

# Italy's Mixed Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Written by Augusta Nannerini

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

## Italy's Mixed Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

<https://www.e-ir.info/2023/05/03/italys-mixed-response-to-the-syrian-refugee-crisis/>

AUGUSTA NANNERINI, MAY 3 2023

**This is an excerpt from *Policy and Politics of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Eastern Mediterranean States*, edited by Max O. Stephenson Jr. & Yannis A. Stivachtis. You can download the book free of charge from E-International Relations.**

The most evident steps undertaken by Italy to show solidarity with Syrian refugees in the aftermath of the crisis is the resettlement program run by the government and the humanitarian corridors led by civil society, both started in 2015. These programs did not begin as explicit responses to the war in Syria, but most of their beneficiaries were individuals fleeing the Syrian conflict who had found refuge in neighboring countries. In this chapter, I shed light on the context, purpose, and structure of these humanitarian programs. However, as not all the Syrian asylum seekers reach Italy through these means, I begin my discussion by giving an account of other ways through which Italy manages asylum and migration, under a logic influenced by security concerns to protect the borders of the country. By doing so, I also provide the reader with much-needed information about the context of migration and asylum policies in Italy, including the EU influence on them, and I explain the difference between the security and humanitarian logic that shape the Italian response to the Syrian refugee crisis.

In discussing these different logics, the chapter identifies two main forms of governance. The first is influenced by the urge to prevent or stem irregular migratory flows from crossing the borders of the country. To this category belong the bilateral agreements signed with Libya to control migration fluxes, and actions undertaken to stop boats carrying migrants and asylum seekers rescued in the Mediterranean Sea from docking in Italian ports. This form of governance affects the lives of those refugees who arrive in the country without pre-arranged official agreements with Italian organizations, and it materializes a category that I call 'spontaneous arrivals'. The second form of governance, on the other hand, pertains to all the initiatives to bring refugees and asylum seekers to Italy through administratively organized channels. This form includes the Italian resettlement scheme and the initiative of the

Humanitarian Corridors and constitutes a category that I call 'administrative arrivals'. In the rest of this chapter, I focus on elaborating these distinctive forms of governing and responding to migration and asylum, which together illustrate that there is not just one Italian response to the Syrian refugee crisis and that there is internal tension among these different forms of governance and consequent categories.

This chapter is based on desk research and semi-structured interviews conducted between September 2020 and February 2021. I completed 12 interviews with representatives of NGOs, an International Organization and Italian government staff, at the Ministry of the Interior and the central service of the 'Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani' (ANCI), the Italian National Association for Local Authorities. Interviews were not taped. I took notes and transcribed them before writing my analysis. They took place over the phone or via Zoom calls, and lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour and 15 minutes. To ensure confidentiality, interviewees are kept anonymous and direct quotations are not attributed. Interviews were used to inform my own understanding and for suggesting additional relevant documents that I could include in my research to consult already existing data.

### The Category of Spontaneous Arrivals

By spontaneous arrivals, I address the category of refugees that arrive in Italy without being included in safe and

# Italy's Mixed Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Written by Augusta Nannerini

legal pathways to claim asylum. Asylum seekers that belong to this category are subject to different application procedures to assess their claims and, to a certain extent, they enjoy different treatments and access to benefits compared to the ones that arrive in Italy through other means. To be understood, the processes and reasons why this category of refugees materializes need to be explained within the complex political debate around Italian migration and asylum policies, where one of the most divisive and dramatic topics of discussion is the humanitarian crisis taking place at the Italian Southern maritime borders, part of the so-called 'Central Mediterranean Route' to reach Europe. According to official statistics, in 2021 Italy witnessed more than 67,000 arrivals to these areas, and at least 1,552 people died or went missing during the journey along that route (ECRE, 2021).

In this context, one way to respond to this high level of migratory flows includes attempts to prevent migrants and potential asylum seekers from reaching Italian territory. This way of managing migration has historically been part of the Italian Foreign Policy strategy, way before the Syrian war started. It dates to the Italian cooperation with Libyan authorities under Muammar Gaddafi and the bilateral agreements that came with it – the most emblematic being the so-called 'Treaty of Friendship' signed in 2002 (effective in 2008), where Italy agreed to build a motorway in Libya as a compensation for the Italian domination over Libya in its colonial past (Paoletti 2010). As part of the agreement, in addition to economic cooperation, Italy provided Libya with military forces to control sea departure and to construct four migration detention centers. In exchange, Libya committed to accepting Italian- apprehended individuals back into its territory (whether to its soil or territorial waters) intercepted during that country's naval patrolling operations (Paoletti 2010).

