of the host country language by refugees and asylum seekers, the brighter their employment prospects will be.

Many countries in the EU have incorporated this learning into their integration policies. Germany, Norway, and Sweden, among other countries, require refugees and asylum seekers to take mandatory language lessons in order to be granted access to the labor market. In contrast, in Italy learning Italian is not compulsory; in fact, it is only offered in a limited network of reception centers and small NGOs. In a survey from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), learning Italian in order to find a job in Italy is one of the most cited barriers for migrants.

Education and Job Experience

Good education is a driver of higher employment outcomes and a necessary condition for successful labor market integration. However, according to research, the return on investment in higher education in terms of better employment prospects is lower for refugees than for the rest of the population and only works when combined with supportive integration measures such as Italian lessons, coaching, and vocational training.

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Regarding job experience, and according to a survey from IOM, 40% of the 1,309 refugees interviewed during the survey had stable jobs in their countries of origin.\(^{36}\) The largest occupational group among refugees was skilled manual labor; 25% of respondents declared having a job in this category in their country of origin. Examples of typical jobs are: mechanics (20.7%); construction-related jobs (14.5%); metal workers (11.9%); and tailors (6.7%). Other migrants (22%) worked in the agricultural sector. Among unskilled manual workers, the most frequently cited jobs were: drivers (18.3%); cleaners (5.8%); and waiters (3.8%). The remainder (51.4%) was self-employed, mostly shop owners or people working in a family shop.

Furthermore, some migrants worked during their journey to Italy, often picking up new skills in the long journey to Europe. Unfortunately, this experience is generally not valued by employers in the host country.\(^{37}\) In order to reverse this trend, initiatives that focus on early access to training programs in the labor market (internships or apprenticeships, where refugees can access job opportunities to demonstrate their skills) are key to achieve successful economic integration.\(^{38}\) In Sweden, early employment experience acquired through temporary employment agencies enhanced refugees’ prospects for longer-term employment in the domestic market as employers favored domestic work experience.\(^{39}\)

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\(^{36}\) Achilli, “Study on Migrants’ Profiles,” 42.

\(^{37}\) Damas de Matos, and Liebig, “The Qualifications of Immigrants.”

\(^{38}\) Tanay and Peschner, “Labour Market Integration of Refugees,” 15.

Unrecognized Skills

A specific constraint encountered by skilled migrants is unwillingness to recognize their qualifications. Many refugees are unable to produce proof of previous qualifications, so under-employment (defined as holding a job that requires a lower level of skills or qualifications than those possessed by the jobholder) is a common factor in the experience of refugees and asylum seekers in the Italian labor market. In comparison, based on empirical evidence from Germany, when foreign degrees are recognized as equivalent to German ones, employment improves by 23%, reduced job-skills mismatch by 32%, and wages increase by 28% compared to immigrants who did not ask for their skills to be recognized.40

Chapter Summary

In order to gain access to the host country labor market, refugees must overcome a series of barriers. One of the most important ones is learning the local language since fluency in the host country language largely determines the prospects of employment, above the level of education.

My thesis research found that learning Italian helped refugees overcome other barriers such as gaining early access to training opportunities, demonstrating their skills and work experience, building rapport with country nationals, and understanding local norms and culture.

Chapter IV
Arrival in Italy

When asylum seekers arrive in Europe, they have the right to apply for international protection.\textsuperscript{41} The request is examined by a Territorial Commission, (entities that examine and take decisions on all international protection requests) which, after a long process that finishes with a hearing, decides if it will grant protection and the type of protection to be granted. Overall, 2016 asylum acceptance rates in Italy were 45.5\% of requests versus 60.8\% in the EU-28 countries. By 2018, the numbers had declined considerably: 33.3\% for Italy, and 40\% for EU-28 countries.\textsuperscript{42}

Regarding the time of response for an asylum request, in theory a response is legally required to arrive within six months from the submission of a request, extendable to nine months in cases where complex questions must be assessed, or a large number of requests are presented simultaneously. However, in practice, it takes much longer. According to the Ministry of the Interior, in 2014 the average time for a decision from the Commission on Refugees was 346.5 days, although by 2016 that number was lowered to


\textsuperscript{42} ANCI, Caritas Italiana, Cittalia, Fondazione Migrantes, Servizio Centrale dello SPRAR, in collaborazione con UNHCR. \textit{Rapporto sulla protezione internazionale in Italia}, 2017: 88. See also: Samaek, et al., \textquotedblleft The Integration of Refugees in Italy, Greece, Hungary,\textquotedblright  23; Eurostat, \textquotedblleft Final asylum Requests Decisions.\textquotedblright
180 days.\textsuperscript{43} This slow response time and subsequently slower integration severely affects migrants’ economic and social integration and ultimately results in higher costs to the receiving country.\textsuperscript{44}

An asylum seeker in the EU can access three forms of international protection: political refugee under the Geneva Convention, Subsidiary protection, and Humanitarian authorization. In the EU-28 countries, 60.2\% of the type of protection granted in the three years between 2014 and 2016 was based on the Geneva Convention, just under one third corresponded to the subsidiary protection, and the remaining 7.5\% corresponded to the residence permit for humanitarian reasons. In Italy, in contrast, the use of humanitarian protection equals about 50\%, while status under the Geneva Convention is just 14\% on average.\textsuperscript{45}

Arrival Process in Italy

When asylum seekers arrive in Italy, they officially enter the country through hotspots, reception facilities located near the main ports of disembarkation where pre-identification, registration, photo, and fingerprinting operations take place.\textsuperscript{46} See Figure 6 for an illustration of the process.

\textsuperscript{43} Notes of the Parliamentary Committee on implementation of the Schengen Agreement.

\textsuperscript{44} Dustmann, “Economics of Temporary Migrations,” 36.

\textsuperscript{45} Ballatore, et al., “I rifugiati e il richiedente asilo in Italia, nel confronto europeo,” 15.

