

Refugees Perceptions, Rights Compliance and the Implications on European Reception Policy: Results from a Survey

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Abstract This study explores the results of a survey conducted in some reception centers for refugees in Italy to assess the perceptions of asylum seekers about the administrative procedures following their application and the general conditions of reception. Our findings are also corroborated by the views of social workers, managers of the centers, officials of Italian Agencies for refugees and UNHCR representatives. We discuss the push-pull factors underlying the choice of leaving their homeland and the perils they went through during the journey to Europe. Safety emerges as the main concern of asylum seekers. The pull factors and the presence of networks of fellow countrymen turn out to be not very significant in determining the country of destination of refugees, in contrast with previous studies. Some remarks about the design of the reception system in Europe follow, since the distribution of the burden among States is far from efficient and refugees human rights might be, at times, undermined.

Keywords Asylum-Seekers, Refugee Protection, EU Regulations, Perceptions

1. Introduction

The bottom-up approach for detecting refugees viewpoint on reception systems is recently receiving broad consideration in the literature (Mehta and Gupte, 2003). It is argued that individual perceptions do matter because the implementation of policies should be shared primarily with people directly affected from decision making. Knowledge of refugees expectations allows the development of reception and integration policies that are more respectful of human rights and more effective. Hence subjective measures of well-being may represent useful proxies to assess happiness, as opposed to objective measures, drawn from measurable data such as money, wealth, social relations indicators, security (Rapley, 2003) or on statistical indicators on mortality, health, crime rate (Trewin, 2001). Some authors challenge this methodology, being strongly linked to cultural

factors (Kleinman and Good, 1985; Keith et al., 1996; Uchida et al., 2004 for reviews).

We argue that a bottom-up approach may be fruitful to re-examine the European regulations for the respect of refugees human rights and also for the efficiency of the asylum system.

Refugees burden-sharing led to European regulations which precariously balanced between the need to build a fair burden sharing between Members and refugees rights. Such rules, based on objective criteria, were primarily set upon biased beliefs concerning the determinants of refugees movements towards and within Europe. The resulting effects may not only hinder refugees rights, but also negatively affect the efficiency of the whole process of share distribution among Members. A tentative reappraisal of EC rules should rather assess the inner tendencies of refugees, whose life strongly depends from such regulations, so as to build up a shared framework for States and individuals.

Immigration policies in Europe are disciplined by the Dublin Regulation, which states that the Member Country the asylum-seeker entered at first is hold responsible for examining asylum applications and providing integration for those who received refugee status or other forms of protection later on. The residency permit applies only within the State that acknowledged the asylum claims. All this should prevent secondary movements of asylum-seekers from one country to another in search of the best reception conditions, both procedural and material (asylum shopping).

Since refugees flows unevenly hit Europe, overloaded countries complained about the unbalanced distribution of refugees, based on statistics showing that the asylum-seekers flows exceed their reception capacity (ECRE 2005, Heilbronner, 2000). Such asymmetries could originate from pull factors, for instance the presence of fellow communities of refugees in specific countries, as a result of previous admissions of migrants or the economic attractiveness (Dacyl 1995, Neumayer 2004).

Also for refugees a network theory might be persuasive (Efionayi-Mäder et al. 2001, Vogler and Rotte 2000): as migrants flow into specific countries, other migrants follow the same routes towards those countries, attracted by pull

factors (Arango 2000, Massey et al. 1998, Borjas 1994, Tilly 1990, Massey 1988).

As a consequence, Neumayer (2005 and 2004) claims that the physical reallocation of refugees on a voluntary basis would not be successful, given the unwillingness of Member States to take up a disproportionate amount of refugees. Thielemann and Dewan (2006) and Thielemann (2004) draw similar conclusions.

The Dublin Regulation has been challenged by many authors and institutions (see the study of Thielemann et al. (2010), on behalf of the European Parliament) because of the infringement of the freedom of establishment, which stands among the fundamental rights of refugees. Moreover, as peripheral countries maintain, the Dublin Regulation redirected the flows to an excessive extent, since geographical proximity may be the prevailing factor affecting the routes of migrants (Thielemann, 2012 and 2004).