Since its inception, bilateral cooperation with Libya has never stopped. Human rights organizations and the UN have documented and criticized the Libyan detention centers' appalling conditions (e.g., Human Rights Watch 2021). Still, their concerns have never shifted Italy's policy of seeking to control its southern borders by recurring to these sorts of bilateral agreements (Easo 2021). In February 2020, the Memorandum of Understanding between Italy and Libya was renewed, even though an Italian Criminal Court ruled that it was not in conformity with the Italian Constitution and international law, and despite the fact that it had been criticized by several organizations including the Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration (ASGI), and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (Aida 2021). To justify and contextualize this policy, however, one should also keep in mind that the EU policies towards Libya and migration are also very similar to the Italian agreement (Amnesty International 2022). Part of the refugees that belong to the category of 'spontaneous arrivals,' therefore, are those who manage to go beyond this preventive Italian and EU strategy and reach Italian soil to lodge their asylum claim.

Cooperation between Italy and Libya was heavily affected by the death of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, and, especially when the number of arrivals and shipwrecks skyrocketed in the aftermath of the political instability in the country. Several Search and Rescue (SAR) operations have since been put in place by Italian institutions and independent civil society organizations. These initiatives are important because they show the different trends in place in the country to respond to migratory crisis, and present initial evidence to explain why the main claim of this chapter is that the Italian response to the Syrian crisis has been 'mixed'.

For example, one of the most noteworthy exceptions in the ways of governing migration and asylum by Italian authorities can be identified in the 2013 decision of the Italian government to launch Mare Nostrum, a humanitarian and military mission aimed at patrolling international waters (i.e., not only within the Italian jurisdiction), to search for, and rescue, migrants and asylum seekers and disembark them on Italian soil. The initiative was launched as the Italian response to the humanitarian crisis following a terrible shipwreck on 3 October 2013, involving migrants coming from Libya that resulted in more than 300 deaths. Operation Mare Nostrum highlights the tensions created between the securitization of borders and the humanitarian imperative of saving lives and shows how the forms of migration governance in Italy has always alternated between security and humanitarian concerns, even before other EU states experienced the consequences of the Syrian refugee crisis. More recently, many other examples of SAR took place in the Mediterranean, but most of them encountered several difficulties in obtaining permission to disembark their passengers in an Italian port.

Another aspect that Operation Mare Nostrum helps to explain is the importance for the Italian government of negotiating cooperation and support with the EU Member States and institutions, both to share the responsibilities

# Italy's Mixed Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Written by Augusta Nannerini

towards refugees, under the humanitarian imperative, and to keep the EU borders safe, in line with security concerns. The Prime Minister at the time of Mare Nostrum, Enrico Letta, launched the mission under the expectation that EU institutions or its individual member states would also decide to participate, either by sharing with Italy the financing of the operation or by offering support in processing asylum claims, dealing with the relocation of refugees and repatriation of failed asylum seekers (Fondazione Migrantes 2013). In this sense, Mare Nostrum is a good example of an attempt of 'Europeanisation' of Italian asylum policies.

Europeanization is an important concept through which to consider Italian migration policies. In the academic literature, it is described as a phenomenon that aims at understanding and justifying the 'issues of causes' that connect policy changes at the domestic and European levels. (e.g., Olsen 2002, 291). Since it is a vast category, which is not 'itself a theory' (Bulmer 2007, 47), discussing Europeanisation requires a distinction between a 'top-down and bottom-up' approach (Caporaso 2007). In the top-down version, the analysis starts from the EU level, explaining the consequent adaptation to EU policies at the domestic level. The bottom-up stance starts from the national level, examining domestic policy transfer and influence at the European level. Mare Nostrum was an excellent example of a bottom-up Europeanization attempt, but in this case, one that failed. The EU did not join the mission. The government that proposed the operation fell out of power, and the new Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi, decided to end Mare Nostrum and support a smaller EU-funded mission, called Triton (Caffio 2014).

The concept of Europeanization is of critical analytical importance because Italy remains one of the 'doors' to the EU. How it manages its borders needs to be interpreted within its request for cooperation with the EU to ensure security, fight smuggling and human trafficking, protect the right to asylum, and protect its borders. Failure of extending Mare Nostrum at the EU level sheds light on the repeated, and unanswered, calls by the Italian government for more substantial political and pragmatic support in managing migratory flows. Other attempts include calls by Italy to establish an EU-wide relocation system for asylum seekers and migrants that reach national soil by sea, as well as to reform the Dublin system, particularly by changing the clause of first country arrival, which is perceived as overburdening Italian reception systems (Cheli 2013; Pontieri 2014). Clearly, EU actions (or the lack thereof) keep being a key point of reference that influences the domestic political and policy debate. (Gatta and Teodorescu 2013). The next section of the chapter will explain how, in deciding to join a EU-led scheme for Syrian refugees, Italy chose to take steps towards an approach to manage migration in a EU- coordinated and funded, manner. In this sense, the decision to start the Italian resettlement program and the humanitarian corridors reflected a way of governing migration in light of the humanitarian imperative, and it also strengthened the possibility of keeping negotiation concerning asylum matters with the EU open.