\textsuperscript{46} According to Law 142/2015 which became law in September 2015, and regulates the entire Italian reception system. It does not substantially modify the previous reception system. It has two stages: first, asylum seekers are placed in first aid and reception centers (CPSA), accommodation centers (CPA), or temporary centers for emergency reception (CAS). In the second stage, they are moved to protection centers for asylum seekers and refugees (SPRAR).
After an initial assessment, migrants applying for asylum are transferred to the first reception centers or regional hubs, migrants who are not, are sent to the Return Centers for Repatriation. The regional hubs are conceived as large, regional facilities used in the early phases of reception for migrants who have expressed their will to request protection. They function as short-term facilities for registration, identification, and formalization of asylum requests and should only remain in these centers until their
asylum request is determined. If the asylum request is positive, asylum seekers should be channeled toward the second reception centers called Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR).

However, since the peak of arrivals of asylum seekers in the period of 2014-2015, the Extraordinary Reception Centers (CAS) were introduced as a sort of hybrid reception center to solve the lack of space in the former SPRAR. CAS facilities host hundreds of people and only provide essential services such as food and accommodation. These centers are managed on direct assignment of the prefectures, who publish periodic tenders for the allocation of the management of centers. Currently, 80% of asylum seekers arriving in Italy are transferred to a CAS.

In comparison, SPRAR centers consist of a network of managing entities integrated by the government, municipalities, and NGOs that set up and run projects with the primary objective of ensuring an integrated reception that goes beyond the provision of board and lodging. This integrated reception includes Italian lessons, orientation measures, legal and social assistance, and socioeconomic support (registration to the municipality, obtaining a fiscal code, and legal orientation to work, among others.) smoothing the transition from a refugee to becoming a resident in the host country.

47 Legislative Decree, n. 142/2015, Article 9.

48 According to Legislative Decree 142/2015, they should be only open when “accommodation capacity normally available is temporarily exhausted”, and must be arranged “for a reasonable period, limited to the time strictly necessary for the transfer of the applicant to a government reception center or a second reception structure. SPRAR,”Art. 18, par. 9, Directive 2013/33.


Although this successful program has been growing steadily in recent years, it has never grown in scale; currently, less than 20% of asylum seekers in Italy are placed in a SPRAR.

The Ministry of the Interior is the body responsible for deciding where to place asylum seekers based on a system of regional quotas that considers variables such as population, GDP, and number of refugees already hosted by each region. Based on these criteria, the Ministry decides which region will host the new arrivals and advises interested prefectures to find the necessary places. Since most reception centers are full, the prefectures have become accustomed to using the only instrument at their disposal to deal with the problem in a relatively short time: calls to open the CAS centers. Although this mechanism served the purpose of solving the asylum seekers’ placement in the short term, the Centers are not sustainable in the long run since asylum seekers are placed in facilities that are not efficiently equipped to provide the longer-term support they need. However, there is an exception for vulnerable population, who would typically be placed in reception facilities with better services. For the remaining asylum seekers, the lack of proper integration support threatens their chances to assimilate into Italian society.

Moreover, migrants that could have been integrated into society in a shorter time are dragged down by a system that surrounds them with people who may have suffered trauma or violence, who might require special assistance. Therefore, the current model is not only inefficient in achieving good results but can also be detrimental for many

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51 Legislative decree 142/2015.

52 Article 14(1) and (3) LD 142/2015.

people. Finally, poor integration and bad experiences are not the only consequences of this approach, as funds allocated by the state are spent inefficiently.

Costs of Hosting Refugees and Asylum Seekers

From 2014 to 2018, Italy disbursed 17,380 billion euros to support the migratory crisis, of which 10,141 billion euros was directed toward reception facilities and integration measures. The rest was divided between search-and-rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea (28.6%), and health and education (20.2%), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Costs of Hosting Refugees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Search and rescue</td>
<td>981</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>871</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reception and Integration</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>1,400</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>2,832</td>
<td>3,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and education</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>559</td>
<td>624</td>
<td>590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (in billions)</strong></td>
<td>€2,204</td>
<td>€2,735</td>
<td>€3,430</td>
<td>€4,363</td>
<td>€4,648</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual cost per year</strong></td>
<td>€33,360.07</td>
<td>€26,350.78</td>
<td>€19,518.14</td>
<td>€23,768.79</td>
<td>€26,842.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 2015, from the total amount directed to reception, 81% was distributed among CAS (74%) and regional hubs (7%), while the remaining 19% was allocated to the SPRAR centers. The average yearly reception cost for a refugee staying in SPRAR facility was of 13,492 euros versus an average of 11,372 euros in CAS and regional hubs. The additional cost in SPRAR centers varies from 20–25% from 2015 to 2018. For 2015, the weighted average cost of reception was 11,775 euros per asylum seeker per year. If
reception costs are added search and rescue, and health and education, the total cost per asylum seeker is approximately 26,350 euros per refugee per year.

According to the numbers from Table 1, the estimated “cost of better integration” (where all asylum seekers would be hosted in SPRAR centers and enjoy the benefits of staying in these facilities) for 2015 would be an additional 350 million euros (4,600 euros per person per year, for 76,600 people staying in a CAS)—a 13% increase in the overall budget.

Since the number of asylum seekers arriving in Italy has decreased considerably over the last two years, the budget for hosting them should have decreased significantly. According to authors Corradi, Emmi, and Villa, reduction in the influx of refugees has been far greater than reductions in the budget; with fewer refugees, the estimated savings was 1.0 to 1.4 billion euros for 2018, well above the estimated 350 million euros needed to upgrade the “cost of better integration.” Even though directing more funds to reception does not mean integration will happen miraculously (since opening SPRAR facilities entails much more complexity and coordination than just more investment), this exercise is a good example of the current investment needed for improving the socioeconomic integration of refugees and asylum seekers.