In our opinion, statistical surveys based on aggregate data might not grasp the driving forces of asylum-seekers. Ex-post empirical investigations are largely influenced by reception policies already experienced by refugees. According to Thielemann, restrictive measures were mostly adopted by Member States through the years. Other authors (Rossi and Vitali, 2013, Toshkov and de Haan, 2012, Neumayer, 2004, Holzer et al. 2000) believe that the discretionary implementation of reception procedures (despite European standards) might curb asylum rights and eventually change the direction of the flows of asylum-seekers among European States. In particular, as the procedures for granting the status become noticeably less favourable in specific host countries, such information spreads rapidly among refugees, both driven by human smugglers and through connections among refugees through mobiles and the internet, as we noticed during our interviews at reception centers in Italy. Reception policies, therefore, may hugely influence refugees choices about where to enter Europe at first and whether subsequently moving across States. The bottom-up approach can indeed provide useful indications in search of a revision of the regulations that could possibly be more respectful of human rights. Further, knowledge of asylum-seekers expectations may shed more light on the debate on burden sharing, unravelling the genuine determinants of asylum-seekers movements, avoiding some distortions from pull factors presumptions.

The attempt to directly detect the refugees expectations with a survey approach has been already pursued in the literature. Grabska (2006), with reference to a sample of refugees in Egypt, highlighted the importance of their subjective perception of rights. Iversen et al. (2010) examined psychological disorders experienced by migrants, based on a sample of individuals in Norway, arguing that among them, asylum-seekers sufferings are on average worse than other migrants, mainly as a consequence of uncertainty on future standards of living. Bleaker expectations may stem from the quality of reception offered to asylum-seekers as well as the speed and fairness of the protection procedures, that could safeguard the possibilities of reception and integration. Fozdar and Torezani (2008) in a

survey carried out in Australia, found that personal security and integration matter the most among refugees, rather than focusing on the negative aspects of racial discrimination and other factors of exclusion. Discrimination hurts to a lesser extent, in particular when cultural or ethnic distance between refugees and host citizens is felt the least.

We show the results from a survey conducted in Italian reception centers CARA (Reception Center for Asylum Seekers), where refugees without identity documents or who escaped border controls, are hosted while their application is still pending. During first reception, asylum-seekers still hold fresh memories of the motivations that led them to Italy, but they start to perceive how their integration process will evolve. "Spontaneous" motivations of the asylum-seekers may arise from many factors. These include the push-pull factors that justified the journey, how the journey unfolded from departure to arrival, the material reception conditions (food, lodging, recreation, first integration, respect for religious and cultural diversity) and the first contact with the local population, the perception of the effectiveness of the procedures. Based on such premises, the asylum-seekers develop certain aspirations for their future, and the choice of the country where they will settle. The interviews and focus groups with social mediators were conducted in September / October 2009 in two reception centers in Italy, in Crotone (Kr) and Castelnuovo di Porto (Rm). These centers differ for location (Crotone is located in the south of the country, outside of a small town, Castelnuovo di Porto is close to Rome) and by type of hosts (due to the allocation policies implemented by Italian authorities). From such differences, asylum-seekers may express rather different feelings. The sample of 56 + 33 interviews was adequate with respect to the number of admissions (Crotone had 694 hosts, Castelnuovo di Porto 550), representing 7 per cent of the population. However, since the two CARAs were a small part of the reception centers in Italy, we have integrated the analysis with in-depth qualitative interviews with nearly all respondents, and focus groups with social mediators and interpreters. We completed sampling and data collection also with proper consideration of the psychological characteristics of refugees. Our sample could not be exhaustive, due to the dispersion of asylum-seekers throughout Europe and, above all, to their different areas of origin. Some results of our survey are strengthened from conversations with members of the Territorial Commissions, including representatives of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who examine thousands of applications a year. We believe that our findings can support a better policy implementation, respecting the asylum-seekers rights and enhancing at the same time a proper burden sharing in Europe. It should also be noted that attendance within the reception centers during 2009 was rather limited, as a result of refolement operations carried out by Italian authorities in the Mediterranean and a bilateral agreement with Lybia in May 2009 which reduced illegal migration across the Straits of Sicily.