At the same time, as I argue in the chapter, in joining EU actions to resettle refugees, Italy contributed to establishing a system where the way by which refugees arrive in the country determines the procedures through which their applications are processed by authorities. To a certain extent, this also affects the access to services offered by the government and civil society organizations to refugees, to facilitate their integration into Italian society. Even if the UNHCR clearly specifies that 'Article 31 (1) of the 1951 Convention prohibits the penalization of refugees for illegal entry or presence, provided they come directly from countries where their life was threatened and show 'good cause' for violating applicable entry laws' (UNHCR 2000), the ways of managing migratory flows through the lenses of security materializes a category of refugees that get to Italy in the form of spontaneous arrivals. This category is very different from the one of those refugees that arrive to Italy through other institutionalized administrative procedures, according to a humanitarian logic. The rest of this chapter explains the procedures of the Italian resettlement programs and the humanitarian corridors, explaining how through these channels Syrian refugees are welcomed to Italy as a category that I call administrative arrivals.

## The Category of Administrative Arrivals: The Italian Resettlement Program

While attempts to prevent asylum seekers and migrants from reaching the Italian territory have historically been part of the Italian migration policies, before 2015, the Italian experience with resettlement was sporadic and *ad hoc*. For example, in 2010, Italy resettled 180 Palestinians in the 'Al Tanf' camp, which used to be located in a border area between Syria and Iraq (UNHCR 2010). However, it is only with the Syrian crisis that Italy undertook substantial steps to institutionalize its resettlement program. Before that, Italy had developed two legal proposals regarding the

## Italy's Mixed Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Written by Augusta Nannerini

issue of asylum and humanitarian protection (numbers 2410 and 1390), both including the possibility of resettlement measures, and never endorsed by Parliament (CIR 2007). In policy fora, the idea of an Italian resettlement program was first discussed 2005, when the Ministry of the Interior, in collaboration with the EU Commission, funded a research project conducted by the IOM to analyze the different resettlement experiences of the United States, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, to investigate whether they could be reproduced in Italy. The study proposed establishing an Italian resettlement program called 'Piano Dante' (Di Giacomo 2005). This plan suggested that the 'comuni' (i.e., Italian local authorities), would be responsible for hosting the refugees for one year, collaborating with NGOs in independent facilities managed locally. The study was commissioned when the EU was just beginning to discuss the establishment of a joint resettlement plan and, without any certainty of EU commitment to support resettlement in the future, Piano Dante tentatively indicated that the Interior Ministry should be responsible for bearing the initiative's cost. The proposal was never implemented, due to lack of political will and institutional funding.

When, finally, in 2014 the EU Regulation No 516/2014, by the European Parliament and the EU Council, established the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF or FAMI in Italian) and offered financial incentives for member states to resettle refugees, providing 6,000 or 10,000 euros per refugee resettled, Italy decided to join the program. In the first two years, between 2015 and 2017, Italy pledged 1,989 places and resettled 1,612 persons (UNHCR 2019). In 2016, following the EU-Turkey Statement, Italy decided to use a 'share' of its first pledge to resettle Syrian refugees from Turkey (UNHCR 2019). When, at the beginning of 2017, the EU launched a call for resettlement pledges for 2018, Italy pledged to resettle 1,000 individuals and eventually resettled 871 persons. For the year 2020-2021, Italy pledged 700 places, but has resettled a minimal number (21) due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

When resettlement started to be part of the Italian institutions and supported through AMIF funds, the Ministry of the Interior established a new section to deal with the issue, known as the Department for Resettlement (Interview with staff at department on 23 February 2021). In 2015, this section had a Vice- Prefect, three external consultants, and one consultant seconded by UNHCR. In 2021, the team became more prominent and counted four external consultants, one secondment from UNHCR, and three Interior Ministry staff members. The new section was created because of the lack of internal expertise on the matter, which confirms the little experience that Italy possessed. In addition to having a staff member seconded to the Ministry, UNHCR offices in the field provide the refugee profiles that meet UNHCR resettlement criteria. The department of resettlement of the Ministry of the Interior selects the individuals proposed by UNHCR and then submits their dossiers to the security department. Once applications are approved, IOM and UNHCR are responsible for arranging for pre-departure courses and, ultimately, the journey to Italy. Because security screenings take place before departure and the criteria for assessing the asylum claim are already expected to be fulfilled, this category of administrative arrivals follows quicker and smoother procedures to regularize refugees' status in Italy. This results in a facilitated process, less difficult to navigate and experience for the refugees themselves.