Furthermore, when comparing the expenditures that Italy directed to refugees in 2015 against those disbursed by Germany in the same year, the results are striking, since Italy’s costs per refugee are 48% higher. Although part of this difference is explained by the additional costs of search and rescue in the Mediterranean (without search and rescue, Italy is still paying 6% more per asylum seeker), the fact that Germany is a best-in-class

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country in the field of refugee integration shows that there is room for Italy to invest its resources more efficiently and thus achieve better results.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the process that asylum seekers must go through when they arrive in Italy. Although receptions centers such as SPRAR are reasonably well prepared to host and integrate asylum seekers, and provide Italian lessons and other integration measures, emergency reception facilities like CAS have altered the distribution mechanisms of asylum seekers across the country, harming their integration and wasting government funds.
Chapter V
Analysis of Barriers

After learning about the major barriers that impede the socioeconomic integration of refugees, then reviewing the process that refugees go through when they arrive in Italy, the next step is to identify the main barriers that hinder refugees’ access to job opportunities in Italy. To answer this question, I performed a causal analysis that explores the immediate, underlying, and root causes of the problem in order to understand some potential solutions.

Causal Analysis

In Table 2 below, I identify the main barriers that impede refugees and asylum seekers’ efforts to access job opportunities in Italy. These are:

- lack of mobility (external and internal)
- a difficult Italian labor market
- inefficient labor matching (i.e., a mismatch between labor supply and demand)
- the asylum seekers limited skills.

I will discuss each of these factors in more detail in the following pages.
Table 2: Barriers to the Economic Integration of Asylum Seekers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Problem</th>
<th>Barriers of the economic integration of refugees &amp; asylum seekers (AS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immediate Causes</td>
<td>Lack of mobility – AS are not in the right place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underlying Causes</td>
<td>Lack of coordination within the EU members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unequal exposure to the migratory crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inefficient distribution of AS across the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Root Causes</td>
<td>High political cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fragmented EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AS are distributed by space availability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Lack of Mobility*

The lack of mobility has dual significance. First, externally it refers to the limited choice that asylum seekers have as to which EU country they would like to remain in. As explained earlier, the Dublin Accord hinders asylum seekers’ free movement across EU countries. The *underlying* causes of this issue are the lack of coordination and agreement between the countries that comprise the EU block, combined with the burden of a
migratory crisis that is not shared equally. The root causes are the high political costs of receiving asylum seekers, since some countries fear asylum seekers might disrupt society and become a burden on taxpayers. The second factor is an internal lack of mobility. Since asylum seekers that arrive in Italy are not appropriately targeted and are distributed across the territory according to space availability, this harms their chances to elsewhere for better job opportunities.

Difficult Labor Market

The second barrier shown in Table 2 is the difficult Italian labor market. Some of the underlying causes of this problem are rigid labor laws, which make it difficult to hire employees because if a company no longer needs the refugee’s services, it is costly and legally complicated to let them go. This labor rigidity encourages employers to hire employees informally, but employees hired under this scheme lack the proper mechanisms for legal protection, and can become potential victims of exploitation.

At the same time, it hurts national economic growth since the taxes from employers and employees are not collected, thus forcing the government to raise taxes even further on law-abiding businesses and individuals, and placing an even more substantial drag on the economy.

Inefficient Labor Matching

Labor matching refers to the process whereby employees (supply) are matched with job opportunities (demand). An inefficiency in labor matching refers to the lack of knowledge as to where the supply and demand are. The immediate cause could be
explained by a lack of knowledge about where job opportunities are, coupled with an absence of information about the refugees and asylum seekers’ background. This scenario becomes even more complicated when refugees and asylum seekers have little or no access to networking opportunities. In Italy, the types of jobs that are more easily available to refugees (e.g., hotel, restaurants, other jobs in the service sector, and construction) are mostly heard about through “word of mouth.” Therefore, if refugees do not have access to social networks, they remain isolated, thus hindering their chances for socioeconomic integration.

One way to improve this process is by mapping the job needs and labor shortages across Italy while also collecting socioeconomic information from refugees, such as skills and work experience. This information then could be used by Italian authorities to guide the distribution of refugees and asylum seekers to regions with employment needs and shortages. Additionally, regional governments could work in partnership with the private sector and employment agencies to improve coordination between the supply and demand for labor.

Asylum Seekers’ Limited Skills

The fourth barrier is refugees and asylum seekers’ limited background, especially if they have little formal education from the countries they left behind, where access to education and economic opportunities may have been scarce. This scenario, combined with a lack of useful integration, explained by the limited resources of the Italian government (and inefficiently spent), greatly restricts the refugees’ access to job opportunities.
Prioritization of Initiatives

In the previous section, I identified the main barriers that impede refugees from achieving socioeconomic integration in Italy. In this section, I have selected three root causes and recommend potential solutions (see Table 3).

Table 3. Root Causes that Impede Refugees’ Socioeconomic Integration in Italy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immediate Causes</th>
<th>Root Causes</th>
<th>Difficult labor market</th>
<th>Inefficient labor matching</th>
<th>Asylum seekers’ limited skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of mobility</td>
<td>AS are not in the right place</td>
<td>High political cost</td>
<td>No socio-economic information collected</td>
<td>Political unrest that leads to lack of opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS are distributed by space availability</td>
<td>International context*</td>
<td>Lack of coordination between public and private sector</td>
<td>Lack of proper integration measures*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS are distributed by space availability</td>
<td>Political gridlock</td>
<td>Low digitalization Traditional reach by word of mouth</td>
<td>Scarse resources &amp; Inefficient allocation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: thesis author (based on Table 2)

Table 4. Summary of Root Causes with Potential Solutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immediate Cause</th>
<th>Root Cause</th>
<th>Potential Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of mobility</td>
<td>AS are distributed by space availability</td>
<td>Improve the current distribution of asylum seekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inefficient labor matching</td>
<td>No socioeconomic information collected</td>
<td>Collect socioeconomic information from asylum seekers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asylum seekers’ limited skills</td>
<td>Lack of proper integration measures</td>
<td>Provide integration measures. E.g., Italian lessons.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: thesis author
If we look at the root causes of the barriers presented above, we can observe a wide range of areas that (in the hypothetical case of trying to solve them all) would imply a high level of complexity due to their diverse nature. Therefore, I narrowed my focus to root causes in which the Italian government can exercise some degree of control, that are not extremely expensive, and that are relatively easier to implement. As a counter-example, for the dual barrier “Lack of mobility,” there is minimal room to maneuver for the Italian government to change the Dublin agreement, since that involves a broad range of stakeholders from the EU and such efforts would require vast coordination and political will. However, Italy can improve the internal lack of mobility among refugees and asylum seekers by improving their distribution across regions (without overburdening some regions), plus directing them to places where they can benefit from their skillset and job experience.