The paper is organized as follows: in Chapter 2 we explore the main determinants affecting the journey of refugees, arguing that network theory may only partially explain the

behaviour of asylum-seekers; in Chapter 3 we reconstruct the conditions of their journey to Italy; in Chapter 4 we comment perception of life in the Center and outside the Center, with reference to the degree of conflict between refugees of different ethnic groups and against the staff of the Center and the Italians that live outside the Center; in Chapter 5 we report the perception of refugees about asylum procedures; in Chapter 6 we examine the expectations of refugees towards their future and observe how these, although refugees would prefer to remain in Italy, are dramatically undermined by weaknesses in the second reception. Our concluding remarks analyse the perception of the rights of asylum-seekers and how this affects their expectations about the future and their will to displace in the European territory. Some considerations then arise on the effectiveness of the European process of distribution of refugees and the implications that the current system can have on the respect of the refugees rights.

2. Factors Affecting Asylum Seekers Movements

A refugee, according to the Refugee Convention and Protocol, is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or unwilling to return to it. The driving determinants of refugee flows may therefore come from push factors that lead refugees to seek protection abroad. However, the choice of host countries may be influenced by other elements (pull factors), attracting refugees in some specific countries, such as a sound welfare, or the presence of networks of the same ethnicity.

Such discussions raised the issue of burden sharing of refugee flows, which is yet to be solved cooperatively and led EU to the so-called Dublin II Regulation in 2003 (European Regulation 343/2003/EC).

With specific reference to asylum-seekers, qualitative and quantitative studies show that once countries become popular for asylum-seekers, network effects follow, so that the more applications these countries receive, the more they are chosen as final destination from new asylum-seekers irrespective of policy restrictions. Others emphasize that the choice of the country of access is strongly affected by factors such as the history of colonization, the geographical location and the common language. One of our goals is therefore to determine whether the push factors outweigh the pull factors and what drives refugees to selected destination countries to file their applications.

As table 1 suggests, refugees are mainly seeking protection, since they left because of wars and persecutions. The economic reasons are also present, but to a lesser extent. This point contradicts some beliefs about the role of pull factors in determining the destinations of asylum-seekers.

Similarly to the previous question, three out of four individuals (on average) claimed that no choice was made about the final destination country. Only a small percentage

stressed the importance of economic reasons to justify the arrival in Italy, even considering the extreme poverty of the areas of origin of the respondents. Our data show an indirect and not fully aware process: a very small number of respondents said they already had contacts with our country and made the choice due to their family and friends or other social networks. Rather, the acquisition of further links with compatriots usually takes place after the arrival and, often, after leaving the CARA.

Table 1. Reasons for Leaving Homeland (Per Cent)

	Kr	Rm	Total
Wars	11,1	8,8	10,4
Political oppression	35,8	55,9	41,7
Individual oppression	28,4	26,5	27,8
Economic improvement	17,3	2,9	13,0
Poverty	3,7	2,9	3,5
Family reunion	2,5	0,0	1,7
Other	1,2	2,9	1,7

Table 2. Reasons for Choosing Italy (per cent)

	Kr	Rm	Total
Job opportunities	14,3	3,0	10,1
Presence of relatives or friends	3,6	0,0	2,2
Presence of social networks	0,0	3,0	1,1
Distance	16,1	6,1	12,4
Doesn't know, no response	66,1	87,9	74,2

Along other factors, geographical proximity drives asylum-seekers from African countries toward Italy. Thielemann (2004) shows that, as socio-political crises burst, refugees tend to flock towards the closest destinations. In conclusion, respondents clearly state that push factors stood as one of the prevailing reasons to leave their countries, while Italy mainly stands as a final destination country because of geographical factors or because the routes were decided by human traffickers. Finally, we emphasize the role of harsh restrictive measures in specific countries of the Mediterranean area in channelling refugees toward Italy: some interviewees showed marks of permanent beatings and stated they had not been fingerprinted (thus escaping the Dublin provisions and the Eurodac system). In many cases, therefore, a certain knowledge of the fairness of the examination process of applications may have played a role in the choice of the destination country.

3. A Brief Description of the Journey to Italy

Our aim is now to determine why refugees took certain routes to reach Italy. Mostly, asylum-seekers arrived in Italy alone and travelmates were only occasional. Assistance for planning the journey came from relatives and friends, but a significant proportion (24 per cent) of asylum-seekers claimed that human smugglers operating in their country

helped to organize the trip. Community networks of specific ethnic groups were much less influential during the travel in determining the choice of the final destination.