The legal framework currently in use in the resettlement process is Art. 12 Comma 2 of the 'Decreto Procedure'. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, an asylum seeker needs to be physically inside Italian territory to lodge an asylum claim, so, technically, those who are resettled through the resettlement scheme do not yet have their refugee status at the time of departure. They only have refugee recognition from UNHCR and are granted a visa to travel to Italy by the government. However, once they are accepted into the resettlement program, ahead of the journey, the Ministry of the Interior alerts the Commissione Territoriale di Roma, the entity responsible for assessing asylum claims, and shares the dossiers of the asylum seekers in advance. When the asylum seekers land in Rome, they file a request to claim asylum in Italy officially (called Module C3). At this point, la 'questura di Roma,' the police headquarters, based at Fiumicino airport, notifies the Commissione Territoriale di Roma, which starts processing the dossiers that it had already received in advance from the Ministry. In this way, these resettled refugees, differently from other asylum claims of the spontaneous arrivals, do not have to present themselves at the Commissione Territoriale to introduce their case and have their first interview. They only go in person once the process ends to collect their papers. The speed of the procedure is catalyzed by the fact that security concerns have already been considered at the moment of the selection of the individuals, and therefore are not part of the logic that inform this form of governance, very different from the case of spontaneous arrivals.

# Italy's Mixed Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Written by Augusta Nannerini

The choice of countries from which to resettle is set by the EU Commission's calls, which lists some priority countries, including Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and African countries that are points of transit for the so-called Central Mediterranean route. Less significant numbers are refugees from Niger and Libya, resettled to reduce the pressure on states along the Central Mediterranean route. To increase its resettlement quota and take steps to address the humanitarian crisis in the Libya detention centers, in 2017, Italy started to collaborate with UNHCR to evacuate some individuals from the detention centers in Libya. There were six evacuations from Libya to Niger and partially to Rwanda, and two evacuations from Niger to Italy. However, these humanitarian evacuations followed a different procedure than the other resettlement processes, because UNHCR cannot conduct a full security assessment of asylum cases in the detention centers. Therefore, before departure, there are no individuals' dossiers to be shared in advance with the Commissione Territoriale in Rome. In this case, when the refugees arrive at the airport, they undergo the usual procedure to apply for asylum, the same that is applied to spontaneous arrivals. Another option is 'Education Pathways,' based on partnerships with Italian universities, but the program has resettled a limited number of individuals to date (UNHCR 2020b).

## Differences in Post-arrival Treatment

When Italy decided to engage in the EU resettlement programs, it chose to include the new resettled refugees in the already existing Italian national system of reception, the so-called 'SAI' system (i.e., Sistema Accoglienza e Integrazione, in English, Welcoming and Integration System). The SAI provides projects for integration for refugees and different forms of assistance for asylum seekers. The decision to include the resettled refugees in this system meant that the EU AMIF fund, a total of 10,000 Euros per resettled individual, is disbursed by EU institutions to the Ministry of the Interior, which then subsequently allocates it to the SAI. Local authorities are part of the SAI system in different Italian regions. The entity that assigns individuals to each local authority and is responsible for disbursing the funds to support their expenses is the 'central service' of the Associazione Nazionale dei Comuni Italiani (ANCI) (i.e., Italian Association of the National Local Authorities). The central service of ANCI connects the Ministry of the Interior and the local authorities.

Local authorities collaborate with NGOs or private entities for the implementation of the program, and the organizations arrange for refugees and asylum seekers to be hosted in common areas, private apartments or partially shared accommodations (including hotels), depending on the availability of their structures. Services provided in these facilities include Italian language, skills training, and cultural awareness. Each implementing organization is reimbursed an average of 35 euros per day for hosting one refugee that belongs to the category of spontaneous arrivals. In the case of the resettled refugees, the total per person per day can reach 80 euros, which is justified by the system because the resettled persons' vulnerabilities might need special care and assistance. The different amount distributed is one of the differences that results from the two different procedures proper to the categories of spontaneous and administrative arrivals.

Once members of a spontaneous arrivals group are in Italy and have manifested a desire to apply for asylum, they are directed to the centers of 'prima accoglienza' ('first welcoming') that is assigned to them by the ANCI central service. To do so, asylum seekers are divided into three categories: 'vulnerable,' 'unaccompanied children,' and 'ordinary' (interview with staff member on 25 February 2021). Within these categories, local authorities can decide to host one of these categories, or also sub-categories, for example accepting only 'vulnerable women'.