The second cause that I focus on is inefficient labor matching. One way to solve this inefficiency is by collecting information about job needs and shortages at the local, regional, and national levels, and to collect socioeconomic information from asylum seekers, then use this information to channel refugees to regions where they can maximize job opportunities.

The third root cause that I will develop further is the asylum seekers’ limited skills. Although the Italian government cannot exercise much control regarding the backgrounds of refugees and asylum seekers, it can provide adequate support such as education and training, that would equip the refugees to look for jobs. One key avenue of support is providing Italian language lessons. Currently, Italian is only taught in SPRAR
centers, leaving the other 80% of asylum seekers who arrive in Italy without a critical tool to help their integration efforts.

Once data collection systems are in place to gather information about supply and demand, the government can send asylum seekers to the most suitable region where labor needs match their socioeconomic background. Furthermore, once they arrive at the right place, they should be able to access Italian language lessons, allowing them to better leverage other integration tools to maximize their employability.

Theory of Change

In the previous causal analysis and subsequent prioritization exercise, I identified the root causes of the barriers that keep refugees from achieving socioeconomic integration in Italy. Then I focused my analysis on recommendations for possible solutions. To understand if the solutions I proposed will achieve the expected outcome of improving the socioeconomic integration of refugees and asylum seekers in Italy, I have built a theory of change, which is shown in Figure 7 below.
In Figure 7, I outline a theory of change that helps to understand how the proposed solutions would address the problem. Next, I further develop three key activities:

1. collect information from asylum seekers
2. distribute asylum seekers more efficiently
3. provide asylum seekers with the support needed to achieve better outcomes.

Figure 7. Theory of Change to Validate Proposal for Improving Economic Integration of Asylum Seekers in Italy.

Source: thesis author.
These activities aim to bring immediate good results by obtaining critical socioeconomic information from asylum seekers, feeding it into a process that would direct them to the right places, and help them receive the appropriate support. This will, in turn, allow them to access job opportunities, fill labor shortages, and ultimately achieve economic integration in Italy.
Chapter VI

The Solutions

After explaining my proposed recommendations in the Theory of Change, I will describe how these recommendations can improve the current reception process by explaining the role of each step. The process contemplates the following activities outlined in Figure 8:

Figure 8. Process to Improve Socioeconomic Integration of Asylum Seekers in Italy.

Source: thesis author

The process begins with mapping the labor needs and shortages in Italy are located. Although I will not develop this topic in-depth, I will review relevant information about the Italian labor market, with a focus on foreign workers. Next, I will explain a data collection exercise that gathers socioeconomic information from asylum seekers. This exercise considers characteristics related to skills, occupation, and work experience. This is followed by improvements to the current distribution system by analyzing which regions are overburdened and hosting more than a fair share of asylum seekers, and suggesting an ideal distribution. Finally, when asylum seekers arrive at the
designated places, integration measures would follow. I will make some final recommendations on the best way to provide this assistance.

Step 1: Map Labor Needs in Italy

In order to maximize job opportunities for asylum seekers in Italy, I focus on supply and demand. Mapping labor needs and shortages at the local, regional, and national level will help evaluate which industry sectors would benefit most from asylum seekers’ experience and skills. Next, I will present a brief introduction to the Italian economy and the participation of foreign workers in the different sectors of the economy as a good method for understanding which sectors of the economy could employ refugees. I chose to use information from foreign workers because there is a lack of reliable data on refugee participation in the labor market.

Economic Outlook in Italy

Italy is the third-largest economy in the Eurozone, and the eighth-largest in the world. It relies primarily the services and manufacturing industries, which employ 65% and 30% of the country’s active workforce, respectively. The remaining 5% are employed in the agricultural sector.⁵⁵

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The country is divided into a highly industrialized and well-developed northern region, where approximately 75% of the nation’s wealth is produced; the southern region is less-developed and more agriculture-dependent. As a result, unemployment in the north is lower and per capita income higher compared to the south. Italy also has a sizable informal economy, which by some estimates accounts for as much as 17% of GDP. These informal jobs are most common within the agriculture, construction, and service sectors, where most of the refugees and asylum seekers are employed.

Italy has suffered from an economic downturn since the 2008 financial crisis, although a recent recovery in 2015 brought meager growth of 1% growth, and by 2018 growth was only 0.9%). In addition, there were improving labor market conditions, and unemployment decreased to 10.7%, lowering a striking 13% at the end of 2014. This had a dramatic effect on youth unemployment, when more than two-fifths of the population between 15 and 24 years had no job.

Participation of Foreign Workers in the Italian Economy

Most migrants are employed as dependent workers (86.6% of the employed compared to 74.8% of Italians) and blue-collar workers (76.6% compared to 30.7%). Only 8.6% of foreign employees are clerical workers compared to 35.9% of Italians.

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The main labor market sectors where foreigners can participate are agriculture, small companies, urban services, construction jobs, and domestic work.\textsuperscript{60} Foreign workers find work in these sectors owing to the scarcity of national labor and working conditions. Due to the asymmetrical composition of the Italian economy, models of inclusion in the labor market vary across regions (see Table 5).

Table 5. Employment Patterns in Italy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models of employment of migrant labour in Italy</th>
<th>Metropolitan economies' model</th>
<th>Seasonal activities' model (Southern Italy)</th>
<th>Seasonal activities model (Central and Northern Italy)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Territories</td>
<td>Third Italy, Eastern part of Lombardia</td>
<td>Large cities (especially Rome and Milan)</td>
<td>Agricultural and partially tourist areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>Small and medium sized industries</td>
<td>Low tertiary, building sector, personal services and families</td>
<td>Agricultural enterprises; (restaurants and hotels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities carried out</td>
<td>Stable factory work</td>
<td>Service personnel</td>
<td>Harvesting (workforce for tourist seasons)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrants involved</td>
<td>Men with low professional qualifications</td>
<td>Men and a remarkable number of women</td>
<td>Mainly men, daily and season workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incidence of irregular work</td>
<td>Scarce in industry, higher in the building sector</td>
<td>Remarkable (domestic work, personal assistance, building sector)</td>
<td>Very high in Mediterranean agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focal points</td>
<td>Demand for skilled labour; difficulty in having qualifications recognized</td>
<td>Difficult to improve conditions especially for women; self-employment</td>
<td>Move from irregular to regular work; access to social rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consolidating employment status; possible development of self-employment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The amount of total employment for foreign workers in 2017 was 10.5%. Of that number, the highest participation occurred in the service sector (community, social and personal services) at 37.3%, followed by hotels and restaurants (18.5%), agriculture

\textsuperscript{60} Ambrosini, “The Role of Immigrants in the Italian Labour Market,” 62.
(16.9%), and construction (16.6%). The majority of foreign workers work as employees, and more than 70% hold positions as manual workers.\textsuperscript{61} Figure 9 provides details.

The regions of Italy with the highest incidence of employers who hired foreigners were Trentino-Alto Adige (35.7%), Emilia-Romagna (29.2%), and Tuscany (26.7%). In contrast, the percent of employers was lower in most of southern Italy, particularly Sardinia (5.6%), Sicily (10.7%), and Campania (10.0%).\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{61} Eighth Annual Report, Foreigners in the Italian Labour market, 3.

\textsuperscript{62} Eighth Annual Report, Foreigners in the Italian Labour market, 8.
Importance of Foreign Employees in the Italian Labor Market

In the last few years, the importance of foreign employees in the Italian labor market has emerged strongly, not only because of the importance that foreign workers have had and continue to have in the performance of specific tasks, but also by the compensatory effect they have played in the recovery of the economic crisis. From 2015 and throughout 2016, increased foreign employment added to growth in Italy’s employment.63

It is important to stress that given the peculiar structure of unemployment in Italy, non-nationals have little impact on competition with nationals for jobs. Instead, foreign workers replace local workers in many sectors where those locals and the younger generations are no longer interested in taking some types of jobs.64 For example, in the dairy sector of Lombardy, immigrants from the Punjab region of India have successfully inserted themselves into this sector of the Italian economy, carrying on the traditions and continuing production in this key industry sector.65

Projected Economic Outlook, 2030–2050

One of the major brakes on Italy’s long-term growth will be the country’s low labor participation rates. Projected net immigration is expected to be insufficient to halt the continuing decline in the working-age population through 2050. Italy’s labor market participation rate is expected to rise from the current low level of about 66%, but


64 European Monitoring Centre, “Migrants, Minorities and employment in Italy.”

increasing only moderately, reflecting the growing number of women joining the workforce and a gradual rise in the minimum retirement age. However, participation will remain well below the OECD average of ~72% in 2017, which will be insufficient to prevent an annual average decline in the labor force of 0.6% from 2018 to 2050.66

Section Summary

In this section, I presented a brief introduction of Italy’s economy and the participation of foreign workers in its various sectors. I also highlighted the importance that foreign workers played in the country’s economic recovery over recent years, and the broad aim to open a window of opportunity for refugees to be considered in the labor force by contributing their skills and job experience to an economy facing the challenges of an aging society.

Step 2: Improve the Distribution of Refugees and Asylum Seekers

One of the major dilemmas facing the Italian reception system is that some regions host an unfair share of asylum seekers compared to other regions. This imbalance affects the goodwill of the host regions, causes overcrowding in the intake centers, has adverse effects on the social order, and increases the political cost of hosting refugees.

66 Economic Intelligence Unit, “Report on the Italian Economy.”
However, distributing refugees efficiently and fairly across the country is no easy task; the key is to balance flexible choice for refugees about where they would want to settle, coupled with access to quality job opportunities.67

To avoid a scenario where most asylum seekers want to settle in border regions and big cities, many countries have established dispersal policies to ensure an even distribution across the country. Germany, for example, established the “Königstein key” system which distributes asylum seekers across the German states based on tax-raising capacity (two-thirds) and population (one-third). Denmark’s municipal dispersal system relies on population but adds criteria such as the number of non-citizens in a municipality or the personal characteristics of migrants and potential family ties. In OECD settlement countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, United States), resettled refugees are distributed to specific communities, although the allocation depends more on welcoming capacity than on equalizing factors.

In Italy, the distribution system is based theoretically on a system of regional quotas that considers variables such as population, GDP, and the number of refugees already in each region. In reality, however, the system is based on available space in local reception centers. According to the EU, the distribution of asylum seekers should be based on objective, quantifiable, and verifiable criteria that reflect the capacity of the countries to absorb and integrate refugees, with weighted factors reflecting the importance of four criteria:

- size of the population (40%) as it reflects the capacity to absorb a certain number of refugees;

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67 Dustmann. The Economics of Temporary Migrations, 36.
- total GDP (40%) as it reflects the absolute wealth of a country and thus indicates the capacity of an economy to absorb and integrate refugees;
- average number of spontaneous asylum applications and the number of resettled refugees per one million inhabitants over the period 2010-2014 (10%) as it reflects efforts made by Member States in the recent past; and
- unemployment rate (10%) as it reflects the capacity to integrate refugees.

Based on these recommendations, I gathered numbers for the current distribution of asylum seekers per region in Italy (taking into account all the reception facilities in place) and reorganized it following the criteria described above, to a maximum cap equal to \( \leq 1\% \) of the total population of the region.

Table 6 below shows all the regions that constitute the Italian territory, with the number of refugees and asylum seekers hosted in each respective region. Column 4 reflects the actual weight of reception for each region (for example, Lombardia is hosting 15% of refugees and asylum seekers in Italy). In column 5, I calculated the criteria described above, taking into account each regions’ population, GDP, unemployment, and refugees already in place. Columns 6 and 7 present the relative and absolute differences between the refugees they host versus the new criteria. The final number is adjusted taken into account the remaining refugees from the Valle d’ Aosta region, where I implemented the rule of maximum cap equal to \( \leq 1\% \) of the total population.
Table 6. Improved Distribution of Asylum Seekers in Italy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total of AS in the region</th>
<th>Actual weight</th>
<th>New criteria 40-40-10-10%</th>
<th>Relative difference</th>
<th>Absolute difference</th>
<th># AS regions should host</th>
<th>Final number per region (adjusting for 1% rule)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North East North West</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lombardia</td>
<td>23,391</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>-17%</td>
<td>(4,021)</td>
<td>19,370</td>
<td>20,067</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piemonte</td>
<td>14,136</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>-22%</td>
<td>(3,155)</td>
<td>10,981</td>
<td>11,343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valle d’Aosta</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1641%</td>
<td>5,021</td>
<td>5,327</td>
<td>1,262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liguria</td>
<td>5,788</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-23%</td>
<td>1,336</td>
<td>7,124</td>
<td>7,359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veneto</td>
<td>13,769</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>-14%</td>
<td>(1,937)</td>
<td>11,832</td>
<td>12,222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trento/Trentino</td>
<td>2,806</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>129%</td>
<td>3,621</td>
<td>6,427</td>
<td>6,639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friuli Venezia Giulia</td>
<td>5,040</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>1,412</td>
<td>6,452</td>
<td>6,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emilia Romagna</td>
<td>12,399</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>-9%</td>
<td>(1,059)</td>
<td>11,340</td>
<td>11,714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toscana</td>
<td>12,479</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>-19%</td>
<td>(2,366)</td>
<td>10,113</td>
<td>10,447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umbria</td>
<td>3,204</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>1,837</td>
<td>5,041</td>
<td>5,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazio</td>
<td>14,992</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>-9%</td>
<td>(1,389)</td>
<td>13,603</td>
<td>14,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marche</td>
<td>4,623</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>1,663</td>
<td>6,286</td>
<td>6,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abruzzo</td>
<td>3,738</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>1,967</td>
<td>5,705</td>
<td>5,893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molise</td>
<td>3,413</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>1,118</td>
<td>4,531</td>
<td>3,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South and Islands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campania</td>
<td>14,386</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>-15%</td>
<td>(2,132)</td>
<td>12,254</td>
<td>12,658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puglia</td>
<td>11,844</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
<td>(2,418)</td>
<td>9,426</td>
<td>9,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calabria</td>
<td>7,263</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-8%</td>
<td>(557)</td>
<td>6,706</td>
<td>6,927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basilicata</td>
<td>2,526</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>2,076</td>
<td>4,802</td>
<td>4,754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sicilia</td>
<td>13,581</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>-16%</td>
<td>(2,229)</td>
<td>11,332</td>
<td>11,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sardegna</td>
<td>5,524</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>1,213</td>
<td>6,737</td>
<td>6,959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>175,188</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>175,188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: La “prima accoglienza” degli immigrati: la gestione del fondo nazionale per le politiche e i servizi dell’asilo (2013-2016) sezione centrale di controllo sulla gestione delle amministrazioni dello stato Deliberazione, March 7, 2018, 131.

In the table, the northwest regions, Piemonte and Lombardia, together have 7,200 more asylum seekers than they should be hosting. According to the criteria presented above, Valle d’Aosta should be hosting 5,327 asylum seekers, but that number represents 4% of the total inhabitants in the region. To address this, I applied the rule of the ≤1% maximum cap, and the new total is 1,262, while the rest has been equally distributed among the rest of the regions. The northeast regions of Trentino and Friuli Venezia Giulia together host 5,000 asylum seekers less than their respective weight, while Veneto and Emilia Romagna have an extra 3,000 refugees. In Central Italy, the most affected region is Tuscany with an extra 2,400 asylum seekers, followed by Lazio with 1,600. The remaining regions in Central Italy—Umbria, Marche, Abruzzo, and Molise—host 1,600
refugees less, on average. Southern Italy hosts fewer refugees (except for the regions of Basilicata and Sardegna), below 7,500 refugees in total.

It is worth mentioning that although the northern part of the country tends to be more developed and have more job opportunities, this exercise has estimated the absorption capacity by considering each region’s GDP per capita and unemployment rates. Nevertheless, the distribution of refugees in Italy is flexible enough to allow refugees to move freely across the territory to find better job opportunities. The only limitation to this free movement is that refugees have to leave their reception facility and then must find another place on their own.

Step 3: Develop a Data Collection System

Once the labor needs have been mapped, the next step is to incorporate the socioeconomic information of all asylum seekers and refugees into the decision-making process for distribution across Italy. To do this, it is crucial to collect information early in the asylum process, starting right at the hotspots, where the refugees arrive into the host country. There asylum seekers can be identified and registered, and continue the process across the different reception stages. This process includes collection, processing, and analysis of data through a mix of quantitative and qualitative techniques, including questionnaires, online tools, and key informant interviews.
When asylum seekers arrive at the hotspots, they go through a complex process that includes high flow of information and numerous stakeholders such as government bodies, international organizations, and NGOs. Besides special treatment for this vulnerable population, the asylum seekers are treated equally and are distributed to reception facilities in regions where space is available. Figure 10 illustrates the current system of handling refugee flows into reception centers.

![Figure 10. Current Flow of Reception Process in Italy.](image)

Source: thesis author

Recommendations for Changes in the Current Process

Figure 11 illustrates my concept of an improved intake and integration process. My recommendations for improving this process begin with collecting socioeconomic
Figure 11. Improved Flow of Reception Process, Based on My Proposal.

Source: thesis author

information right after asylum seekers have complied with all ordinary asylum procedures and have proved their grounds for asylum. Subsequently, asylum seekers would be asked a series of questions focused on education, skills, livelihoods, competences, former occupations, income-generating activity (if any), perceived strengths and weaknesses, and aspirations and preferences for work. This information will be collected by experienced interviewers in an online tool that is comprised of preset categories shown in a drop-down menu (see Table 7).
Table 7. Example of Collection Tool with Asylum Seekers’ Information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work experience</th>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>A1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical</td>
<td>Cleaning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Construction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>mothertongue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: thesis author

Response information will be grouped in a centralized database that will “match” the labor needs and shortages previously identified with suggestions to the territorial commission (i.e., the government body that decides where the asylum seeker should go) as to the most suitable region for the asylum seeker. Each region would receive a pool of individuals that will fit their requests, plus a group of asylum seekers with no qualifications/education, who would need to be trained and educated. Vulnerable populations would be equitably distributed across all regions. During the first phase of collection, the questions asked will be straightforward in order to maximize the use of time and avoiding generating bottlenecks in the hotspots. The goal of this first phase of collection is to determine the most suitable region for asylum seekers to be transferred to, based on their education and experience.

It will be important, however, to provide asylum seekers with the right amount of time and space to settle into the host region. Once asylum seekers arrive in the regional hubs, the second phase of data collection will begin: asylum seekers will complete an online skills assessment, such as those used by many public employment services from other European countries (e.g., Germany, Netherlands, Denmark). This assessment
focuses on “transferable skills” (i.e., generic skills and personal attributes that make the person suitable for a particular job), and is intended to pull together a comprehensive picture of each asylum seeker’s competencies and help them recognize the skills they possess so they can leverage them in several potential occupations. The assessment also helps refugees understand which areas should be developed further if they want to work in a specific labor segment (i.e., where valid foreign qualifications are needed or specific training). Figure 12 shows an example of the skills assessment questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language &amp; Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many years did you attend school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was your favorite class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many languages do you speak?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Skills: (List competency of all languages used in the following areas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking/understanding:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading/writing:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you learn them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you speak Italian?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you like to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What skills do you have? /In what activities you are good at?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you done anything to help people in your community or something you have done to help a friend or someone in your family?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have any specific strength?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like to talk to people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you like to use a computer or your cellphone?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What was your occupation or profession in your home country?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many years you have work as “profession/occupation described above”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was involved in this job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What part of the job did you like most?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you like to continue doing your job in Italy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your job aspirations in Italy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think are the main barriers that prevent you from accomplishing them?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12. Example of Skills Assessment Questionnaire.

Source: UK, Skill Audit for Refugees; EU Skill Assessment tool.
It is important to note that these tools are also designed to function in many different languages, which means interviewers and participants can interact at the same time together and make the interview process more efficient. The goal is that all the socioeconomic information from asylum seekers remains in a centralized database, for all organizations involved in refugee integration to access (including national authorities, employment assistance services, education organizations, social services, charities, and NGOs). This will help to avoid duplication of tasks (plus time and resources), and ensure that all stakeholders are connected and working efficiently. It is worth mentioning that the proposed database will only contain socioeconomic information of asylum seekers, and would not contain restricted or sensitive information that could expose asylum seekers to any harm.

After asylum seekers’ information is entered into the system, they can start by using their wait time to learn Italian or to participate in various trainings. If they are ready to work, they can start job-hunting while waiting for asylum-application decisions and further transfer to SPRAR centers. This process of data collection could be led by UNHCR or another implementing partner with vast experience in profiling refugees and asylum seekers, working in coordination with the Italian government.

Another option could be to include a fast-track procedure for specific professions that are missing in the country. In Sweden, the government launched fast tracks to speed up the entry into the labor market for skilled immigrants. This initiative was coordinated between the government, trade unions, and employers’ organizations, and includes guidance, skills assessment, validation/ recognition, work placements, training, apprenticeships, and language learning. Fast-tracks in Sweden exist for 30 professions
(cooks, butchers, preschool teachers, and several regulated professions within the health-care sector such as doctors, nurses, and dentists). The involvement of employers (and trade unions) in the development of fast tracks can be considered as a good practice example. The initiative received a highly positive response from employers and social partners, and resulted in tri-partite cooperation. Public employment services monitoring showed that participation numbers in fast tracks are gradually increasing. In March 2017, there were 3,540 people who started a fast track as of January 2016. After 13 to 15 months, 33% of the participants were employed in the food industry, and 52% in the truck driving sector.68

Step 4: Italian Language Lessons and Other Integration Measures

Once asylum seekers are transferred to SPRAR centers in a region where they can maximize their potential, the full process of integration will begin. Italian law states that asylum seekers can start working immediately while their refugee status is being assessed. However, my proposal includes mandatory Italian lessons with a minimum approval grade of A1 to be able to work (basic users level, able to communicate in everyday situations using common expressions and elementary vocabulary).69

68 Konle-Seidl, “Integration of Refugees,” 38.

69 The Common European Framework of Reference offers Levels A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, representing the learner’s mastery of listening, speaking, and writing, from a more basic level to mastering the language. Level A1 corresponds to basic language use, where people communicate in everyday situations with commonly used expressions and elementary vocabulary.
If asylum seekers obtain a grade of B1 (intermediate level) or higher, they are able to access to other benefits such as specific language classes and IT training. In this system, asylum seekers who are ready to work would still have to go through a series of preparation steps in order to be fully prepared to work in Italy. In my proposal I have included analysis of the cost of integration; should such costs not be possible, agreements could still be made at the local level with schools, universities, and NGOs that could provide classroom and online classes.

Refugees also have attend vocational training and employment orientation that will help them understand and deal with cultural differences. Municipalities that host SPRAR centers have actively participated in mapping their labor needs and shortages, so they would work closely with companies, chambers of commerce, associations, unions, and employment services to support refugees with training and early access to the labor market. These could come in the form of internships, training programs, and volunteering, allowing refugees to validate their skills and start slowly contributing to the local economy. Figure 13 summarizes the integration process, stakeholders, and responsibilities for the socioeconomic integration of refugees and asylum seekers.
The entity responsible for coordinating this process will be the National Coordination Board, a body established by the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration in the Ministry of Interior. This board oversees the management of migration flows, optimization of systems for the reception of asylum seekers, and the
coordination of regional boards. The Coordination Board works closely with all levels of government, volunteer sector, and the territorial commissions, and is responsible for the drafting the National Operational Plan. This plan is an analysis of the international migration scenario, and covers future projections and assessment of the impact of migration flows to Italy, as well as assessment of the distribution and capacity of reception centers and data collection. In order increase the chances of success of this proposal, it is crucial to include the Ministry of Labor as a key member of the coordination board to ensure labor needs are taken into account in the distribution, reception and integration measures.

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70 The Board is chaired by the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior, who is appointed to deal with immigration, and also includes the Head of the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, who may stand in for the chairman. This body consists of a representative of the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, a representative of the Department of State Police, a representative of the Ministry of Labour, a representative of the ANCI, a representative of the UPI, and a representative of the Conference of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces. There is also a representative of the Minister for Equal Opportunities, a representative of the UNHCR, a representative of the National Commission for the right to asylum and, if required, also a representative of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the IMO and eventual representatives of other administrations or parties concerned with the subjects handled.
Chapter VII

Conclusion

After working with refugees and asylum seekers in Rome and witnessing first-hand the challenges they face when looking for a job, I spent several months studying the main barriers that prevent them from accessing job opportunities. This enabled me to identify solutions that the Italian government could implement in order to help refugees achieve socioeconomic integration.

With this aim, I explored learnings and evidence from renowned scholars and analyzed case studies from multiple countries. These findings helped me confirm that language is the main barrier hindering refugee socioeconomic integration and the first item in which Italy should invest. Other integration measures such as recognition of qualifications and early access to the labor market in the form of internships or training programs are also essential for helping refugees demonstrate their skills and job experiences and counteract market bias asymmetries.

To suggest improvements in the current reception and integration process, it was first critical to understand and acknowledge that Italy was one of the European countries most affected in the last refugee crisis due to its proximity to the North and East Africa migration routes. Although Italy had implemented key integration policies (such as legal access to work shortly after asylum seekers submitted their asylum request) and had launched the SPRAR model (placing communities at the center of the planning, reception, and integration of asylum seekers), the dramatic increase in the number of
refugees in 2015 caught Italy off guard and unprepared to sustain or expand this model. This forced the country to take an emergency approach that placed asylum seekers in large facilities with no clear plan for further integrating them into the country.

Four years have passed by, and the number of asylum seekers arriving has slowed considerably (for now), thereby reducing the level of emergency and paving the way toward a transition phase. This slowdown offers the country an opportunity to re-think the role it wants to play in receiving asylum seekers. Large facilities like CAS should be gradually closed, and SPRAR centers should be encouraged and supported, since socioeconomic integration should start at the local level with the full support of the communities, the private sector, and local NGOs.

Ensuring a fair distribution of refugees and asylum seekers among regions, and taking into consideration labor needs and shortages in the equation, is critical since communities hosting refugees need to see value in hosting refugees, beyond their ethical duty, because refugees have the right to self-reliance. Moreover, when both factors are combined, refugees are in a position to contribute to the economic growth of communities where unfavorable demographic trends pose a significant risk to the future of the local economy.

Coordination efforts with stakeholders are crucial and should be promoted; NGO, charities, religious organizations, and others involved want to contribute, but conditions are not entirely in place for this to happen. Lack of information about who is doing which tasks is detrimental to the efficient investment of time and resources toward integration. Building an online platform or database containing the refugees’ socioeconomic information, together with a clear plan for economic integration will be critical to
avoiding duplication of tasks and ensuring that all stakeholders are adding value toward the same goal. This will also help make the most of the investment destined for integration.

Finally, all integration programs in place should measure a series of indicators based on outcomes, since these will help determine whether their programs are producing the desired results and if they can be replicated. Research on long-term results of different approaches and conditions should also be encouraged, so everyone can learn what are the best initiatives to implement so funds can be directed to them.

While writing this proposal, I always kept in mind my desire to propose solutions that were reasonably easy to implement, and – taking into consideration Italy’s economic situation – also not too expensive. Now that the emergency has stopped, this is an excellent time to put the country’s house in order and leverage the government’s savings (due to decreased numbers of asylum seekers) to implement the improvements suggested in this proposal. Of course, this pause may only be temporal, since living conditions in countries like Mali, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Northern Nigeria, and Burkina Faso among others, can quickly deteriorate under a mixture of extremism and severe climate change effects. If European countries wants to stop migration, they need to address the root causes of these problems, work closely with African governments and institutions, and make this subject a priority in the world geopolitical agenda.
References


La “prima accoglienza” degli immigrati: la gestione del fondo nazionale per le politiche e i servizi dell’asilo (2013-2016) sezione centrale di controllo sulla gestione delle amministrazioni dello stato Deliberazione 7 marzo 2018, n. 3/2018/G p.131


SPRAR. Manuale giuridico per l’operatore de la tutela del richiedente asilo, 2008.