Table 3. Who Helped the most during the Journey? (per cent)

	Kr	Rm	Total
Relatives and friends	47,9	45,3	46,8
Community members	10,8	2,7	7,4
Human smugglers	32,5	10,7	23,5
Other	4,9	5,3	5,1
None	10,8	26,0	17,0

As means of conveyance, 70 per cent of refugees used boats, from Africa in particular, while 15 per cent of respondents, mainly from Asian countries, claimed to have used vehicles (trucks and buses). They crossed a number of countries: in some cases they stopped in intermediate countries, often for several months especially for Africans, while others were not even aware of the number of border they crossed before reaching Italy. Asylum-seekers from Africa entered Italy through a few ports of Sicily, while people from Asia have reached Italian shores on the Ionian or the Adriatic Sea.

Table 4. Means of Transport to Reach Italy (per cent)

	Kr	Rm	Total
Boat	77,4	60,0	70,2
Truck	7,9	22,0	13,7
Plane	8,8	15,3	11,5
Coach	2,0	0,0	1,2
Oil Tanker	3,9	0,0	2,3
No answer	0,0	2,7	0,1

The amount paid for the trip vary much among respondents and no correlation emerges with the length and duration of the trip. Funds were collected through working periods, specially for those coming from Africa, who stopped over labour camps in Libya, or savings, as those coming from Asia who claimed to have sold their properties to flee homeland.

Table 5. How the journey was funded? (per cent)

	Kr	Rm	Total
Family savings	58,8	53,3	56,7
Borrowings	14,7	2,7	9,8
Work	34,4	36,0	35,0
Loans from friends	2,9	10,0	5,8

3.1. Some Representative Cases

The first case we present concerns a twenty-five male from Ghana. His route to Europe lasted three years, through Togo, Benin, Niger, along a road many migrants already walked through. He then came to a halt in a labour camp in Libya for 2 years and 9 months. From the Libyan coast was then shipped to Italy, reaching Lampedusa. The cost of this last crossing, even in the testimony of other respondents, is

about \$1,000. Once in Italy, in late March 2009, he was sent to Crotona where he applied for asylum, getting a negative response from the Territorial Commission on 14 July 2009. His views about reception are mixed. He complains about the prolonged permanence at a temporary structure, and about healthcare, since only one doctor visits the community center once a week. However, he recognizes the effort made by the Italian authorities to ensure safety. After his application was rejected, he filed an appeal helped by a lawyer, while at CARA, where he is waiting for the pending outcome. His uncertainties now regard the costs of the appeal and whether he will remain at the Center or must leave after rejection of his application. If he could obtain protection he would remain in Italy looking for reception among some community of compatriots or anywhere he can find a job and some kind of accommodation.

The second case concerns two Turkish Kurds cousins who fled their country as supporters of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). They both boarded the Turkish coasts and reached Italy near Soverato, paying a considerable sum (about \$ 6,000). In their views, both the riskiness of the sea escape and the tight inspections of the Turkish Authorities hampering the expatriation of the Kurds, justified the sum. Along with other individuals from neighbouring countries (Iran, Afghanistan), they proudly stressed that they didn't fled out of poverty, rather they were considered wealthy in their own country, since they could sell a plot of land to afford the cost of the trip. Their level of education is above average and their keen desire is to start a new business, such as a barber shop. Moreover, they were informed about the possibility of obtaining some form of protection and accommodation in our country while waiting to be reached by their wives and children remained so far at home.

The third case represents a dramatic travel experience of a Somali woman, arrived at CARA in Crotona in early April 2009. As in the case of other Africans, the path is similar. She travelled through several Central African countries to converge at some labour camp in the Libyan desert. The journey was very long and, in the case of this twenty-six, lasted about six months. At the start, she abandoned her family and children and joined a caravan of people travelling along the same path. During the trip, however, the living and safety conditions, already precarious, with violence and robberies, definitely became unbearable for the weakest. Many witnessed violence against women, particularly in Africa, where local police was often accountable for sexual harassment. Nowadays she is waiting the response of the Territorial Commission and her expectations and main concern are now to find a job and send money home to her children.

4. Activities and Everyday Life Inside and Outside Reception Centers

The number of asylum-seekers within an Italian reception Center may vary over time. With regular arrivals, the permanence period is more prolonged: while refugees wait

for a response to their application, and, in some cases, the appeal, they spend their time inside the Center because they have no other place to go. During the day, refugees may also leave the Center, in observance of the rules of coexistence provided for in the Legislative Decree 25/2008.