The group of refugees that arrive through the administrative arrivals are hosted at the SAI for one year, while refugees who arrive spontaneously can stay for six months. The six months are counted from the day that asylum seekers obtain refugee status. Asylum seekers wait in the SAI while their application is processed and then have six months of 'accoglienza' (i.e., 'welcome period') to find a job and accommodation. Individuals can extend their stays, depending on their asylum application stage (for example, in case of appeal, they can continue staying in the SAI structure). During the period in which they are part of the SAI reception system, the administrative arrivals refugees and the ones who are part of the spontaneous arrivals group enjoy the same treatment and are included in the same projects. However, as mentioned above, what differs is the length of the period they are allowed to stay.

Since 2018, at the end of the SAI period, refugees who arrive as administrative arrivals can choose to join projects

# Italy's Mixed Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Written by Augusta Nannerini

carried out by Italian civil society organizations to further facilitate their social and economic integration. The EU funds these projects through the AMIF funding allocated for integration initiatives and resettlement. Two main groups of NGOs implement them, the Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana (ARCI) (i.e., Italian Association for Cultural and Recreational Activities), and Consorzio Communitas. The projects' selection criteria include being resettled through the Ministry of the Interior program and having already been living in Italy for at least six months. There can be cases of refugees that apply to be included in the projects without having a direct SAI referral, but they all need to be part of the administrative arrivals. Notably, because most resettled refugees live in SAI located in the southern part of the country, some of the entities that work in the North struggle to reach their quota because they do not always find resettled refugees to include as beneficiaries (interview with staff on 15 December 2020). This phenomenon, that comes as a result of the different categories that created the diverse forms of governance to respond to migratory flows, is particularly paradoxical if one considers that the Southern part of the country is also the one with the highest number of spontaneous arrivals.

ARCI is the project lead of Compasso, an acronym that stands for the Italian words 'competencies' (COM-), 'passion' (Pass-) and 'occupation' (O-), and that aims to support refugees' integration into the labor market. The project is active in the region of Lazio, Campania, Basilicata, Calabria, Puglia, Sicilia, and Sardegna. Consorzio Communitas covers the rest of the country, i.e., the north-eastern regions and maintains a similar focus on employment opportunities. Consorzio Communitas counts about 23 entities that work together, and it also collaborates with Caritas. Among other things, Caritas contributes with its network of 230 parishes that have agreed to participate in the initiatives. Each project assumes different nuances in its implementation. Overall, projects can offer vocational training, support for self-employment activities, provision of educational tools, assistance in finding an accommodation that replaces the structure provided by the SAI system, help in getting a driving license and similar services. The implementing entity in the region budgets a total cost of 3.900 euros per individual for the project's duration. These projects fill a substantive gap, because without them, at the end of their time at the SAI, refugees risk encountering homelessness or labor exploitation in the agricultural sector, a very concerning example of modern slavery in the south of the country (Open Society 2018). However – given that even young Italian generations sometimes leave small urban centers in the south to find better economic possibilities elsewhere – at the end of the project, some refugees may decide to do the same and move somewhere else in the country. Families with small children are more likely to stay in the areas that welcome them at first, and in this sense, the interviews carried out for this research also discovered several positive integration experiences (interview with staff on 30 December 2020).

It is important to reiterate that the EU AMIF funding supports these projects only for the group of refugees that arrive to Italy through the administrative procedures of resettlement of the Ministry of the Interior. In practice, this model leaves out the spontaneous arrivals. Hence, as a result of the different structure and *modus operandi* of the different forms of migration and asylum governance of Italian policies, the refugees that belong to the group of the administrative arrivals, the majority of which, as I explained, are Syrians, can benefit from the state or NGOs' assistance for more extended periods than refugees who reached Italy by other means and they can be included in more organic integration projects.

## The Category of Administrative Arrival: The Humanitarian Corridors

In addition to the resettlement program run by the Italian Ministry of the Interior in cooperation with UNHCR, refugees can also reach Italy through the so-called Humanitarian Corridors. This initiative represents another channel for the administrative arrival of refugees. The negotiation to establish the humanitarian corridors started around the same time when the Italian government began its engagement with the EU funded resettlement schemes. In 2015, the Ministry of the Interior signed a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Tavola Valdese (Waldesian Council), the Community of Methodist Churches, the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI) and the Community of St. Egidio to start the first 'humanitarian corridor' (Sigona 2015; Squire 2020). In 2018, the Community of St. Egidio, Caritas, and Fondazione Migrantes started a second humanitarian corridor from Ethiopia to offer safe routes to Sudanese, Eritreans, and Somalis. (Confronti et al. 2020). In a nutshell, the humanitarian corridors are an example of community sponsorship, whereby local Italian communities assume responsibility to welcome and integrate refugees. It is a project that is complementary to the Ministry of the Interior's work for resettlement. Therefore, it is added to the quotas that the Italian government

# Italy's Mixed Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Written by Augusta Nannerini

pledges to the EU. This *additionality* criterion (i.e., the fact that the number of refugees brought to the country is 'added' to the one pledged by the government) is crucial for the humanitarian corridors' vision because it shows the desire not to free the state from its moral responsibilities to resettle refugees.

The legal framework of the humanitarian corridors is based on Article 25 of the Codice Visti, (the Italian Visa Code), which envisages the possibility of issuing a visa with the purpose of lodging an asylum claim. The process, starting from the referral from the ground and ending with a flight ticket to get to Italy, usually lasts five months, a much shorter period than other resettlement procedures, that can take up to two years from the moment a person starts the first interview with the UNHCR. The HQs of FCEI and St. Egidio in Rome receive referrals from the country where individuals are staying, assess whether to go forward with the application process, and present on their behalf the visa application to be processed by the relevant Italian authorities at the embassy. Italian authorities carry out security checks and eventually issue the visa that allows the applicant to travel to Italy. Referrals from the ground happen in different ways, depending on the network of the organization responsible for the 'corridor'. Criteria to be selected are set around the issues of vulnerabilities, enabling the organizations to understand a 'need of protection' that is less constraining than the 1951 Refugee Convention (for example, allowing for being considered as part of the category of humanitarian protection).

Most of the organizations that implement humanitarian corridors have a presence in the field to receive applications and select individuals. It is essential to review the applications, interview individuals and carry out pre-departure courses, that describe to refugees what to expect once arrived in Italy. During my interviews, one of my interviewees mentioned that the fact that the humanitarian corridors are implemented by churches, in a shorter time compared to state-led channels, risks amplifying the dynamics where the 'savior' humanitarians working for religious organizations are rescuing the 'victims' refugees to give them a better life in Italy (interview with staff on 19 November 2020). These dynamics translate into the fact that once in Italy, some resettled refugees expect the organization that brought them there look after them in a way that goes beyond the organization's capacity. Part of the pre-departure courses' mission is to explain the individuals' responsibility in undertaking the migratory journey and report all the difficulties that individuals may encounter in the future (Corridoi Umanitari 2020).

Once arrived in Italy, refugees are taken care of in the project for a period that ranges between 18 months to two years. During this time, rent and allowance for basic expenses are provided by the project, along with help with legal paperwork, vocational training, and referrals to organizations that offer Italian lessons. Refugees arrive in Rome and are then distributed to different parts of Italy, depending on the structure and partner organization that can host them. The matching between the place and individuals considers the refugees' needs, particularly their vulnerabilities. For example, in the case of health issues, the organization that sponsors the person makes sure that there are adequate health facilities in the locality where they will be hosted. Often, the organization notifies the hospital of reference in the area in advance. As with any other Italian citizen, refugees have free education for their children and access to the national health system.

The humanitarian corridors' original agreement included Lebanon, Morocco, and Ethiopia, but the project in Morocco never started and the one from Ethiopia counted very few individuals. At a later stage, Caritas also started selecting individuals from Jordan, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. De facto, most individuals that benefited from the projects fled the Syrian crisis. The most common nationalities are Syrians and a smaller number of Iraqi. One reason to explain this trend, as per the fact that most individuals resettled by the Ministry of the Interior are Syrians, is that it is almost inevitable for a Syrian to be granted refugee status in Italy. This certainty about asylum applications' outcomes removes the issues of returns of failed asylum seekers, which would waste the program's resources and overall undermine its main purpose of giving refugees a new beginning in Italy.

In four years, counting from the beginning of the project until March 2020, FCEI reported that 1896 individuals reached Italy through the first humanitarian corridors (Corridoio Umanitari 2020); 94 per cent of them had fled the Syrian crisis. Overall, the refugee portion of this category enjoyed faster resettlement and a longer period of assistance for their integration in Italy, coupled with some very supportive structural facilities to foster their self-reliance and well-being in the country. As such, the humanitarian corridors differ from the treatment for so-called spontaneous arrivals and also from the resettlement programs run by the government.