Table 6. Relations among Asylum-seeker and Italians Outside the Center

	Kr	Rm	Total
Friends	21,6	10,7	17,1
Employers	2,9	0,0	1,7
Others	0,0	14,7	6,0
No	75,5	72,0	74,1
No answer	0,0	2,7	0,1

The hospitality is largely appreciated by guests. The assistance received from the staff working within the Center, is positively judged as well, though some aspects of daily life may show difficulties, in part due to expectations of a more comfortable reception (the quality of the food, the frequency of medical examinations) and in part related to the cultural adaptation of people from remote places. With regard to relations with the Italians living in the surroundings, three out of four asylum-seekers claim they had no contact outside the Center, but among those whose stay is the longest (or among refugees more open to socializing) the most frequent contact happens in Crotona, where guests usually spend their time outside the Center, in contact with the local population, on commercial activities, at the beach or in the city center. In Castelnuovo di Porto instead, life takes place mainly within the Center and contacts with Italians are occasional both for the distance from Rome, and because a large city is more distracting.

Greater chances of getting in touch with local people may also cause greater conflicts. 35 per cent of asylum-seekers in Crotona reported several episodes of intolerance, although none of them have been considered particularly serious. In contrast, other guests expressly declare that relations with Italians are good and, in some cases even friendly and supportive. In Castelnuovo di Porto instead, respondents reported no episodes of intolerance by the Italians, whom they rarely meet.

Yet social workers in Castelnuovo di Porto have reported some (not serious) tensions between different ethnic groups. The general reception conditions in the two Centers, the opportunity to interact with local people, the rapidity of asylum procedures and the information provided by the staff of the Center are all factors that affect the human rights of asylum-seekers. When refugees perceive that the Center does not fulfil such principles (for reasons not directly related to the organization that manages Centers), as in Castelnuovo di Porto, the degree of satisfaction of respondents shrinks and episodes of conflict with the staff of the Center or among the guests themselves are more likely.

5. Asylum-Seekers Perceptions of Procedures

Human rights compliance and the level of satisfaction about the procedures undertaken by applicant is significantly linked to the time required for the completion of the procedures and the way how these are articulated.

The period spent at the reception facilities of Crotona and Castelnuovo di Porto is, on average, equal to 108 days if we include individuals currently present at these Centers. This average number is yet strongly influenced by individuals who spend there only a very short period, due to sudden emergency situations, or just because the guest himself, being able to freely enter or exit the Center, spontaneously leave soon after entrance.

Conversely, the proportion of individuals who stay at the Center a prolonged period is conspicuous. If we exclude visitors staying for less than 10 days, 30 per cent of individuals remain for more than 180 days in Castelnuovo di Porto, 20 per cent in Crotona.

In our sample, 56,5 per cent of the individuals had already obtained a hearing at the Territorial Commission. The percentage is higher (66 per cent) in Castelnuovo di Porto, where a large number of guests remains for longer periods, waiting for their pending case. At Crotona, where the Territorial Commission is located within the Center, pending periods are shorter and the average permanence thus shrinks.

The schedule is different for rejected applicants. On average, their path from entrance to the first hearing is shorter (less than 3 months), while the time spent at the Center after the hearing is much longer. The backlogs are mainly due to rejections after the hearing at the Territorial Commission, while those who obtain refugee status, subsidiary protection or humanitarian permit, usually leave soon after the judicial hearing.

These statistics confirm that the reception facilities performs a plurality of functions, not always in line with the tasks they are responsible for according to the Legislative Decree 25/2008. The subsidiary functions of CARAs conceal the lack of a well-defined path of integration, with adequate resources. The shortcomings of secondary care often determine a relocation of refugees outside Italy, in contrast to their desires and expectations, as we found in the interviews.

Table 7. Did asylum-seekers Heard about Quarrels between hosts and Italians Outside the Center? (per cent)

	Kr	Rm	Total
Yes	35,1	16,0	27,3
No	64,9	81,3	71,6
No answer	0,0	2,7	0,1

Table 8. Knowledge of Bureaucratic Procedures (per cent)

	Kr	Rm	Total
Yes	25,0	3,1	17,0
No	75,0	96,9	83,0

Several questions were asked to capture the overall feelings of asylum-seekers on the entire reception procedure in Italy. Here “the procedure” stands for the whole bureaucratic process followed once an asylum request is

filed. Since sometimes acceptance of the request may take a very long time, we are interested in the repercussions of such difficulties on refugees perception of CARA operations and the efficiency of the procedures.