# Italy's Mixed Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Written by Augusta Nannerini

## Conclusions

This chapter has briefly described the different ways by which Italy responded to the Syrian refugee crisis. How refugees arrive in the country (or fail to do so) is the most important factor that determines the set of policies and initiatives put in place to support their stay, or to prevent their arrival in case they decide to attempt the migratory journey through spontaneous migratory routes. In addition, concerning the refugees who arrive by safe and legal pathways, a significant difference materializes depending on who is responsible for their stay, which can be the Italian governmental authorities in the case of the resettlement program or civil society and faith-based organizations in the case of the humanitarian corridors. The variety of the actors, purposes and institutional frameworks that are part of this scenario explain my claim that the overall Italian response to the Syrian refugee crisis has been mixed.

Within the analysis, this chapter has shown that the Italian response to the Syrian refugee crisis has proven to be especially complex because migration and asylum is part of the delicate Italian relations with the EU. The chapter provided a brief background of Italian ties with Libya, the way of protecting the country's sea borders from the threat of irregular crossings and explained the role that Italy's relationship with the EU has exercised in the decisions that have been taken over time. The securitization of migratory flows, embedded in the policies that restrict access to asylum in the Central Mediterranean since the implementation of the Treaty of Friendship, is entangled with the crisis of the shipwrecks that have been occurring there for more than a decade. In turn, the death of those who failed in their crossing of the sea has been co-constituting the issue of migration as a humanitarian emergency that started to be perceived in the country many years before the 2015 refugee crisis. Therefore, the logic of security and humanitarianism are intertwined in the various forms of governance of migration and asylum.

Humanitarian and security concerns have influenced very diverse policy responses, which were also affected by the initiatives of the EU institutions (or lack thereof). Examples of this variety include decisions to launch Mare Nostrum in 2013 to search for, and rescue, individuals drowning in international waters bordering Libya and bring them to Italy, which directly opposes the bilateral agreements still in place with Libya to prevent migrants and asylum seekers from reaching Italian ports. Simultaneously, these decisions were never taken entirely independently from the European Union.

For example, Mare Nostrum started with the expectation that more EU states would join the initiative and ended due to the EU's lack of intervention. With a similar logic that kept the EU in sight, the first plan for an Italian resettlement program, the Piano Dante, did not have enough support to be implemented. Italy started engaging with resettlement initiatives only in 2015, in conjunction with the EU resettlement program and AMIF funding. The renewed interest in resettlement provided the institutional framework that also enabled civil society and faith organizations to play a vital role in offering legal and safe pathways for asylum seekers fleeing the Syrian crisis.

Therefore, to conclude, the Italian response to the Syrian crisis must be understood in light of the complexity that the issues of migration and asylum represent to the country, and the many nuances that it has assumed over time in different scenarios. The research carried out to write this chapter suggests that this mixed context and policy has created the two categories mentioned above; administrative arrivals and spontaneous arrivals. Further research is needed to include the role of domestic political debates in shaping the Italian response, as well as the refugees' perspectives that are part of these two different categories, to inquire how being part of these two groups affect their lives.

## References

Amnesty International. 2021. Libya/EU: Conditions remain 'hellish' as EU marks 5 years of cooperation agreements, press release available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/01/libya-eu-conditions-remain-hellish-as-eu-marks-5-years-of-cooperation-agreements/>