A first question asked whether the asylum-seekers knew before entering our country, and even in a non-detailed manner, the bureaucratic procedure adopted for asylum in Italy. Only a small fraction, less than 20 per cent of the sample responded positively, with a clear prevalence among them of Somalis and Iraqis.

Table 9. Assistance during C3 form Draft (per cent)

	Kr		Rm		Total	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	83,9	16,1	68,8	31,2	78,4	21,6
Linguistic	80,4		75,0		78,8	
Legal	0,0		5,0		1,5	
Both	19,6		20,0		19,7	

Actually, the information held by respondents lies on general issues and mainly relates to the awareness of reaching countries where some form of protection is awarded, rather than a transfer of knowledge gathered from friends who had experienced the same process in the past. In most cases, no tight connections emerge among migrants, so that the presence of social networks attracting asylum-seekers to specific destinations is not confirmed.

Further, individuals were asked if they had received some assistance in completing the C3 form (which is the official document where asylum-seekers initially declare their intention to seek asylum in front of the police authority) and, later, what kind of help was provided. In Crotona, 84 per cent claim they had received help in completing the form, mainly (80 per cent) due to the presence of an interpreter, while about 20 per cent also received legal support. In Castelnuovo di Porto a lower percentage of individuals maintain to have been helped in the compilation of C3 (69 per cent), while a slightly higher percentage had legal support (25 per cent).

On the assistance received during the entire process of reception by the Italian authorities, on average, 56 per cent affirmed they were much helped by the Italian Government. However, the living conditions experienced assume a decisive role in addressing the response. In Castelnuovo di Porto emerges some criticism from respondents: 34 per cent said they were totally dissatisfied (only 7 per cent in Crotona), while a smaller fraction said to be partially dissatisfied from the Italian Government. The question was deliberately placed in very general terms, where the "authorities" are no specific subject, to get an impression about the entire process.

The satisfaction of asylum-seekers does not depend much on the assistance provided during the bureaucratic procedures. A minority of individuals (46,5 per cent of respondents), among those who received bureaucratic assistance, claim they fulfilled their expectations. Neither assistance provided during the first stages of reception (i.e. the compilation of C3) strongly affects the overall opinion

on Italian authorities, nor the hearing at the Territorial Commission seems to be relevant on such behalf.

Table 10. Judgment on authorities Assistance and Intention to Stay in Italy (per cent)

	Kr		Rm		Total	
	*	*	*	*	*	*
None	7,1	100,0	34,5	100,0	16,5	100,0
Little	32,1	94,4	17,2	100,0	27,1	95,7
Much	60,7	94,1	48,3	100,0	56,5	95,8

* of which claiming to stay in Italy

We can conclude that the judgment of the respondents on the Italian Authorities is based on the overall level of security they receive while in Italy. The majority of individuals (56,5 per cent) shares positive feelings just because of protection and reception. Since we were casual viewers of some episodes of intolerance, we have learned that the attitudes of the social workers and their ability to mediate across the entanglement of procedures and the daily life in the Center matter the most. Between Crotona and Castelnuovo material conditions and access to procedures are much variable. The presence of the Territorial Commission within the CARA in Crotona allows for better information on the progress of each application and the timing involved.

6. Issues on Second Reception and Future Prospects

Once the applicant has obtained a status, the process of integration in the Italian society is ready to begin. Due to welfare conditions in Italy, some difficulties arise, due to the lack of reception facilities, or inefficiencies of the SPRAR network (System of Protection for Asylum Seekers and Refugees), as clearly shown in the 2011 ASGI report. Many refugees remain in the reception center for an extended period even after receiving the decree granting the status. The conditions of the refugee, even with a residence permit, are too often marginalized and many are induced to seek better living conditions in other EU countries. European rules then sent many of them back to Italy after being located by local authorities. All this is in stark contrast to the true desires of the refugees. In our interviews they stated almost unanimously their will to remain in Italy.

Table 11. Would the Asylum-seeker prefer to Stay in Italy or Move Abroad? (per cent)

	Kr	Rm	Total
Yes	93,2	97,3	94,9
No	4,0	0,0	2,3
Don't know	2,0	0,0	1,2
Don't answer	0,9	2,7	1,6

However, some refugees may still be inclined to move further towards destinations of Northern Europe that provide

better opportunities, and a reception that will allow them to immediately acquire a better standard of living, and consider Italy as a country of transit. The incentives to remain in one country may be categorized into four items: the job opportunities, the possibility of joining friends or relatives, the presence of a network of solidarity and support, the chance of a process of integration that improves their living conditions. The strongest incentives follows from the ability to get a job and integration on the territory. More than half of the respondents state as very important the possibility of getting a job, while 45 per cent of respondents said that a good integration is an important reason to remain in Italy. More than half of the respondents believe irrelevant the presence of the other two aspects (friends and networks).

Again, we observe that the majority of respondents wishes to perform a job in accordance with their aptitudes, often the same job they had in their own homeland. The answers show very clear and detailed intentions; only a few claim they are ready to accept whichever job is offered.

During the period of the application the asylum-seeker does not aim at a specific professional training, but a general vision about the role that can be played in the Italian society emerges. The refugee has no information and encouragement from the CARA staff, which, however, appears to be consistent with the limited means available in Italy.

Table 12. Reasons to Settle in a Specific Country (per cent)

Job			
	Kr	Rm	Total
Very important	57,1	48,5	53,9
Not so much important	0,0	9,1	3,4
Unimportant/no answer	42,9	42,4	42,7
Friends			
	Kr	Rm	Total
Very important	14,3	3,0	10,1
Not so much important	1,8	24,2	10,1
Unimportant/no answer	83,9	72,7	79,8
Network			
	Kr	Rm	Total
Very important	8,9	6,1	7,9
Not so much important	0,0	27,3	10,1
Unimportant/no answer	91,1	66,7	82,0
Integration			
	Kr	Rm	Total
Very important	39,3	54,5	44,9
Not so much important	0,0	9,1	3,4
Unimportant/no answer	60,7	36,4	51,7

As a concluding remark, the refugee is mainly seeking integration in the country that welcomed him at first. Being ready to learn the language and become acquainted to new social habits, the refugee does not easily tolerate further travels and tribulations. The fact that many refugees leave Italy after being granted the status seems to be the consequence of the chronic lack of integration possibilities

there, rather than because of the attraction from external pull factors.

7. Concluding Remarks

In this paper we debated the regulation of refugees flows in Europe, through a bottom-up approach. From interviews with asylum-seekers hosted in Italian reception centers and conversations and focus groups with social workers and officials of Italian Agencies for refugees, we gleaned evidence that asylum-seekers do appreciate the effort of Italian authorities to guarantee their rights. Their evaluation of the reception system is rather favourable, both as bureaucratic procedures are concerned, and for the assistance received in the reception centers.

Our study, in line with other surveys, reveals that:

- 1) The material reception conditions, referring to food, accommodation and social areas, are not perceived as very important by guests, except when unexpected inflows of asylum-seekers lead to appalling overcrowding. Although hospitality supplied by Italian facilities in many cases stands below North European standards, especially when compared to what is available in The Netherlands, Norway or Germany, asylum-seekers seem to get easily accustomed to basic living conditions. We registered no specific complaints from migrants, who often left miserable backgrounds to undertake hazardous journeys to reach Europe. However, in Crotona, we felt a higher degree of appreciation about the accommodation, since more common areas were available to refugees, so that they could gather together, play football, worship, or simply stroll around. We also note that our interviews with asylum seekers occurred when Italian authorities implemented a “push-back” policy, through interception at sea of migrants approaching Italy’s Southern Mediterranean maritime border to send them back to North African coastlines. As a result, Italian reception centers were not particularly overcrowded at that time, while a dramatic change in attendances occurred in 2011 and 2012, mostly after the “Arab Spring”. Since these events put a significant strain on the first reception system, further research is needed to address such changes.
- 2) Relationships with nearby inhabitants seem important to asylum-seekers, since a more benevolent environment may improve their expectations about the later paths of integration in the territory. In Crotona, more opportunities were available, given the geographic location and the proximity to the main town, to get in touch with local people and some also experienced friendly relationships, since neighbourhood seems on average not hostile. Castelnuovo di Porto is instead located farther from built-up areas, with less opportunities to relate to nearby Italian inhabitants, apart from those who move at day-time to Rome, but the life-style of a big city makes them more anonymous. As a result, asylum-seekers deeply seek to feel welcomed by a

benevolent social context. Also, they tend not to overestimate some episodes of (minor) intolerance, regarding them as a result of little tensions in interpersonal relationships.

- 3) The perceptions of bureaucratic procedures for refugee status assume major importance. The acquisition of a status is the fundamental reason why the asylum-seekers arrived in Europe. With regard to formal procedures, although there had been no explicit complaints, the time span from the initial request to the final answer is considered crucial. Distress, anxiety and uncertainty among refugees may arise during first reception, especially for those who have left their families at home or in a risky environment. Despite a restrained length of the procedures (about 96 days to get the original hearing in front of the Territorial Commission) seemingly in line, as far as can be determined, with other European countries, we accidentally witnessed some tensions in Castelnuovo di Porto, due to delays in the course of the proceedings, but mostly following a lack of information. In Crotone, on the contrary, we noticed a more relaxed environment. This is probably due to the presence of the Territorial Commission within the Center, which provides, through bulletin boards and verbal information, updated news on administrative procedures. In summary, when asylum-seekers are more involved in the entire process, their expectations about a fair and relatively fast hearing may balance the feelings of insecurity due to their human condition. The perception of not being given the chance to represent their humanitarian needs, because the procedures span across excessively long periods of time or the path to the final response is not clear, creates frustration, maybe anger and a desire for rebellion.
- 4) The greatest desire of asylum-seekers is integration within the host country. They blatantly expressed such feelings during our interviews, asserting their will to settle in Italy, if they were awarded a status. As many of those who are granted asylum travel across other European Union countries at a later stage, we attribute such apparently contradictory behaviour to the shortcomings of the second reception in Italy, as repeatedly reported by humanitarian organizations.

As a result, some considerations on the European reception system follow.

The concern of some States to be particularly attractive in case of major flows of refugees appears unfounded. One-way movements of refugees may indeed occur as a result of the restrictive measures implemented in specific, non benevolent countries. Later secondary movements of refugees, either following an asylum shopping type of behaviour or the best reception conditions after being granted protection, may also occur but could be explained, among other factors, by inconsistencies between the reception environment and the expectations of integration of recipients. Though such issue is underlined even in formal documents (Italian Ministry of Interior, 2012), it

becomes noticeable mainly during second reception, when States must provide for an efficient, economic and social assistance.

The restriction imposed upon the residency permit to the State issuing the status not only hinders the human rights of refugees (Thielemann 2008), but it appears also unnecessary when a "fair" distribution of the burden between States is taken into account. Fulfilment of refugees wishes about their final destination in Europe, would not substantially change their distribution among States, if integration conditions were homogeneous. The current system is complex and inefficient as it causes improper movements of refugees that could be prevented.

Several proposals of physical reallocation have been recently proposed: UNHCR believes that States where the application is submitted for the first time should carefully address such issue; ECRE (2005), more radically, maintains that applicants should be allowed to choose the State where to apply for asylum.

Some European countries already adopted procedural models, through central and local agencies, for the physical allocation of the refugees within their borders. In Thielemann et al. (2010) some reallocation schemes are discussed. While some States relate to objective measures, either based on capability indices, as in Germany, or as in UK, where the regional resources, such as labour demand, are taken into account, other States leave complete freedom of settlement to the refugees, as in France and Sweden.

As a result from our study, no evidence emerges against the adoption of similar schemes across EU, provided that the integration possibilities offered by each State are deemed equally valid by refugees. Allocation patterns that follows from the requests of recipients would not also lead to large displacements across Europe.

The problem therefore lies in the failure of the integration systems in some States.

The commitment EU undertakes to face refugees reception entails direct and indirect costs that are estimated as financially and socially insignificant (Thielemann et al. 2010). More cooperation among European States is thus achievable, under the spirit of Directive 55/2001/CE, still under implementation. The first and second reception should be more homogeneous across Europe, through binding procedures and common standards and also granting to the States a more sizeable amount of the European Refugees Funds (ERF). Advances in procedure and reception harmonization are recently addressed by the European Refugees Support Office (EASO 2012). In-depth analysis on the effectiveness of the measures suggested and the unwillingness of the States to adopt them, might be the subject of other research.

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