Bulmer, S. 2007. Theorizing Europeanization, in Paolo Graziano and Maarten

P. Vink (eds.), *Europeanization: New Research Agendas*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 46–58.



# Italy's Mixed Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Written by Augusta Nannerini

- Caffio, F. 2014. L' Europa fra Triton e Mare Nostrum, in *Affari Internazionali*, 11 November 2014. <http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=2865>
- Camera dei Deputati. 2021. Diritto di asilo e accoglienza dei migranti sul territorio. <https://www.camera.it/temiap/documentazione/temi/pdf/1105104.pdf>
- Caporaso, J. 2007. The Three Worlds of Regional Integration Theory, in Paolo Graziano and Maarten P. Vink (eds.), *Europeanization: New Research Agendas*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 23–45.
- Cheli E. 2013. 'Immigrazione: poteri e doveri dell' UE", in *Liberta' Civili, Rivista bimestrale del dipartimento per le liberta' civili e l' immigrazione del Ministero dell' Interno*, pp. 33–35.
- Confronti, Idor, Oxfam, Federation Entraide Protestante. 2020. Sponsoring Integration. Impact Assessment of the Primary Achievements of the humanitarian Corridors Program in Italy and France, edited by Claudio Paravati and Antonio Ricci.
- Corridoio Umanitari-Una pratica replicabile. 2020. Atti della Conferenza. Report edited by Confronti, idos, and the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. [https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2020/10/corridoi\\_umanitari\\_una\\_pratica\\_replicabile.\\_atti\\_della\\_conferenza\\_-\\_luglio\\_2020\\_def-compresso.pdf](https://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2020/10/corridoi_umanitari_una_pratica_replicabile._atti_della_conferenza_-_luglio_2020_def-compresso.pdf)
- Council of Europe. 2012. Action Plan, Communication from Italy concerning the case of Hirsi Jamaa vs. Italy (Application No. 27765/09).
- Di Giacomo. 2005. Uno sguardo verso il futuro: Ipotesi per un Piano Dante. F.A.R.E. -Studio di fattibilità per un Programma di Reinsediamento in Italia, report funded by Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati, Commissione Europea, Ministero dell' Interno.
- Easo. 2021. EU-Libya Relations Factsheet, Easo website: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/19163/EU-Libya%20relations](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/19163/EU-Libya%20relations)
- ECRE. 2022. Med: Tragedy Continues as Routes Change and Situation in Libya Deteriorates Even Further, press release. <https://ecre.org/med-tragedy-continues-as-routes-changes-and-situation-in-libya-deteriorates-even-further/>
- European Council. 2013. Conclusion 24 and 25 October 2013, euco 169/13. [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/139197.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/139197.pdf)
- European Resettlement Network. 2019, Italy, website. <https://www.resettlement.eu/country/italy>
- Fondazione Migrantes. 2013. Interview with Enrico Letta, Non accetteremo compromessi al ribasso, 22 Ottobre 2013. [http://banchedati.chiesacattolica.it/pls/cc\\_i\\_new\\_v3/v3\\_s2ew\\_consultazione.mostra\\_pagina?id\\_pagina=51353](http://banchedati.chiesacattolica.it/pls/cc_i_new_v3/v3_s2ew_consultazione.mostra_pagina?id_pagina=51353)
- Gatta A., Teodorescu L. 2013. Il direttore della Rappresentanza della Commissione Europea in Italia, Lucio Battistotti, sottolinea come lo sviluppo di una politica migratoria dell' Unione Europea sia uno degli obiettivi centrali della presidenza Italiana, in *Liberta' Civili, Rivista bimestrale del dipartimento per le liberta' civili e l' immigrazione del Ministero dell' Interno*, pp. 29–33.
- Golini. 2013. Italia e Unione European nel processo di globalizzazione, in *Liberta' Civili, Rivista bimestrale del dipartimento per le liberta' civili e l' immigrazione del Ministero dell' Interno*, pp. 36–41.
- Human Rights Watch. 2021. EU: Time to review and remedy cooperation policies facilitating abuse of refugees and migrants in Libya. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/28/eu-time-review-and-remedy-cooperation-policies-facilitating-abuse-refugees-and>

# Italy's Mixed Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Written by Augusta Nannerini

Olsen. 2002. The Many Faces of Europeanization, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40 (5), pp. 921-52.

Open Society Foundation. 2018. Is Italian Agriculture 'Pull Factor' for Irregular Migration—And, If So, Why? <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/italian-agriculture-pull-factor-irregular-migration-and-if-so-why>

Paoletti, E. 2010. *The Migration of Power and North-South Inequalities. The case of Italy and Libya*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Paolicelli, M. and Vignarca, F. 2009. *Il caro Armato. Spese, Affari e Sprechi delle Forze Armate Italiane*, Milano:Altraeconomia.

Pontieri, M. V. 2014. The ABC of the Dublin regime, in *Liberta' Civili, Rivista bimestrale del dipartimento per le liberta' civili e l'immigrazione del Ministero dell' Interno*, pp. 49-52.

Sigona, N. 2015. Two Bottom-up humanitarian corridors for refugees launched, 31 October 2015. <https://nandosigona.wordpress.com/2015/10/31/bottom-up-humanitarian-corridors>

Squire, V. 2020. Corridoi Umanitari: Dignity in Motion and a Politics of Welcome. In *Europe's Migration Crisis: Border Deaths and Human Dignity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 105-133.

UNHCR. 2000. Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's programme, 18th Meeting of the Standing Committee (EC/50/SC/CPR.17), 9 June 2000. <http://www.unhcr.org/excom/EXCOM/3ae68d144.pdf>

UNHCR. 2010. Wim Wenders inspired by integration model. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2010/3/4ba7a0126/wim-wenders-inspired-integration-model-set-idyllic-town-calabria.html>

UNHCR. 2019. Resettlement Handbook. Country Chapter: Italy. <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/5d778f907/unhcr-resettlement-handbook-country-chapter-italy.html>

UNHCR. 2020. Complementary Education Pathways, UNHCR website. <https://www.unhcr.org/complementary-pathways-through-education.html>

---

## About the author:

**Augusta Nannerini** is a PhD candidate in International Relations and Political Science at the Geneva Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies and a Research Assistant at its Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding.