

**Italian Refugee Integration Program:
Policy reform and institutional discrimination, 2018-2022**

Emanuela Canini

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This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

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Emanuela Canini

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*...ma soprattutto ci vuole coraggio
a trascinare le nostre suole
da una terra che ci odia
ad un'altra che non ci vuole...*

*[...but, above all, it takes courage
to drag our soles
from a land that hates us
to another that doesn't want us...]*

*'Pane e coraggio'
[Bread and courage]*

Ivano Fossati

Abstract

Numbers of refugees in Italy have swelled dramatically over the past two decades, rendering that country paradigmatic for global responses to asylum. Italian policy allows individual municipalities to institute integration programmes encompassing the social, civil, and economic domains. While the general processes of refugee integration have received scholarly attention, specific aspects continue to require further examination. In particular, this study focuses on ongoing barriers and obstacles despite the existence of policies that encourage full integration. The study seeks insight into the effects of policy changes and institutional dynamics on the integration process, focusing specifically on the period from 2018 to 2022, and how operators have adjusted to the changes. The analysis encompasses both the legal and administrative aspects of the integration system, as well as any potential instances of discriminatory acts in its implementation outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The issue of displaced persons and asylum seekers is one of the most contentious and highly discussed topics in international politics and the media. In recent years, public anti-immigrant and anti-asylum rhetoric has arguably reached its highest levels in European nations (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 248). Armed conflicts, persecution of minorities, political instability and natural disasters, have compelled the European Union (EU) member states to establish novel types of international protection, new categories of beneficiaries, and new norms for the reception of asylum seekers (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 235; Ataç et al., 2024, pp. 714-715; Maggini, 2021, p. 19; McDowell, 2022, pp. 454-457). The increase asylum seekers since 2014 has caused tension and controversy across the EU, with certain political parties and individual politicians labelling it a form of 'invasion'. Despite the rise in asylum seekers' arrivals, measures have not been put into place by the EU that effectively address the underlying causes and consequences (Archibugi et al., 2022, p. 487; Gozdzia, 2021, pp. 116-117).

Italy, strategically located along Mediterranean migratory routes, has become a pivotal entrance point for asylum seekers, who perceive the country as either a transit route or their ultimate destination in Europe. As a result, Italy has played a significant role in the reception and integration of refugees and asylum seekers (RAS). But it has also experienced considerable difficulties in managing the large number of asylum seekers arriving on their shores, first relying on temporary humanitarian visas and improvised housing solutions (Ambrosini, 2014, pp. 242-243; Armillei, 2017, p. 143). This has fuelled conflict with other European countries over the allocation of asylum seekers, and has led to changes in policies and among governments with differing viewpoints on how to address the issue of asylum (Ambrosini, 2014, pp. 237-238; Colucci, 2019, p. 433; Rossi, 2017, p. 50; Tsourdi & De Buycker, 2022, pp. 27-28). Emergency solutions for dealing with asylum seekers in Italy have sometimes prioritised security at the expense of humanitarian considerations, reinforcing existing patterns of exclusion and marginalisation towards RAS in broader Italian society. The process of integrating refugees who have been given international protection is often overlooked, resulting in inadequate legislation as well as the uneven enforcement of

rules relating to integration (Coresi & Maugeri, 2023, p. 159). As a result, refugees frequently encounter obstacles that prevent them from fully integrating in Italian society, which deepens existing social conflicts and negatively impacts upon their capacity to reconstruct their lives.

1.2 The research

The integration of RAS into host societies is a crucial element of refugee protection and social harmony. This study seeks to provide a thorough examination of the asylum integration system in Italy between 2018 and 2022, a period that was marked by a succession of policy changes and unforeseen events, as detailed in this section. Three places in distinct regions of Italy were chosen: Torre Pellice, a small town in the province of Turin in northern Italy; Bologna, a metropolitan city in the north-central part of the country; and Benevento, together with its surrounding minor villages in the southern province. The study will analyse both the legal and administrative aspects of the integration system and investigate any potential instances of discriminatory acts in its implementation. The aim of the study is to gain insight into the effects of policy changes relating to the integration process in Italy, based on a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews of varying nature which were determined by the interviewed subjects.

Italy was chosen for this research on the basis of my own Italian linguistic and cultural background, which has enabled me to access relevant material and understand the context of the issues under analysis without relying on interpreters. Moreover, because of its location in the middle of the Mediterranean, Italy is often chosen by asylum seekers as either a transit country or their final destination in Europe. Italy is also one of the EU's 'frontline' countries, which leaves it disproportionately burdened among EU member states with registering and receiving a high number of asylum seekers, who arrive by sea. In recent years Italy has distinguished itself in the power struggle with other EU nations over talks on the obligation of hosting asylum seekers. Between 2018 and 2022, however, different governments in Italy have held competing political views on asylum policy, which has resulted in numerous policy shifts and institutional overhauls. These will be discussed and analysed in my dissertation.

This study is guided by two research questions examining key aspects of the Italian RAS integration program from 2018 to 2022. First, were changes in asylum legislation and administrative policies during this period impactful on RAS integration in Italy? This question evaluates whether such changes influenced access to services, employment, and social inclusion for RAS. Second, has institutional discrimination, including arbitrary decision-making and systemic biases, hindered the integration process for RAS? This question focuses on whether these practices contributed to further marginalisation and impeded successful integration into Italian society.

Although there is existing research on integration centres' best practices, my observation is that most of these studies have concentrated on the particular site and administration of policies at one point in time, presenting descriptions of the services provided along with the obstacles faced. Significantly, I have been unable to locate research on the responses of individuals and organisations at integration centres throughout a rapid policy change period. I thus selected the timeframe of 2018 to 2022 on the basis that 2018 witnessed a significant shift in immigration policy as well as the implementation of numerous new restrictions, yet in 2020 (the year I commenced these studies) there was a reversal of this trend, with a portion of the pre-2018 policy replaced. The Covid-19 pandemic, the Afghanistan crisis and the Ukraine War introduced additional external challenges that, while unforeseen for this research, nonetheless constituted a noteworthy supplementary element in the overall context. Additionally, the so-called 'Brexit', or the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU in February 2020 is also noteworthy in terms of my study. While this development did not have a direct impact on my research, it did complicate the comparison of EU statistics for a comprehensive understanding of historical data. This is because the figures were previously collected per 28 countries but have since been reduced to 27.

Presently, the theoretical orientation of the existing body of literature on this subject appears to advocate for refugee agency at the individual level. In other words, it is anticipated that refugees will increase their level of engagement in integration initiatives, foster the growth of their personal human resources, and broaden their social connections (Lee et al., 2020, p. 209). Nonetheless, only recently has research begun to identify how institutional discrimination at the street level hinders them from reaching their objectives (Ambrosini, 2023; Blangiardo et al., 2020; Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021; Corsi, 2018; Flamini, 2020). Consequently, this study also seeks to

examine the impact of institutional dynamics on the outcomes of RAS integration into Italian society.

The research has been approved by the Ethics Committee in accordance with protocol, and participants have been presented with information and consent forms. As my first language is Italian, I have, to the best of my knowledge, completed the Italian-to-English translations.

1.3 Terminology and concepts

1.3.1 Immigration policies

For this research, I derived my definition of immigration policy from that provided by Bjerre et al.: *'government's statements of what it intends to do or not do (including laws, regulations, decisions or orders) in regard to the selection, admission, settlement and deportation of foreign citizens residing in the country'* (Bjerre et al., 2015, p. 559). I have thus classified as 'immigration policies' as every law, regulation, decision, or order issued by governments and other authorities pertaining to immigration that affect the integration of RAS.

In addition, the rationale for including both asylum seekers and refugees in the classification arises from the parallels that exist between the two, particularly in terms of the prospective duration of their stay in the territory. Refugees are asylum seekers who have been recognised as individuals in need of protection according to the Article 1 of the United Nations Refugee Convention, and thus have the legally recognised right to establish residency in the territory.¹ In comparison, asylum seekers are those who have applied for protection and remain in the country for a considerable length of time before they receive a conclusive ruling on their legal status. This is primarily due to the protracted processing times of the system (Bove, 2017, 2018, 2020; Bove & Romano, 2021; Della Puppa & Perocco, 2021, p. 10; Dimitriadis, 2023, p. 267; Giovannetti, 2021). Furthermore, the asylum seekers' involvement in integration

¹ See in particular the article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees which defines refugee the person who: 'As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to 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, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.' The 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees subsequently applied the definition of the Convention to all refugees, irrespective of the dateline of 1 January 1951.

programmes has been subject to Italian legal regulations over time, and their eligibility to partake in activities has been contingent on the prevailing policies of the government in power at the time. Consequently, both refugees and asylum seekers potentially interact with the society in the territory in which they are.

1.3.2 Integration

An understanding of the concept of integration is essential in order to complete this research. Valtonen (2016) and Puma et al. (2018) emphasise the importance of comprehensive support services for successful RAS integration in the society. The interviews undertaken in this study reveal the diverse range of services provided by integration centres, including housing, employment support, language instruction, and social assistance. Considering that the Italian integration system is founded on the provision of these integration services, it was essential that I analysed established policies of integration and the metrics that assess the integration outcomes. This was required to comprehend the ramifications of policy changes on these services in Italy. While, this thesis does not aim to determine what the most appropriate terminology for the process of RAS settlement into society is, this study will utilise the term 'integration' owing to its prevalence in legislation and policy.

This study investigates the interplay between policies and refugee integration processes. Policies are intentionally formulated and implemented by governing bodies, whereas integration transpires within societal contexts and their associated factors. Although effective policies can facilitate integration, the process may also develop autonomously or even counter to official policies. This research specifically emphasises the effects of policy measures, while external environmental factors affecting integration have not been directly addressed, although an awareness of these contextual variables has been preserved throughout the analysis.

1.3.3 Reception and integration centres

The media and academic communities employ the terms 'reception centre' and 'integration centre' inconsistently, which frequently results in confusion. This is also due to the fact that terminology differs based on the national language. This study will employ the designation 'reception centre' to denote the facilities that house asylum applicants subsequent to their identification at their initial site of arrival, or 'hotspot', in Italy. These reception centres- hosting facilities are called Extraordinary Assistance

Centres [Centri di Assistenza Straordinaria – CAS]. CAS have been incorporated into integration programmes on occasion, contingent on government policies as described in this thesis. CAS have been established in response to the scarcity of spaces in ‘integration centres’, which are locations where refugees and certain asylum applicants are accommodated and receive integration services. I will refer to these ‘integration centres’ as SAI centres, which are presently known as centres of the System of Reception and Integration [Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione – SAI]. Historically, the SAI was referred to by various names due to policy modifications that transpired over time, as I elaborated in the literature review segment.

1.3.4 Ordinary beneficiaries

While evaluating the SAI centres, I focused exclusively on RAS ‘ordinary’ beneficiaries, which include adult RAS and RAS families with both parents. All unaccompanied minors and other RAS ‘vulnerable’ beneficiaries have been excluded from this study, as their integration programmes are distinct and specialised. According to Italian law, the ‘vulnerable’ beneficiaries are people with special needs such as minors, unaccompanied minors, the disabled, the elderly, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, the victims of human trafficking, people suffering from serious illness or mental disorders, the people for whom it was ascertained that they have suffered torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual or sexual orientation- or gender identity-related violence, the victims of genital mutilation.² All other RAS are designated as ‘ordinary’ beneficiaries, indicating that not all refugees and asylum seekers are by definition regarded to be fragile individuals by the law.

No integration services exist for migrants or foreigners who do not seek asylum. They enter Italy with a visa or are exempt from visa requirements and then obtain a stay permit. They are essentially abandoned to their own resources within society.

1.3.5 Municipality, metropolitan city, province, region

The Republic of Italy consists of municipalities, provinces, metropolitan cities, and regions. These bodies are independent and work in conformity with the principles

² Bill n.142 of the 18 August 2015, last update on 5 August 2020, section 17 [*Attuazione della direttiva 2013/33/UE recante norme relative all'accoglienza dei richiedenti protezione internazionale, nonché della direttiva 2013/32/UE, recante procedure comuni ai fini del riconoscimento e della revoca dello status di protezione internazionale*].

outlined in the Italian Constitution, each having its own statutes, powers, and functions. They also have control over their own administrative tasks and those that are granted by state or regional law, in line with their specific areas of competence. In this thesis, the mention of these entities primarily denotes their geographical scope.

Emilia Romagna is a constituent region of Italy, along with 19 other regions.³ Regions are large territories that include several provinces, often consisting of the most densely populated cities within the regions. Italy has currently 110 provinces, such as Benevento in the Campania region. Bologna and Turin are two of the ten metropolitan cities of Italy, formerly known as provinces. Metropolitan cities have geographical similarities with provinces and only vary in certain administrative aspects. Every province or metropolitan city consists of a central city and many adjacent municipalities.⁴ Italy has a total of 7,896 municipalities, and Torre Pellice is among them.⁵

1.3.6 Questura and Prefettura

The Questura is the administrative body of the State Police that has jurisdiction at the province level. The Questura is responsible for overseeing the management of public order and security, as well as the deployment of public force. Additionally, it performs other security and administrative police tasks, such as issuing stay permits and collecting applications for international protection and other forms of protection. The Prefettura serves as a territorial office of the Ministry of the Interior, responsible for providing guidance, social mediation, intervention, consultation, and collaboration in all areas of administration. Additionally, it serves as the governing body for public security at the provincial level. One of the responsibilities of the Prefettura is to establish and manage the tenders for the CAS facilities that host asylum seekers.⁶

³ See: Governo Italiano. Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri. Presidency of the Council of Ministers. Titolo V – Le Regioni, le Province e i Comuni. [Italian Government. Title V – The Regions, the Provinces, and the Municipalities]. <https://www.governo.it/it/costituzione-italiana/parte-seconda-ordinamento-della-repubblica/titolo-v-le-regioni-le-province-e-i-comuni>. Accessed on 10 August 2024.

⁴ See: Camera dei deputati. Servizio Studi. Città metropolitane e province. [House of Representatives. Study Services. Metropolitan cities and provinces]. www.camera.it/temi/ap/documentazione/temi/pdf/1104880.pdf. Accessed on 10 August 2024.

⁵ See: Istituto Nazionale di Statistica. Codici delle unità amministrative. [National Statistics Institute. Codes of the administrative units]. <https://www.istat.it/classificazione/codici-dei-comuni-delle-province-e-delle-regioni/>. Accessed on 10 August 2024.

⁶ See: Ministero dell'Interno. Uffici del territorio. [Ministry of the Interior. Territorial offices]. <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/ministero/uffici-territorio>. Accessed on 10 August 2024.

1.4 The selected locations

Throughout its history, Italy has been distinguished by local disparities in terms of patterns of economic growth and social cohesiveness (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 244). Although my research did not centre on the influence of the local territory on RAS integration, I selected three locations in distinct regions of Italy to capture potential variables and incorporate them into the study. The three integration centres were chosen on the basis of recommendations gathered during an initial round of informal discussions with scholarly experts during the exploratory phase of the research. Furthermore, these integration centres were selected for analysis on the basis of their distinct management structures and diverse resources, and thus for their potential for different approaches towards situations. The selected locations, which are described below, are the town of Torre Pellice, the metropolitan city of Bologna, and a consortium of villages mainly in the Campania region in the South of Italy. The identities of all SAI centres are published with the written consent of each director of the centre.

Torre Pellice is a municipality that owns both CAS and SAI projects and has assigned its management on its territory to a Church organisation. Bologna is a municipality that likewise owns CAS and SAI centres, but it performs its duties by involving the entire province, and thus a larger territory, and by collaborating with numerous other organisations. Finally, each municipality examined, primarily in the area of Benevento and Avellino, two provinces of the Campania region, was the legal owner of its own SAI centre, although they were all operated by a single consortium. Therefore, this paper examines the above peculiarities in administrative structure and their ramifications, along with the common challenges, interplay among the different stakeholders, and the impact on the involvement of beneficiaries within the local context.

1.4.1 Torre Pellice

The municipality of Torre Pellice, which at the time of data collection in 2023 had a population of 4,575,⁷ is situated in the Piedmont region of north-eastern Italy about 50km southwest of Turin, the major Piedmont city where the Questura for the issuing of migrants' stay permits is located. Torre Pellice is positioned in a valley that is

⁷ Data from the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT) [National Institute of Statistics] on 1 January 2023, <http://dati.istat.it/index.aspx?queryid=19101>. Accessed on 11 April 2023.

enclosed by the Alps. Renowned for its deep connections to the Waldensian Church, a Christian movement that originated in the Middle Ages in the region, the town boasts an extensive historical background. Historically and culturally the town has been influenced by the Waldenses, who were persecuted for their religion in the past. Interviewees have described the town as well-known for its welcoming atmosphere and broad acceptance of all cultures.

The social activity of the Waldensian Church is coordinated and connected by the Waldensian Deaconry, a non-profit independent ecclesiastical organisation based in Torre Pellice, although it also extends all its activities throughout Italy. The Deaconry oversees reception and assistance facilities and services, including those for the elderly, minors and youths, the disabled, individuals experiencing hardship, migrants, and those engaged in volunteer work. The organisation addresses the needs of individuals in distress and provides interventions and services to both Italian and non-Italian citizens via a network of branches. The Waldensian Deaconry has been managing both CAS and SAI centres on behalf of the municipality since 2011.⁸ They have been recently hosting (mostly male) beneficiaries, with totals of 36 in 2016, 47 in 2017, 37 in 2018, 43 in 2019, 31 in 2020, and 28 in 2021 (numbers up to November 2021).⁹ The SAI centre at the time of participants' interviews was approved for 34 ordinary places, the organisation rented seven apartments, with each apartment capable of accommodating three to four beneficiaries.¹⁰ The majority of beneficiaries were African-origin males between the ages of 25 and 30.¹¹

Their reception strategy emphasises housing as a key component, offering apartments where beneficiaries are responsible for all aspects of upkeep including cleaning, maintenance, neighbour interactions, and shared space management. This model applies to both their SAI and CAS centres. The Waldensian Deaconry advocates for the widespread reception model as the most effective approach for reception projects to collaborate with the local community, utilising its services and resources. This model involves welcoming individuals who bring their skills and competencies to contribute to community life, similar to other Italian citizens. The Waldensians believe that taking responsibility for one's home and schedule is the

⁸ Data provided by the Torre Pellice's SAI manager.

⁹ Data provided by the Torre Pellice's SAI manager.

¹⁰ Interviewee no.3.

¹¹ Interviewee no.2.

initial stage towards independence, which in turn impacts the individual's ability to move throughout the area to actively seek resources they require, rather than passively receiving centralised services.¹² The Waldensian Deaconry obtains funding from various sources, including impromptu donations, contributions from taxpayers through their tax returns, and the management of a number of social and religious activities that may also contribute to the organisation's budget.¹³

1.4.2 Bologna

Bologna is the major city of the Emilia-Romagna region in northcentral Italy and had a population of 387,981 people at the time of data collection in 2023.¹⁴ According to the interviewees, the city has always been a hub of migration, both from within Italy and from abroad. A significant number of national students attend the city's university, adding to the city's population, which together with an increase in tourism to the region since 2008, has also contributed to the local housing deficit (Nomisma, 2019).

The political history of Bologna is distinguished by its participation in significant historical movements, the impact of left-leaning ideologies, and a longstanding tradition of political activism. Bologna emerged as a hub of political activity in the aftermath of World War II, specifically with regard to the Italian resistance against fascism. Diverse political parties and movements advocating for democratic values emerged within the city. During the 1970s and 1980s, Bologna acquired the title of 'Red Bologna' on account of its political inclination towards the left. A vibrant cultural scene, progressive policies, and social activism were all hallmarks of the city. As a result of its historical leftward political inclination, Bologna has a rich heritage of social assistance (Giovanardi & Silvagni, 2021, p. 1).

The Bologna SAI has been active since 2004, and at the time of participants' interviews, was approved for 1,650 ordinary places across 132 apartments, (despite having requested an additional 300 extra places to accommodate Afghanis who were temporarily hosted in CAS).¹⁵ The activities are coordinated by the entity for public services to the population [Azienda pubblica di servizi alla persona Città di Bologna –

¹² Diaconia Valdese. Accoglienza migranti. (Waldensians Deaconry. Migrants reception]. <https://inclusione.diaconiavaldese.org/accoglienza-migranti>. Accessed on 5 March 2024.

¹³ Interviewee no.1.

¹⁴ Data from the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT) [National Institute of Statistics] on 1 January 2023, <http://dati.istat.it/index.aspx?queryid=19101>. Accessed on 11 April 2023.

¹⁵ Interviewee no.4.

ASP], the public agency for social assistance, and from 2017 are delegated to approximately 10 local external organisations,¹⁶ covering the whole province territory.¹⁷ The percentage allocation of services (such as language teaching, accommodation provision and legal aid) to external organisations was extrapolated from the bid submitted during the public tender conducted by the municipality of Bologna.¹⁸ The guiding principle of this allocation is co-project management, in which each organisation contributes either with single or multiple services that interweave with one another, thereby fostering cross-level collaboration.¹⁹ Despite the fact that the integration project is officially owned by the City of Bologna, 41 neighbouring municipalities have provided their land for the purpose of hosting RAS and conducting integration activities.²⁰ The City of Bologna also convenes meetings with local politicians, technical operators, and administrative personnel every three to four months in order to assess critical situations, obtain updates on the current state of affairs, and gain knowledge of best practices.²¹

1.4.3 Consortium of municipalities in Benevento

The third SAI centre researched is represented by a Consortium, called Sale della Terra, which manages the SAI centres on behalf of a number of municipalities, mainly in the provinces of Benevento and Avellino in southern Italy. The Consortium, which has the coordinating office in Benevento, was founded in 2016 by four cooperatives. At the time of interviews it managed 13 SAI ordinary centres on behalf of the following municipalities: Chianche, Petraro Irpino, Torrecuso, Castelpoto, Sassinoro, Pietrelcina, San Bartolomeo in Galdo, Baselice, Santa Paolina, Roseto Capo Spulico, Tiggiano and Tricase. The Consortium also administered the municipality of Roccabascerana until 2021, but following the renewal of the procurement, the project was lost to another management entity.²²

The consortium administers SAI centres (but not CAS) along with various socially

¹⁶ Interviewee no.4.

¹⁷ Members of ASP Città di Bologna are: Bologna Municipality (97%), Bologna Province (2%), the non-for-profit financial institution Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Bologna (1%), <https://www.aspbologna.it/gli-organismi-dell'asp-citta-di-bologna/asp-citta-di-bologna/gli-organismi-dell'asp>. Accessed on 13 April 2023.

¹⁸ Interviewee no.4.

¹⁹ Interviewee no.4.

²⁰ Interviewee no.4.

²¹ Interviewee no.4.

²² Interviewee no.5.

motivated activities such as hospitality, food and agricultural initiatives. It employs 257 people, among whom are migrants and disadvantaged individuals (Sale della Terra, 2023). SAI's beneficiaries were predominantly of African descent, particularly Nigerian, and male for approximately two-thirds of the total.²³

Table 1: SAI municipalities managed by Consortium Sale della Terra.

Municipality	Province	Region	Population*	SAI activation date	Ordinary places**	Beneficiaries hosted***
Torrecluso	Benevento	Campania	3,237	2018	30	19
Castelpoto	Benevento	Campania	1,109	2017	20	19
Sassinoro	Benevento	Campania	647	2018	20	21
Pietrelcina	Benevento	Campania	2,878	2018	30	20
San Bartolomeo in Galdo	Benevento	Campania	4,362	2018	80	22
Baselice	Benevento	Campania	2,094	2018	40	6
Chianche	Avellino	Campania	478	2016	25	11
Petraro Irpino	Avellino	Campania	302	2016	116	9
Santa Paolina	Avellino	Campania	1,157	2018	20	15
Tiggiano	Lecce	Puglia	2,755	2021	31	19
Tricase	Lecce	Puglia	17,076	2021	29	18
Roseto Capo Spulico	Cosenza	Calabria	1,887	2021	115	16
Roccabascera	Avellino	Campania	2,308	2014	30	23

*ISTAT data as of 1 January 2023, accessed on 18 April 2023 <http://dati.istat.it/index.aspx?queryid=1602>

**SAI data as of February 2023, accessed on 18 April 2023 https://www.retesai.it/progetti-territoriali-3/?sft_provincia=benevento

***Data provided by Consortium Sale della Terra as of July 2021

The ordinary places specified in the table are those that were authorised and were listed on the SAI Central Office website as of February 2023. Since these details are no longer published on the website (as of 10 March 2024), they are no longer accessible to the general public. Regardless, caution should be exercised when interpreting the data, as it may not represent the situation accurately. For example, the designated number of places in Petraro Irpino, a municipality with a population of 302, is 116. While this may appear extremely disproportionate, the Consortium specified that only 20 beneficiaries were currently residing in Petraro. The municipalities of Baselice instead, have 40 places, however, 20 were accommodated in the Baselice area, while the remaining 20 places were intended to be shared with

²³ Interviewee no.5.

a neighbouring municipality under an agreement, although the municipality of Baselice is the sole official owner of the project.²⁴

1.5 The participants

This study employs a qualitative approach to analysis by utilising semi-structured interviews that differ in their design according to the interviewee's role. Due to the pandemic travel restrictions that were in place throughout the majority of the research, I conducted the majority of the interviews via videoconference and some of them in person, when travelling was declared safe. All the interviews were conducted in Italian, except for the interview with the European DG Home Department interviewee, which was held in English.

The interview sample for each of the three selected areas, out of a total of 53 interviews, was comprised of operators from the SAI central office and the individual SAI centres working in a range of fields (law, psychology, employment, education, accounting, management); operators of external collaborating organisations; external legal professionals; and administrators in managerial positions, including mayors of the selected municipalities and other authorities. The sample of 53 participants comprised 31 females and 22 males. The selection process did not consider gender as a determining factor. The objective was to comprehend the legislation, administrative rules, and dynamics between the many operators at various levels, as well as their problems or remedies. Although a range of positions were sought, the number and range of interviewees were limited by the availability of the personnel themselves – specifically, in the SAI centres, managers listed the names of available operators. Although this could have led to bias, the SAI entities were not large organisations, and for most departments there was only one operator. Therefore, the choice of any researcher would likely have been appropriate.

Furthermore, it was observed that the information gathered from the interviews was generally consistent across all SAI centres. During the travel limitations imposed by the pandemic, the majority of interviews were conducted through videoconferencing in 2021 and 2022. From July to August 2022, new operators were interviewed face-to-face in Italy. Additionally, some of the first interviewees, who were initially

²⁴ Information provided by the Consortium Sale della Terra management.

questioned over videoconference, also reconvened for further in-person interviews and provided additional feedback on the adjustments and management of Afghans and Ukrainians who had fled their respective nations' conflicts. In addition to the interviews, the SAI centres submitted demographic anonymised data on beneficiaries, including data on the beneficiaries' nationality, age and gender, as well as data on the outcomes of the completion of the integration programmes. The purpose of this data was to provide a historical and contemporary perspective on the attendance and engagement of beneficiaries.

The interviews and data submitted by the participants have been analysed in order to identify obstacles or best practices for possible system improvement. To evaluate the efficacy of RAS inclusion programmes, several parameters, including housing, the degree of Italian language gained, employment, access to local services, and social interaction, have been investigated. Given that these characteristics are among the primary objectives of the SAI programme, the selection of these factors is congruent with most of the existing literature for this system. Furthermore, this study has paid special attention to the procedures associated with the legal status of the beneficiaries and their influence on the above factors. Lastly, the conversation during interviews and the collection of data did not include information about special needs groups engaging in specific programmes. In light of the diversity of services provided to different groups, the research only analysed beneficiaries who qualify for ordinary programmes and who may not present extra hurdles to integration.

Table 2: Number of interviews per organisation and interviewee's role.

SAI centres	Managers and operators	Mayors	Others
Bologna	10		
Torre Pellice	6	1	
Consortium Sale della Terra (Benevento area)	23	2	
SAI Central Office	2		
OTHER PARTICIPANTS			
Regional government representatives			1
UNHCR representatives			2
Legal professionals			5
EU DG Home representatives			1

1.6 Challenges and limitations

The study was especially hindered by the Covid-19 pandemic, which hit Europe in March 2020, just at the beginning of the research. Extensive communication with providers was therefore difficult, and fieldwork was impossible. Although a large number of organisations, researchers, and other types of groups were approached, the responses were poor and slow, and the information and contacts that were acquired were scant as well. It was thus necessary to narrow the scope of the research in an effort to improve the project's feasibility. Moreover research funding during the Covid-19 pandemic was limited, which in turn required finding novel ways to undertake qualitative research with reduce expenses.

Another element that impacted upon the research's execution and objective was in meeting the Ethical standards for approval. Given that '*refugees are the experts of their own experience*' (Hynes, 2003) and also due to the fact that refugees are often excluded from social science research (Aljadeeah, 2022), initially, RAS were to serve as participants and interviewees alongside policymakers, programme operators, and others. According to the Ethics procedure, however, all RAS are considered a vulnerable group (in opposition to Italian legislation). It was thus requested that contact with potential RAS interviewees, along with their and acceptance, be arranged with local organisations independent of the administrative entities researched in this

study, in order to assist participants who may have experienced psychological distress following the interviews.

This task proved impossible for two reasons: first, I was in Australia for most of the study due to the pandemic travel restrictions, making it difficult to locate and communicate with local organisations in Italy. Second, in most of the small municipalities studied, the potentially supportive organisations were involved directly or indirectly with the entities researched. As a result of this conflict, which could not be resolved, refugees and asylum seekers had to be excluded from this study, which ultimately focused solely on interviewing administrative and legislative actors. Local operators, however, could still make a significant contribution to understanding the problematics of integration, given they are both the initial point of contact for refugees and the individuals tasked with facing legislation and regulatory issues.

Finally, although the goal was to acquire information that was objective from all perspectives, it was not possible to interview Italian central government officials. Several email and telephone attempts to reach the immigration department of the Ministry of the Interior,²⁵ the Prefettura, and the Questure have failed. The majority of email contacts offered on the websites of these authorities are of the so-called PEC [Posta Elettronica Certificata - Certified Electronic Mail] variety, of which accept emails only from a paid account. Standard email addresses listed instead resulted in either no answer, or a full inbox (which indicates that the email address owners do not check the inbox at all). When attempting to contact the phone numbers provided on the websites, an almost non-existent response was received; in certain instances, the numbers were even inactive. No cooperation was achieved beyond the process of being transferred from one office to another.

1.7 The structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises seven chapters. The initial chapter introduces the research and the thesis argument. I present an overview of the study's scope, the criteria used, and the unexpected challenges encountered during the process. Furthermore, I describe the selected research venues, the study participants, and the selection method with its limitations. The second chapter analyses the existing literature,

²⁵ Dipartimento per le libertà civili e l'immigrazione [Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration].

specifically scholarly papers, books, reports, and governmental documents. The objective is to identify key subjects, gaps in research, and opportunities for further study in the field of RAS integration in Italy. First, existing theories of the meaning of integration are investigated, in all their academic forms as well as different terminologies in order to critically evaluate various theoretical frameworks. Secondly, I discuss how the discriminative application of reception and integration policies is known to impact the process in Italy. In particular, important aspects of the integration are examined, such as housing, employment access, language learning and social welfare access.

The third chapter presents an overview of the integration procedures inside the EU and Italy, as well as the narratives surrounding this topic. This encompasses the bureaucratic processes, assistance systems, and obstacles encountered by RAS individuals as they negotiate the Italian reception system and attempt to integrate into Italian society. In addition, I analyse the current techniques used to assess integration, the often-used indicators, and their respective definitions.

Chapters four, five and six concentrate on the research findings by examining the conducted interviews and contrasting them with the current body of literature. In particular, the fourth and fifth chapters examines the responses of operators and groups responsible for managing the integration system to changes in asylum and integration policies. It also explores how they successfully maintained service provision despite the negative challenges. The sixth chapter addresses the illicit actions occurring at the local bureaucratic level, which hinder the integration of refugees by unfairly denying them their rights and access to services. In the seventh and final chapter, a summary of the findings and suggestions for future research is presented. A list of the sources consulted for the study will conclude the paper.

1.8 Conclusion

Ultimately, this study explores the complex terrain of immigration policy, problems in integration, and institutional reactions. The research starts with a moving account of individual hardship and determination, then moves on to explore the intricacies of migration, asylum laws, and administrative measures in Italy spanning the years 2018 to 2022. The careful selection of research locations, the thorough analysis of integration facilities, and the perceptive revealed through interviews with a wide range

of individuals involved provide valuable insights into the complex factors influencing the process of integrating RAS in Italy. The study identifies important concerns about the effects of legislative changes, institutional discrimination, and the effectiveness of integration attempts through thorough qualitative analysis and extensive involvement with literature and stakeholders. The research gives penetrating insights into the complexities of integration efforts in Italy and the difficulties encountered by RAS and service providers by examining the experiences of people and organisations at integration centres during periods of fast policy changes. In addition, the selection of study sites in various regions of Italy enhances awareness of the differences between local areas and the factors that affect integration outcomes in those areas. From the welcoming village of Torre Pellice to the politically charged city of Bologna and the centres administered by a consortium in southern Italy, each place provides distinct viewpoints and teachings for promoting inclusive and efficient integration methods. Despite encountering challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic and bureaucratic difficulties in obtaining information, this research project persisted in its pursuit of knowledge and comprehension about RAS integration in Italy. Although there were difficulties in reaching certain stakeholders, such as central government officials, the study nonetheless enhances public and scholarly comprehension of integration dynamics in Italy at the grassroots level, where the true effects of policies and practices are most deeply experienced.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The debate on integration

2.1.1 Introduction

Integration of new individuals into society is becoming increasingly important and must be planned. Of course, the social integration paths for newcomers are neither arbitrary nor accidental: they are the outcome of purposeful and conscious planning (Catarci, 2014).

The complex and multifaceted process of integrating newly arrived immigrants into host societies has been extensively discussed in academic literature. Scholars in the field of RAS studies have devised several theoretical frameworks, each with its own particular assumptions, advantages, and drawbacks. Theoretical perspectives on RAS span a spectrum, with some highlighting the cultural distinctions between RAS and their host nations, while others prioritise economic factors such as education and employment accessibility. Given the unprecedented scale of forced displacement worldwide in the last decade (UNHCR, 2022a), there has been a growing discussion on the optimal theoretical framework for the integration of RAS.

2.1.2 What is integration?

The concept of migrant integration has evolved significantly over the decades. While the concept of assimilation once dominated discussions on the integration of migrants, contemporary perspectives recognise the limitations and drawbacks of this approach.

Assimilation is based on the assumptions that immigrants and their progeny will ultimately adopt the cultural norms and values of the host society. The hegemonic culture, which is the prevalent culture of the host society, is the foundation for the assimilation of immigrants, according to this theoretical framework. With time, it becomes increasingly anticipated that immigrants will abandon their native cultural practices and wholeheartedly adopt the cultural conventions of the host society (Giddens, 1989, pp. 271-272; Schalk-Soekar & Van de Vijver, 2008).

Assimilation has been perceived as 'an ethnocentric and patronising imposition on minority peoples struggling to retain their cultural and ethnic integrity' (Alba & Nee,

2003, p. 1). This viewpoint fails to acknowledge the potential for immigrants to preserve aspects of their cultural heritage while simultaneously making meaningful contributions to the host society. In its most basic manifestation, assimilation constitutes a unidirectional process. The process of assimilation may present challenges or prove unattainable for certain immigrants, particularly those who encounter prejudice and social exclusion within the receiving society. This may be because the assimilation process does not assign a favourable status to the ethnic group in which the migrant seeks refuge, particularly during the initial phases (Alba & Nee, 2003, p. 5). Furthermore, while there may be a perceived correlation between the notions of assimilation and complete separation between RAS' country of origin and their host country, this relationship is not necessarily reflected in reality. Many RAS, for example, sustain connections with their country of origin through the transmission of remittances (Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018, p. 399).

In the current era of globalisation, there is evidence that government authorities have begun to recognise the need to transcend the notion of assimilation, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. In Australia, an advanced multicultural polity, for example, already in 1978, a report was commissioned by the Australian government to study the functionality of services provided to migrants. The report, authored by lawyer Frank Galbally, endorsed the cessation of assimilation as an official settlement strategy in Australia. The report highlights the inadequacy of assimilation policies in addressing cultural sensitivity. It emphasises the necessity of creating a system that is more closely aligned with ethnic communities, where they can play an active role in the process, thereby introducing the notion of multiculturalism (Peisker & Tilbury, 2003), a 'melting pot' that is located between cultural homogenisation and cultural diversity. The melting pot is a metaphor for the process by which immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds may join and merge into a single, unified culture. According to this theory, first-generation immigrants and their descendants would eventually intermarry with members of the pre-existing population, thereby contributing to the establishment of a new culture (Giddens, 1989, pp. 271 - 272).

The melting pot concept differs from cultural pluralism, where cultural factions coexist in isolation, preserving their own identities, but that can lead to the marginalisation of specific cultural groups, by negating their capacity to integrate into the national identity and labelling them based on their 'racial' or 'diverse'

characteristics. This practice creates a dichotomy between privileged and underprivileged groups, leading to unequal distribution of power and resources (Catarci, 2014).

Recently, the limitation of multiculturalism theory has come to light: it fails to account for the intricacies of demographic reality and the recognition that there are additional factors at play besides nationality and ethnicity (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018, p. 180). Vertovec and other researchers use the term 'super-diversity' (as a summary term rather than a theory), to refer to the complex changes in migration patterns and the dynamic interactions between various factors, including different legal statuses and their accompanying conditions, diverse experiences in the labour market, distinct combinations of gender and age, variations in spatial distribution, and the mixed responses of service providers and residents in local areas (Grillo, 2015, p. 4; Penninx, 2019; Vertovec, 2007, p. 1049). These factors also result in the emergence of new patterns of inequality and prejudice, such as new forms of racism, segregation, experiences of space and social interaction (Vertovec, 2019, p. 126).

Nevertheless, although there is growing recognition of super-diversity as a novel demographic phenomenon, migration studies have, to a certain degree, remained predominantly centred around an ethno-national perspective. Until recently, discussions and studies on the relationships between migrants, their offspring, the existing population, and the government have often been framed in terms of binary concepts such as minority/majority, them/us, and dominant/non-dominant. Policies have again emphasised the expectation for migrants to assimilate into a presumed singular dominant culture. This method lacks the ability to sufficiently analyse the multifaceted socio-cultural and demographic complexity that is the basis of super-diversity. This complexity often includes the absence of a dominant culture in many locations and/or the frequent movement of populations. Multicultural viewpoints have frequently underestimated factors such as educational attainment, linguistic proficiency, gender, legal standing, or duration of residency, which may have greater significance than ethnicity when it comes to integration results, either independently or in combination (Grzymala-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2018, p. 180).

Hence, it is an inherent and natural progression whereby all the components must indispensably collaborate in order for the apparatus to advance. Building upon the

principles of functionalist sociology, which argues that society operates well when all entities actively and cooperatively contribute, integration is undeniably enhanced via the interaction of actors striving towards the common goal of social cohesiveness (Blangiardo et al., 2020, p. 36). This interaction may open to 'interculturalism', which recognises that in a community with many ethnic groups, cultures exert influence in different ways. Immigrant or minority cultures have a reciprocal impact on host or majority cultures, resulting in the recognition, exchange, circulation, and modification of cultures (Mascitelli & De Lazzari, 2021, p. 52).

2.1.3 Additional factors regarding the concept of integration

The current economic order necessitates the inclusion of candidates in the global market, labour force, or cultural contexts contingent upon their ability to meet established standards, while those who fail to meet such standards are subject to marginalisation and denial of rights. Due to the absence of a deliberate selection process to cater to specific market needs, RAS are more prone to encountering challenges in gaining acceptance from the host society compared to the less vulnerable migrants, including prosperous entrepreneurs or immigrants from specific industrialised nations (Castles et al., 2002, pp. 125-203). The concept of integration is then perceived as 'individualised, contested and contextual' (Robinson, 1998), 'immigrant integration always takes place within the borders of one state and under its conditions. In other words, states are the *locus* and the *rule setters* of integration. For these two reasons, states play an essential role in integration' (Barbulescu, 2019, p. 10). For instance, while migrants in general and RAS in particular are expected to conform, this is not required of EU citizens. Nancheva & Ranta (2022) discovered that EU citizens in the United Kingdom (UK) were successfully incorporated into society, even including those with low levels of skills and English proficiency. This occurred despite the fact that there were no integration policies applicable to them as a group. They were not regarded as migrants and, as such, integration was neither required nor expected; however, after the so-called Brexit, the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union, conditions may alter in the future (Nancheva & Ranta, 2022).

Nancheva & Ranta corroborate the statement that integration policies are not universally designed, but rather are contingent upon contextual factors. Despite the potential for RAS to actively engage in society and serve as catalysts for their own

integration (Peisker & Tilbury, 2003), the successful integration of RAS into a host society is contingent not only upon their individual abilities and efforts but also upon their interactions with the surrounding context (Hynie, 2018).

Legal status and the constraints associated with it also influence the early methods by which foreigners integrate into society; for example, RAS who are resettled through humanitarian organisations, encounter circumstances more similar to those of regular migrants. The same holds true for family members who eventually reunite with RAS (Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018, p. 399). Hathaway (2021) argues that refugees should seek citizenship in their host nations, given that, unlike local integration, citizenship terminates refugee status. If they acquire citizenship, refugees can remain and enjoy full fundamental rights and can participate in public life after naturalisation, as neither the Refugee Convention nor international law grant them political rights. The Convention's primary remedy is local integration; consequently, refugee status confers rights only as concerns local integration, which signifies that a refugee receives a permanent legal status that permits them to remain indefinitely in the country of asylum and participate only in its social, economic, and cultural life (Hathaway, 2021). However, the 'Common basic principles' for immigrant integration policy in the EU (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 19) require the receiving society to establish opportunities for the political participation of immigrants,²⁶ and Article 34 of the United Nations Refugee Convention supports naturalisation (UNHCR, 1966).²⁷

On the other hand, host country populations may persist in perceiving newly naturalised citizens as outsiders, even if they obtain citizenship through legal means and irrespective of whether they hold a passport issued by the host country (Artero &

²⁶ Principle 1 of the Common basic principles for immigration integration policy in the European Union: 'Integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States. Integration is a dynamic, long-term, and continuous two-way process of mutual accommodation, not a static outcome. It demands the participation not only of immigrants and their descendants but of every resident. The integration process involves adaptation by immigrants, both men and women, who all have rights and responsibilities in relation to their new country of residence. It also involves the receiving society, which should create the opportunities for the immigrants' full economic, social, cultural, and political participation. Accordingly, Member States are encouraged to consider and involve both immigrants and national citizens in integration policy, and to communicate clearly their mutual rights and responsibilities.'

²⁷ 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, article 34: 'Naturalisation - The Contracting States shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalisation of refugees. They shall in particular make every effort to expedite naturalisation proceedings and to reduce as far as possible the charges and costs of such proceedings.'

Ambrosini, 2022). While obtaining citizenship may be a desirable goal, the attainment of this milestone does not necessarily indicate the resolution of integration issues. Simonsen (2017) notes that the assessment of integration is commonly based on naturalisation rates or the attainment of socioeconomic parity with the native population, with minimal attention given to the subjective experience of immigrants regarding their sense of citizenship. The concepts of citizenship and national identity are often conflated, yet the notion of belonging is a subjective one that cannot be ascertained solely based on an individual's legal standing. The process of citizenship confers membership of the host nation upon individuals who were previously considered as 'others'. It remains to be determined, though, whether this process also results in their nationalisation. Simonsen's research, which encompassed 14 Western nations, revealed that immigrants perceive citizenship as a marker of membership solely when the host nationals regard it as a fundamental criterion for being recognised as a member of the nation. Based on these findings, it can be inferred that national affiliation cannot always be determined by an individual's citizenship status (Simonsen, 2017). Furthermore, the notion of citizenship could potentially lose its gravitational pull and sense of belonging when compared to modern naturalisation investment schemes implemented by a number of nations. These schemes allow investors to acquire citizenship in exchange for reciprocal financial advantages. The likelihood of granting citizenship to affluent investors might be greater in comparison to that of refugees. The notion of citizenship is a fundamental human entitlement, and the act of marketing citizenship encompasses more than the mere exchange of official status; it involves the genuine transfer of the privileges and obligations that are linked to citizenship (Tanasoca, 2016).

Another recent investigation conducted on 23 European nations analysed the concept of successful integration as perceived by the respective populations of the European countries (Dražanová et al., 2020, p. 9).²⁸ The study revealed that the most highly regarded factors were the acquisition of proficiency in the local language, fulfilment of tax obligations, and acceptance and adoption of local customs and principles. In contrast, the factors that received the lowest ratings were engagement in associations, participation in local elections, and acquisition of citizenship in the host country. Results were similar across countries. These factors show that

²⁸ This study did not include Italy.

acceptance of immigrants is contingent upon their ability to positively contribute to the welfare system and avoid disruptive behaviour, rather than upon their involvement in the democratic process (Dražanová et al., 2020, p. 9). Nonetheless, the participants were not assessed regarding the importance of voting in a broader context beyond the scope of immigrants. In Italy, for example, there has been a significant decrease in citizens' engagement with their democratic right to vote, as evidenced by a gradual decline in political election participation over time. This trend reached its nadir in 2022, when voter turnout was recorded at 63.8 per cent, marking the lowest level in the country's history (Ministero dell'Interno, 2022). It may be argued that this element has the potential to serve as an additional influential aspect over the perception of the importance of immigrants' political participation.

2.1.4 The bidirectional concept of integration

Schinkel (2018) criticises the research on the integration of migrant populations, arguing that the term 'integration' has become associated with a static society whose very existence suggests they already possess some degree of integration as an innate trait in a problem-free society. As a result, any disparity can only be ascribed unilaterally, as if immigrants are held responsible for any community issues that may arise. In addition, the lack of integration of a migrant is then attributed to the entire group to which he or she belongs (Schinkel, 2018). Hadj Abdou (2019) reiterates Schinkel's argument that migration and integration research is predicated on a dichotomy between citizens = 'us' and migrants = 'them', where 'us' is the undisputed and unproblematic norm in everyday practices and discourses (Hadj Abdou, 2019). Abdou also reminds us that although differences are an essential part of the social fabric, diversity has become commodified, and only those that meet the specific characteristics required by the states can experience the society's benefits.

Integration is defined by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) as 'the two-way process of mutual adaptation between migrants and the societies in which they live, whereby migrants are incorporated into the social, economic, cultural and political life of the receiving community. It entails a set of joint responsibilities for migrants and communities and incorporates other related notions such as social inclusion and social cohesion' (IOM, 2019, p. 190). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is in agreement with the two-way, dynamic,

and multifaceted process that requires efforts from all parties involved, including a willingness on the part of RAS to adapt to the host society without sacrificing their cultural identity, and a corresponding willingness on the part of host communities and public institutions to welcome RAS and meet the needs of a diverse population (UNHCR, 2005, p. 1). The integration process involves reciprocal changes between the immigrant population and the recipient communities. While many studies of integration tend to concentrate on the changes that occur in newcomers, it is important to acknowledge that the process itself modifies both groups (Hynie, 2018).

The process of integration requires mutual acknowledgement and acceptance of the cultural distinctiveness of all groups involved. However, the ability of non-dominant communities to select and actively pursue integration is contingent upon the dominant society's level of tolerance of cultural diversity. Usually, it is expected that subordinate groups must adopt the core principles of the broader community, while the dominant group must make adjustments to national establishments to effectively cater to the needs of all groups residing in a diverse society. The utilisation of this integration approach is contingent upon the presence of certain psychological prerequisites in communities that are openly multicultural. These prerequisites include the prevalence of a societal appreciation for the value of cultural diversity, a relatively low incidence of prejudice, the existence of positive mutual attitudes among cultural groups, and a sense of attachment or identification with the larger society by all groups (Berry, 1997, p. 11).

The Italian legal framework²⁹ characterises integration as that 'process aimed at promoting the coexistence of Italian and foreign citizens, in compliance with the values enshrined in the Italian Constitution, with a mutual commitment to participate in the economic, social and cultural life of society'.³⁰ The National Integration Evaluation Mechanism (NIEM) Report 2022 reveals that despite the existence of explicit regulations, the issue of social distance between distinct groups, particularly

²⁹ Art. 4bis Decreto Legislativo n. 286 del 5 Ottobre 2018: Testo unico delle disposizioni concernenti la disciplina dell'immigrazione e norme sulla condizione dello straniero [Article 4bis of the Legislative Decree no. 286 of 5 October 2018: Consolidated text of the provisions concerning the regulation of immigration and rules on the condition of foreigners].

³⁰ Translation from Italian: 'Ai fini di cui al presente testo unico, si intende con integrazione quel processo finalizzato a promuovere la convivenza dei cittadini italiani e di quelli stranieri, nel rispetto dei valori sanciti dalla Costituzione italiana, con il reciproco impegno a partecipare alla vita economica, sociale e culturale della società.'

between Italians and migrants, is not being adequately addressed. Individuals who engage in daily work with migrants, regardless of the migrants' legal status, have identified a lack of trust in immigrants as the primary obstacle to achieving integration and promoting migrant autonomy, which is evident in all facets of the process of integration (Blangiardo et al., 2022, p. 69). Therefore, the success of integration is closely tied to the attitudes and perceptions of the population, which can exert an impact on policies or be subject to the influence of policies (Dražanová et al., 2020, p. 31).

2.1.5 What to expect in the future of integration

The different concepts regarding integration have led to a re-examination of the fundamental discourse surrounding its definition and subsequent criticism. Even though there is no universally utilised definition, theory, or model of integration for immigrants and RAS, it seems that the dominant expectation is that one sole route exists to show achieving inclusion in a given society, which necessitates conformity to a standardised cultural identity to promote cohesion (Castles et al., 2002, p. 113). It could be maintained that the onus of fostering integration falls upon the receiving nation, given that while integration is a mutual undertaking, it is inherently imbalanced, with immigrants being required to adapt to a greater extent than the host community. Due to this disparity, it is incumbent upon states to exert greater effort in extending a hospitable reception to immigrants than it is upon the immigrants themselves. The host nation is also more powerful in terms of institutional and financial resources, and must therefore be more accommodating in integration matters (Barbulescu, 2019, p. 11).

Although the idea of assimilation has resurfaced, it has undergone changes and no longer carries the condescending assimilationist mindset that once defined it, which aimed to completely absorb migrants as influenced entities. Rather, the transition has evolved into one of increasing similarities. Furthermore, the normative emphasis has shifted from an imposed process where the immigrant is an 'object', to an event where persons are 'active subjects', across multi-generational communities, as 'mutated' members of the community, manifest dissimilarities from preceding members of the source population (Brubaker, 2001, pp. 542 - 544).

2.1.6 The influence of the context

To accurately evaluate the outcomes for immigrants and the disparities observed between immigrant and native-born populations, it is essential to consider contextual factors (OECD, 2018b, p. 23). Bertossi argues that scholars tend to utilise preconceived notions with the purpose of demonstrating their own models when comparing integration among countries, in particular in the selection of indicators. For example, Muslim chaplaincies stationed in military institutions or correctional facilities in the Netherlands to illustrate the diversity would be considered trivial or unorthodox in nature within the French context. This is because establishing that the presence of Muslim chaplains in French correctional facilities or the military is indicative of the nation's multiculturalism is difficult. This particular case not only underscores the apprehensions associated with employing a 'one-country/one-indicator' methodology in comparative studies but also illustrates how the utilisation of constructed national models may result in the exclusion of other credible independent variables from the analysis (Bertossi, 2011).

The integration of RAS involves the participation of multiple stakeholders and the complexity of their operations. These stakeholders, which include employers, support organisations, and RAS themselves, are all constrained by the institutional framework within which they operate (Lee et al., 2020). Macro-level factors related to economics, social dynamics, and institutional frameworks have been identified to be pertinent to all international mobile workers, irrespective of their refugee status. These factors exhibit interdependence and mutually influence one another, resulting in compounded effects. The prevalent dependence of the field on success factors at the organisational and individual levels, while disregarding macro-level contextual factors, indicates a bias. Consequently, these last must be considered when developing integration theories (Szkudlarek et al., 2021).

The delivery of services that are more important for the initial phase of integration, such as financial assistance, childcare, language instruction, medical care encompassing psychological well-being, educational opportunities, housing, and all-inclusive information services (Valtonen, 2016), may also be influenced by the context. Consequently, the eventual outcomes of sustained integration, such as job attainment, children's education, social cohesion, security and stability, and civic participation (Puma et al., 2018) may also be affected.

An approach to identifying the stable components of a group is to examine the interrelationships between things that are vital to their daily existence, such as networks and topography. Aside from that, the approach attempts to comprehend the less predictable aspects of their daily lives, such as how they commute to work, utilise amenities and services, and participate in group activities. The premise underlying this approach is that the residential environment of migrants significantly influences whether they are marginalised or welcomed into society. The implementation of a place-based approach, which involves the participation of numerous stakeholders and governmental levels, holds an opportunity to mitigate socio-spatial inequality. Although the original intention of these programmes may not have been to facilitate the integration of migrants, they can effectively target various communities, including migrant communities, through the integration of people-centred strategies and a location-based approach. The secondary benefits of a place-based approach, which entails implementing urban development plans that are specific to the areas where people reside and work, have not yet been thoroughly examined. Giving priority to urban areas that facilitate the functionality of the environment improves the integration of migrants. This can be done by incorporating a broader spatial scope in the territorial strategy and measures from multiple policy domains, including synergies in funding. This allows the capture of the routine activities of the local population, including the interconnected spatialisation of migrants' daily lives, and the revitalisation of deprived areas in an outward-oriented manner to reintegrate them into larger functional territories (Fioretti et al., 2021, pp. 2 - 4).

2.1.7 Frameworks, indicators, and policy analysis in integration studies

A wide variety of different integration models exist at the intermediate level, each of which serves as a framework for investigating the effect that policies have on the integration process at several different levels. Ager and Strang's (2008) model of integration incorporates four different degrees of integration. These levels comprise indicators and measures that apply to functional components of integration, such as housing, health, employment, and education, among other things. In addition, social connections are taken into account. These connections comprise a wide range of different forms of social interactions, including social alliances, social bridges, and social linkages. The approach also takes into account facilitators such as linguistic and cultural understanding, safety, and the cornerstone of integration, which relates

to rights and citizenship. Because of the interconnectedness of the many levels of integration, the scenario that arises is one in which changes made at one level might encourage changes made at other levels (Hynie, 2018). Immigrants may exhibit superior proficiency in certain domains while encountering challenges in others, relative to the native-born cohort. The reason for this is that integration involves a series of complex procedures. The inability to attain success in a particular domain may impede one's capacity to develop in other domains. The process of incorporating multiple integration domains across diverse cross-country metrics necessitates a certain degree of simplification and approximation. The comprehensive assemblage of indicators, when considered collectively, provides a more lucid depiction of the extent to which nations have accomplished the assimilation of their migrant communities (OECD, 2018b, p. 23).

The *Settling in 2018: Indicators of Immigrant Integration* report published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and EU acknowledges that the successful integration of migrants is not solely a matter of economic factors. The subject exhibits a multitude of dimensions, including but not limited to social, educational, and spatial aspects. The close association between drawbacks and the inability to integrate into a single dimension is expected to produce various results. Certain outcomes are comparatively more measurable than others. Moreover, the identification of harmonised indicators pertaining to migrant integration across nations is comparatively effortless in certain domains as compared to others. For example, the measurement of economic integration can be effectively accomplished through the utilisation of labour market outcomes derived from standardised cross-country surveys of considerable size (OECD, 2018b). The UNHCR has identified several indicators of the integration of RAS into the labour market, for the purpose of measuring integration processes. They examine various aspects of the labour market, including labour market participation and employment rates, occupational status, employment commensurate with experience and qualifications, diversity of occupations and non-separated labour markets, job retention, and job advancement and occupational mobility, the legal agreements between employers and employees, specifically regarding the terms of employment and associated perks such as benefits and finally job satisfaction (Cresta & Greco, 2018). The measurement of social or health integration is more challenging, instead,

as it often necessitates the reliance on surveys that gauge attitudes, emotions, and perceptions. Subjective indicators are susceptible to various issues. Perceptions are often subject to significant influence not only from the diverse national contexts in which enquiries are presented but also from the ongoing public discourse or highly publicised events that occur in proximity to the survey date. Furthermore, cross-national comparisons frequently necessitate the utilisation of non-standardised data sources, owing to variations in the formulation of survey questions (OECD, 2018b, p. 23). The Eurobarometer is currently employed as a polling mechanism by the European Commission, the European Parliament, and other EU institutions and agencies to consistently assess the condition of public sentiment in Europe concerning matters pertaining to the EU, as well as viewpoints on topics of a political or social character.³¹

The expanding interest in the study of immigration has generated numerous efforts to quantify immigration policies. The study of these phenomena from a quantitative perspective is relatively new due to a lack of or difficulty in obtaining data in the past. In addition, quantifying migrant integration is difficult due to its complexity and the lack of uniformity in the migration policies of many states, which are founded on multiple criteria (Alaimo et al., 2023). The construction of policy indices has grown in popularity in various disciplines, reflecting a general trend in political science to simplify the complexity of political phenomena and permit cross-national and cross-temporal comparisons (Bjerre et al., 2015, p. 556). By analysing some of the available indexes, Bjerre et al. (2015) found that policy output, policy implementation, and policy outcomes were often conflated, arguing that they should be kept analytically distinct for two main reasons. First, the research will determine which of the three measures are pertinent for investigation. Second, the ability to isolate the effects of outputs on outcomes is crucial. Therefore researchers are not prevented from investigating the independent effects policy output may have on outcomes and vice versa (Bjerre et al., 2015). These policy indexes work well but their architecture may limit them. A numerical value that shows a country's immigration restrictions simplifies massive amounts of data and complicated data analysis. If users do not understand the index's conceptual assumptions and methodological choices, its simplicity may hinder

³¹ See: Eurobarometer. Public Opinion in the European Union. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/>. Accessed on 10 May 2023.

understanding and knowledge. Users must comprehend theoretical background and expectations informing the index construction. Instead of selecting a single numerical measure for convenience, users should customise these schemes to fit their theory and research issue (Bjerre et al., 2015, p. 557).

In the past decade, the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX) has become a standard for comparative studies on migrant integration, and its data has been extensively cited in the literature (Alaimo et al., 2023). It is a one-of-a-kind instrument that measures the integration policies of 56 countries since 2007 (last updated in 2019). The index is a helpful instrument for evaluating and comparing what governments in all countries analysed are doing to promote the integration of migrants (Solano & Huddleston, 2020). The objective of this communication is to educate and involve influential stakeholders in the effective utilisation of indicators to enhance integration governance and policy efficacy. The ultimate goal is to assess policies that foster integration in both socioeconomic and civic dimensions. However, the MIPEX has been subject to certain criticisms. (Alaimo et al., 2023). While comparing MIPEX to other indexing exercises, Huddleston and Borang (2009) positioned integration within a policy context. According to their findings, there are statistically significant correlations between a government's performance on integration policy as measured by MIPEX and its performance on good governance. In contrast, certain nations had legal systems that significantly impacted these connections. They found that despite their excellent governance, welfare generosity, gender equality, and domestic competitiveness, Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland have poor integration policies for non-EU nationals, while the integration policies of Italy, Portugal, and Spain outperform their scores for sound governance, gender equality, and competitiveness (Huddleston & Borang, 2009, p. 83). MIPEX evaluates the effectiveness of targeted policies to promote immigrant integration, and not the labour market or education. A country may, for instance, have favourable targeted policies for migrant access to a labour market that is structurally unfavourable to foreigners (Huddleston & Borang, 2009, p. 66).

Geddes and Wunderlich (2009) agree that it would be overly simplistic to state that there is a connection between policy mapped by MIPEX and outcome, given that integration policy frameworks may or may not be the consequence of these policies. In a study of the EU labour market, it was determined that there is little reason to

assume that there is a direct correlation between the types of policy frameworks depicted by MIPEx and the contextual conditions discovered in relation to labour market integration (Geddes & Wunderlich, 2009, p. 196). The entirety of the context must be considered (Geddes & Wunderlich, 2009, pp. 215 - 216). In addition, they discovered that MIPEx utilises data collected by various nations, not all of which adhere to the same methodology. Despite this, the 'politics of statistics', the variation in which states decide which data to acquire and in what manner, should also be considered if we are to fully comprehend the policy's effects (Geddes & Wunderlich, 2009, p. 196).

2.1.8 Employment and integration: disparities and policy implications

The attainment of employment is a fundamental indicator of integration (Fozdar, 2009; Ghizzi Gola, 2015; Valtonen, 2004, p. 76), as it enables individuals to secure a reliable source of income that is crucial for achieving a desirable standard of living (Shergold et al., 2019, p. 6; Valtonen, 2004). This financial stability, in turn, facilitates greater participation in various domains such as education and leisure activities. Engaging in employment provides individuals with opportunities to expand their social network beyond their immediate circle, facilitating the establishment of connections and the accumulation of social capital within the broader community. Conversely, the state of being unemployed presents a challenge for individuals to engage in social activities and establish new social connections, thereby serving as a significant contributor to social marginalisation (Valtonen, 2004, p. 76).

The comparative employment results between migrants and RAS and the local population can exhibit significant variations contingent on the particular context, policies, and factors such as education, skills, language proficiency, and labour market conditions in each country or region. The degree to which migrants and RAS are able to obtain employment opportunities equivalent to those of the local population may be impacted by factors such as immigration policies, integration programmes, and anti-discrimination measures of the host country (OECD, 2018a, p. 82). RAS are susceptible to various forms of vulnerability, such as those stemming from past traumas, lack of qualification documents, inactivity during the asylum process, cultural and linguistic barriers, and the potential for stigmatisation in various fields (European Commission, 2016, p. 4).

Empirical evidence and scholarly reports have demonstrated that RAS frequently encounter elevated levels of unemployment in comparison to native populations and other migrant cohorts (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Fozdar, 2009; Lee et al., 2020, p. 199; Richardson et al., 2004; Valtonen, 2004, p. 78). It is not uncommon for RAS to be presented with employment opportunities that are characterised by low skill requirements and remuneration, which may even include illicit work (Lee et al., 2020, p. 200), even when they possess relevant qualifications obtained within the host country (Bloch, 2008, pp. 21 - 35), or because their qualifications obtained elsewhere remain unrecognised (Ambrosini, 2014, pp. 246-247; Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021, p. 110; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006), due to the stringent regulations in the validation of foreign credentials, as well as the related time-consuming procedures. This phenomenon is compounded by the disparagement of pre-existing education and work experience, due to the belief that knowledge acquired in so-called developing countries is inferior and incompatible, thereby limiting RAS' access to higher-paying professional positions (Lee et al., 2020, pp. 199 - 201). Enabling the validation of skills and recognition of qualifications is of paramount importance in order to optimise the utilisation of individuals' skills. The significance of this matter is amplified for RAS who may lack essential documentary evidence of their prior educational attainment and credentials or may have experienced disruptions in their educational pursuits (European Commission, 2016, p. 9).

The European Commission acknowledges that the employment rates of third-country nationals are generally lower than those of host country citizens in the majority of member states. A significant number of third-country nationals possess qualifications or skills that exceed the requirements of their current employment and may experience less favourable working conditions in terms of remuneration, employment safeguards, over-representation in specific industries, and limited career advancement opportunities. The female demographic exhibits notably diminished rates of employment and activity, thus necessitating a specific emphasis on their integration into the labour market. Although certain member states, such as Belgium, Italy and Romania, have granted access to the labour market prior to the nine-month deadline stipulated in the Reception Conditions Directive (Directive 2013/33/EU, 2016), as well as the relaxation of conditions in Germany and efforts in countries such as Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Portugal and Estonia to connect RAS with

employment opportunities, there are still considerable obstacles to entering the labour market in practice (European Commission, 2016, p. 9).

In Italy, a similar scenario is observed where migrant workers are often employed in occupations that are considered 'dirty, dangerous and demeaning', which native Italian workers can typically avoid (Armillei, 2017, p. 148; Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021, pp. 215-216). In addition, in many instances, especially in the agriculture sector, exploitation is linked to gang mastery and criminal organisations (the so-called 'caporalato' phenomenon) (Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021, pp. 205-207; Omizzolo & Sodano, 2015, p. 64; Osti, 2017, p. 250).

Although job placement channels have been implemented to assist privileged individuals who have participated in a territorial integration project, the internships and job grants that are activated often do not result in actual employment in the training business. This is primarily caused by a combination of economic circumstances and the challenging labour market in Italy. Moreover, some employers exploit the short agreements made with integration service providers to their advantage by avoiding hiring permanent staff. Furthermore, the lack of knowledge of the Italian language among protection holders often puts them at a disadvantage (Ghizzi Gola, 2015).

Despite the Italian legal system being consistent with the EU regulations, it is still disorganised and fragmented, making it challenging for individuals who have received international or humanitarian protection to secure employment (Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021, pp. 215 - 216). Indeed, the opportunity to secure employment is also contingent upon the legal standing of the individuals in question. In 2011, for example, the process of renewing humanitarian stay permits was conducted at three-month intervals, which effectively restricted the capacity to participate in lawful employment and they were left to fend for themselves (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 243). In many of these cases, the option left is to find work in the shadow economy. In fact, irregular employment is prevalent in several sectors in Italy, including personal and domestic services, agriculture, and the manufacturing industry; it includes mainly Italian labourers and it has had a significant expansion in recent decades (Talani, 2019, p. 120).

2.1.9 Overcoming linguistic barriers in RAS language acquisition

As advocated by the EU's fourth Common Basic Principle (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 20), language acquisition is one of the factors that equip recipients of international protection with the practical skills necessary for daily survival, as it broadens opportunities in public life, such as greater participation in social activities, access to housing, job opportunities, health and the social system, and accessibility to training and education (Wolffhardt et al., 2020, p. 101). While language skills continue to be essential, linguistic barriers should not be regarded as an insurmountable obstacle for RAS. If properly utilised, the cultural and linguistic diversity brought by migrants represents a significant source of opportunity for the host nation (Shergold et al., 2019, pp. 2 - 5). In general, RAS desire to learn the host country's language and improve their abilities, citing language to be crucial to their integration, as it facilitates communication with others, serves as a link to employment, and is crucial to their capacity to live independently (Mogli & Papadopoulou, 2018; Morrice et al., 2021, p. 687). The importance of acquiring the language of the host country is rated highly by RAS, more so than by practitioners working with RAS, researchers and policymakers, and they view language as the third most essential indicator of integration, after housing and employment (Cheung & Phillimore, 2013, p. 37).

RAS have reported difficulties in obtaining employment (Fozdar, 2009) and limitations in their ability to apply for highly skilled positions (Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021, p. 130) due to language barriers, however, language proficiency should not be viewed as a prerequisite for beginning a job search, efforts should be made to ensure that language acquisition can occur concurrently with work experience and continues after they are employed (Shergold et al., 2019, pp. 2 - 5). Studies of language learning indicate that employment does not contribute to greater language proficiency (Tollefson, 1985, p. 756), particularly for those in low-level employment who are hindered from improving their language skills (Morrice et al., 2021, p. 697). On the other hand, language proficiency has the highest correlation with employment, and a greater number of hours of classes generally results in greater language skills, thereby increasing the likelihood of obtaining employment (Tollefson, 1985, p. 756).

Language is the most intimidating of the many obstacles RAS face. In addition, while there are similarities in the experiences of different RAS, the consequences of

forced emigration differ greatly between groups. Therefore, when planning learning modalities for RAS, it is essential to consider all of these factors and what motivates them to acquire a new language (Abou-Khalil et al., 2019, p. 2). RAS identified a number of obstacles to learning, including waiting lists and costs for classes, eligibility for free courses, travel costs, a lack of childcare, and a shortage of classes at higher and lower levels (Morrice et al., 2021, p. 688). In addition, men are more likely to gain better language competencies than women (Phillimore & Goodson, 2008, p. 41). For example, the lack of childcare and the social and cultural norms of gender relations have a disproportionately negative effect on the language acquisition of women compared to males (Lee et al., 2020, pp. 203 - 204).

Multiple factors have been identified by research as potential causes of ineffective learning. First, when the teaching is not contextual (Abou-Khalil et al., 2019, p. 14; Shergold et al., 2019, p. 7), especially if it does not include workplace language (Shergold et al., 2019, p. 7), is not related to their life experiences (Morrice et al., 2021, p. 689; Tollefson, 1985, p. 3), or, in the case of elderly people, is not focused on their daily practical needs (Morrice et al., 2021, pp. 690 - 691). In addition, it has been observed that mixing learners of various skill levels in the same class is detrimental to those at the beginner level, especially the elderly and those with a low level of general education (Damiani, 2021, p. 47; Morrice et al., 2021, p. 690). Other factors influencing learning are associated with modes of instruction. Teaching in community contexts can be substituted for a traditional classroom setting, which is not appealing to everyone (Abou-Khalil et al., 2019, p. 13; Shergold et al., 2019, p. 7). Although many RAS attend classes and use dictionaries, they also rely heavily on their smartphones (Abou-Khalil et al., 2019, p. 2), apps and e-learning can be employed to enhance participation (Damiani, 2021, p. 48; The Council of Europe, 2017); however, this technology may not be accessible to those who are illiterate (Morrice et al., 2021, p. 689).

The mental condition of RAS can also have an impact on their ability to learn, due to the stress associated with their past experiences as well as their present life, which is frequently fraught with uncertainty regarding their living situation or the restrictions imposed by the host nation (Bianco & Ortiz, 2019; Damiani, 2021, p. 48). Tollefson (1985, p.760) also suggests that health-focused English classes may help them not

only better navigate the healthcare system but also comprehend their medical condition.

Due to the necessity of obtaining language certifications for legal purposes, the focus in Europe, including Italy, has primarily been on adapting the language acquisition programmes for migrants without paying separate attention to the needs of RAS. Bianco and Ortiz (2019) found that in Italy existing courses are deemed insufficient for their integration, particularly due to the insufficient number of hours provided. In addition, Italian language classes are sometimes delivered by untrained volunteers within the host agencies (Bianco & Ortiz, 2019, pp. 2 - 4).

2.1.10 The housing maze: obstacles in provision of shelter for RAS

The provision of housing is considered a pivotal measure towards achieving social inclusion for RAS (Blangiardo et al., 2020, p. 3; Bolzoni et al., 2015, pp. 400 - 401; Phillimore & Goodson, 2008, p. 32), often serving as a necessary condition for the full realisation of civil and social entitlements and welfare benefits (Bolzoni et al., 2015, pp. 400 - 401). Insufficient housing policies can lead to challenging circumstances for these vulnerable individuals residing in impoverished conditions (Bolzoni et al., 2015, pp. 400 - 401). For migrants and RAS, who have by definition abandoned the home as a habitual living environment and sphere of daily social reproduction, the concept of home is only a possible point of arrival, not an obvious starting point, for settlement, inclusion, and recognition (Boccagni, 2017, p. 61).

The issue of providing housing for RAS is complex and multifaceted, as it is hindered by various factors such as their limited access to economic and non-economic resources, discriminatory practises, and inadequate housing policies (Andersen et al., 2013, p. 22; Bolzoni et al., 2015, p. 403; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Fozdar, 2009). Despite the existence of policies in some countries aimed at facilitating the acquisition of permanent housing for RAS following the granting of their refugee status, the results with regard to their spatial integration continue to be a topic of debate. Commonly, policies prove to be inadequate in preventing or remedying spatial segregation, and in some cases, they may even facilitate its perpetuation (Dell'Olio, 2004, p. 117). The majority of European nations provide asylum aspirants with housing while their requests are being processed. Although the types of housing vary considerably, they are frequently located in depressed or isolated areas (Bolzoni

et al., 2015, pp. 403 - 404). Besides, upon being discharged from the reception system, which offers provisional accommodation, RAS often encounter difficulties in securing permanent housing (Blangiardo et al., 2020, p. 3; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021). In addition, the reception system may not have enough locations to accommodate all those in need (Bolzoni et al., 2015, pp. 401 - 402), or the reception accommodation period may be too brief (OECD, 2018a, p. 108), or there may not be enough public housing for local citizens (Blangiardo et al., 2020, p. 55). In many instances, RAS are not afforded the opportunity to select the location of their reception accommodations. Consequently, if they possess any familial or social connections that could provide them with support, they may be precluded from accessing such aid. Furthermore, in certain instances, these individuals are also relocated to multiple reception centres, thereby lacking sufficient time to establish their own local networks (Cheung & Phillimore, 2013, p. 33; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021). Incapable of finding their own housing, RAS, who do not have family or friends support or cannot afford to rent a property, are forced to rely on alternative arrangements such as informal housing, resulting in overcrowded households (European Commission, 2016, p. 3), temporary homelessness, squatting, or the need for aid from charitable and non-governmental organisations (NGO) (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 242; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Semprebon & Pelacani, 2020, p. 23). The UNHCR reports, for instance, that groups of homeless migrants circulate in a number of large Italian cities, seeking refuge in abandoned structures and squats without essential necessities. Local communities view them as a source of criminality, urban decay, and a threat to the protection of residents (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 242).

European asylum laws require formal equality in the access to social rights between RAS and nationals as a means of preventing social hardship. According to international law, RAS are entitled to a specific set of rights that must be granted by the host state, as they fall under its protection. For the enforcement of these rights, it is imperative that they are underpinned by distinct national and local policies, as well as tangible practices (Bolzoni et al., 2015, p. 405). In Italy, the majority of homes are owner-occupied (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021), at the same time the supply of public housing is among the smallest in Europe. This indicates that immigrants have extremely limited access to public accommodation. In addition, Italy has a widespread 'black rental market' (Dell'Olio, 2004, pp. 120 - 124). An estimate of the types of

accommodation for asylum seekers and holders of international protection in Italy as of January 2020 reveals that those hosted by reception centres and those renting their own place account for nearly the same proportion (respectively 42.3 per cent and 43.3 per cent), while the third group (12.4 per cent) consists of those who are free guests of relatives and acquaintances (Blangiardo et al., 2020, p. 49). After the reception period, which is typically between six and eighteen months, RAS must find their own housing, but without a permanent employment contract, which is often required to secure a rental property, or sufficient income to cover the cost, this can be difficult. The Italian bureaucratic and administrative obstacles associated with stay permits exacerbate the situation, particularly in terms of eligibility for public housing (Bolzoni et al., 2015, p. 407; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021).

2.1.11 Conclusion

The process of integrating recently arrived immigrants, particularly RAS, into their new environments is a multifaceted and constantly evolving project that necessitates the consideration of numerous theoretical models, methodological strategies, and contextual factors. Integration is not a universal solution. To be effective, strategies should acknowledge the unique challenges and opportunities that distinct migrant groups and host societies present. It is essential to employ tailored strategies that cater to the unique requirements of diverse communities in order to surmount integration obstacles and cultivate more inclusive societies. Future research should concentrate on the development of more comprehensive and context-sensitive approaches to resolve the complexities of immigrant integration. Furthermore, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term efficacy of policies and programmes, it is imperative to conduct additional longitudinal studies that monitor the integration trajectories of immigrants over time.

It is still a substantial challenge to accurately measure integration. Comparisons are difficult due to the absence of standardised indicators and the variety of contextual factors. It is crucial to create more precise instruments and methods for evaluating integration, which should consider the diverse contexts in which it occurs. Moreover, housing, language proficiency, and employment are particularly critical areas that necessitate concentrated attention. Therefore, effective integration strategies must be comprehensive, addressing not only a single aspect of the immigrant experience but

also the full spectrum of factors that contribute to successful integration, including the policies that govern other areas connected to integration that create barriers, such as socioeconomic disparities, discrimination, and employment and housing equal access.

2.2 Institutional discrimination and illegitimate administrative practices

2.2.1 Introduction

As per Common Basic Principle 6 for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU, ensuring non-discrimination is crucial for fostering integration and ensuring equal access to products, services, and institutions for immigrants, just like national citizens (Wolffhardt et al., 2020, p. 25).³² Regrettably, although hosting societies attempt to foster integration through the implementation of some policies and practices, they remain far from genuinely embracing others. This fact is most evident through observation of daily life. While there are instances of remarkable unity, there are also numerous divergent viewpoints that are primarily motivated by prejudices and apprehension towards those who are 'different', and often perceived as a threat. Consequentially, numerous instances of discrimination against RAS and migrants in general occur (Blangiardo et al., 2020, p. 34). Primarily, legal precariousness, gender, accent, religion, appearance, and ethnic origin are associated with discrimination (Armillei, 2017, p. 142; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006; Lee et al., 2020, p. 200). Furthermore, the politicisation of RAS as a welfare burden exacerbates this phenomenon (Lee et al., 2020, p. 200). Alongside the antagonistic and exclusive stances adopted by the population, there exist institutionalised forms of discrimination that, in the majority of instances, confer preferential treatment upon Italian-born individuals seeking entry into specific labour market services or positions. Blangiardo et al suggest that the forms of integration advocated by policies and those of institutional discrimination coexist on a single, provocative canvas (Blangiardo et al., 2020, p. 34).

³² Common basic principles for immigrant integration policy in the European Union. Principle 6: 'Access for immigrants to institutions, as well as to public and private goods and services, on a basis equal to national citizens and in a non-discriminatory way is a critical foundation for better integration'.

Institutional discrimination does not generally occur as a result of the malicious intents of a ruling group or through coercive legislation imposed by a governing authority. It is more likely to occur due to unchallenged norms and behaviours inside a system, as well as the foundational assumptions of institutional regulations. Many individuals may unwittingly contribute to the maintenance and perpetuation of oppression through the execution of their daily responsibilities and activities (Ambrosini, 2023; Valtonen, 2004, p. 80). Local authorities may exhibit passivity failing to resolve conflictual situations or postponing the delivery of services to RAS; this position can be characterised as a form of 'passive opposition' (Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2023b, p. 19).

Complaints from victims of racist offences or racial discrimination are uncommon, and the anti-discrimination and criminal law provisions against racism are rarely enforced (Armillei, 2017, p. 142; Marchetti, 2021, p. 56). Due to their frequent integration into established bureaucratic procedures and long-standing customs, these practices are gradually accepted and perceived as normal due to a lack of awareness. Ironically, it is simpler to recognise and address blatant and unacceptable prejudice than it is to detect and confront more covert and concealed manifestations. The enactment of discrimination by public institutions serves to legitimise it, thereby impeding immigrant minorities from effectively denouncing and combating such discriminatory practices (Ambrosini, 2023; Corsi, 2018, p. 11). The established acceptance of institutional discrimination is moreover strengthened by the widespread conviction that legislators design policies to advance their personal agendas rather than the collective welfare of the public. Consequently, lawmakers and Questura officials are also perceived as intentionally compounding the intricacy of the immigration bureaucracy (Tuckett, 2020, p. 76). Furthermore, the principle of equal treatment has received scant attention from either judges or the Constitutional Court. Discriminatory treatment of foreigners in the private sector has also received infrequent condemnation from the courts, not due to reluctance on the part of the judiciary but rather because of the limited number of cases that have reached the courts. A prevalent issue that judges have encountered in cases involving discrimination against foreigners is the prohibition on accessing public services. Most judicial decisions in such cases revolve around disputes in the public administration (Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021, p. 212; Flamini, 2020, p. 549). Despite the rulings of

local courts and tribunals, regional governments or corresponding bodies persist in their activism, disregarding these rulings. They not only uphold discriminatory requirements but also continue to create rules that are similar to the ones that have been ruled unlawful (Corsi, 2018, p. 11; Guariso, 2020, p. 531). Exclusion from public services is a significant component of internal policies, alongside others that are centred around the combination of immigration and security. The implementation of these internal policies poses significant challenges due to their potential infringement on fundamental rights, such as the right to health or international protection. Moreover, it necessitates the collaboration of various stakeholders, including local authorities, welfare services, and experts in relevant fields (Ambrosini et al., 2022, p. 10).

2.2.2 Barriers to welfare and integration service access

The most significant barrier to integration pertaining to the reception system is the absence of direct access to integration services. As noted above, asylum applicants and holders of humanitarian protection were subject to discrimination under the 2018 Security Decree³³, which denied them integration services by blocking their access to SIPROIMI centres (Marchetti, 2021, pp. 53-54). Numerous operators of integration centres resisted by abstaining from the frequently repeated tenders due to a lack of participants (Avallone, 2021, p. 9). When the Prefetture were unable to allocate the tenders for the provision of new places for integration services, they were compelled in many cases to transfer the beneficiaries to other locations in Italy, consequently forfeiting the integration efforts that had been undertaken thus far (Avallone, 2021, p. 43). In other cases, the Prefetture were obliged to renew the contracts of their former administrators in compliance with the legislation that was valid prior to 2018, thus the systems remained unchanged. Additional operators filed complaints with the regional administrative tribunals (Openpolis, 2019). In other instances, appeals in order to access the system were filed by some of those beneficiaries, who were excluded by the integration services due to the Security Decree (Facchini, 2019; Indelicato, 2019).³⁴ Unfortunately, given that not every tribunal operated in the same fashion, not every appeal was successful (Openpolis, 2019).

³³ The Legislative Decree no. 113/2018 was adopted on 5 October 2018 and converted into Law no. 132/2018. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2018/12/03/18G00161/sg>.

³⁴ See footnote no. 33.

The above examples illustrate the coping and resisting strategies employed by operators to counteract legislative changes and bureaucratic obstacles as a form of everyday resistance against the imposed restrictions and limitations. These strategies aimed to ensure survival within the existing system, rather than directly overthrowing or transforming it (Maculan, 2022, p. 432). Moreover, caseworkers have expressed dissatisfaction with their job conditions and the challenge of working with limited resources (Giudici, 2020, p. 441), a sentiment that is widely shared by other professionals involved in the asylum process (Dallara & Lacchei, 2021, p. 100; Giacomelli, 2021, pp. 272-286). Therefore, the operators' positioning becomes intricate, as it involves a continuous interplay between maintaining a certain distance from and being in close proximity to the state. Caseworkers are responsible for managing the unrealistic expectations of asylum seekers and actively implementing the significant reduction of the Italian state's obligations regarding asylum rights. Conversely, they frequently exhibit a discerning disposition towards that same system that they ultimately embody (Giudici, 2020, p. 445).

Despite re-admitting the asylum seekers to the integration centres in 2020, the Migration Decree³⁵ of the new Minister of the Interior Lamorgese maintained a differentiation in the services offered by these centres by excluding them from employment orientation and training services. In both Decree cases, all asylum applicants were granted the right to work sixty days after submitting their asylum applications; nevertheless, it is challenging for those lacking language proficiency, orientation, or training to secure employment. Subsequently, the probability of becoming a vulnerable labourer in the tomato fields, a minor-time drug vendor, or a prostitute increases significantly (Avallone, 2021, pp. 41-43). Furthermore, the extensive waiting periods for the determination of protection status have a profound effect on the accessibility of comprehensive integration services. A considerable number of asylum applicants are required to endure wait times of three years or longer

³⁵ Decreto legislativo n.130 del 21 Ottobre 2020: Disposizioni urgenti in materia di immigrazione, protezione internazionale e complementare, modifiche agli articoli 131-bis, 391-bis, 391-ter e 588 del codice penale, nonché misure in materia di divieto di accesso agli esercizi pubblici ed ai locali di pubblico trattenimento, di contrasto all'utilizzo distorto del web e di disciplina del Garante nazionale dei diritti delle persone private della libertà personale [Legislative Decree no.130 of 21 October 2020: Urgent provisions on immigration, international and complementary protection, amendments to articles 131-bis, 391-bis, 391-ter and 588 of the penal code, as well as measures regarding the prohibition of access to public establishments and places of public entertainment, to combat the distorted use of the web and to regulate the National Guarantor of the rights of persons deprived of personal liberty]. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/10/21/20G00154/sq>.

(Bove, 2017, 2018, 2020; Bove & Romano, 2021; Della Puppa & Sanò, 2021, p. 15; Giovannetti, 2021). As a consequence, individuals may be compelled to reside in makeshift shelters or dormitories due to administrative discrimination or delays in the process, despite the right to access the system (Marchetti, 2021, p. 57).

The discriminatory and selective procedures also affect the welfare rights of migrants as these rights are categorised and contingent upon the immigration status. In regard to asylum, individuals in transit face restricted availability of public services as they await the outcome of their application. Besides, the implementation of policies that are contingent upon the welfare rights of migrants is not uniform across all jurisdictions in Italy. In reality, provisions at the national level interact significantly with the particular local environment in which they are executed (Bazurli & Campomori, 2022, pp. 1093-1094). International protection beneficiaries are required to engage in social security when they seek to establish themselves in a foreign country. This is not a matter of privilege, but rather a vital necessity. RAS typically experience a complete exhaustion of their economic resources, including savings and income, as well as the loss of their essential family and social ties. They must start a new life with minimal financial stability or assistance from their close acquaintances. To ensure the best possible protection, it is crucial to provide assistance for basic needs during the initial reception phase, as well as granting access to comprehensive social security provisions that support long-term integration (Wolffhardt et al., 2020, p. 85). RAS often encounter systemic barriers that impede their access to a variety of services and social subsidies and institutional discrimination manifests itself in a wide range of tangible forms. The following subsections mention a selection of them.

2.2.3 Challenging administrative boundaries: securing residency rights and integration

The processes by which individuals are denied residency entail the implementation of administrative borders, which serve as bureaucratic barriers despite lacking physical characteristics. The objective of these barriers is to safeguard specific facets of the local community by prohibiting undesirable individuals from obtaining residency. These obstacles hinder the social sphere in particular by restricting access to a variety of welfare benefits and services. Administrative borders serve as mechanisms for both differentiation and interdependence, rather than simply excluding certain entities. Subjecting individuals who are denied residency to legal and material subordination

serves to render them more compliant and susceptible as workers within local labour markets. From an economic standpoint, the presence of individuals lacking legal rights within municipal territories can be a beneficial outcome for local authorities and economic entities. (Gargiulo, 2017, p. 336).

At the local level, the Security Decree³⁶ abolished the automatic inclusion of asylum seekers in the municipal population registry, required to access welfare local services and obtain documents, which further undermined the system's capacity to safeguard and support asylum seekers. The seeming bureaucratic gibberish was, in fact, a kind of unjust discrimination violating Article 3 of the Italian Constitution on non-discrimination.³⁷ It hindered local applicants from exercising their fundamental rights, particularly the right to health. The new legislation resulted in the creation of a chaotic system that promoted discriminatory treatment and perpetuated stereotypes, thus identifying cognitive distortions and inefficiencies. More precisely, the proposed legislation weakened a personal entitlement - acknowledged, not bestowed, by the legal system - by allowing illegitimate practices (Spada, 2021, pp. 121-122). In practice, to impede their ability to enrol on the registry, it was nationally determined that the stay permit for asylum seekers was no longer an acceptable document (Ministero dell'Interno, 2019).

Given that registration in the residents' registry is used by mayors or their delegates to ascertain the individual's habitual residence within the municipal territory, asylum seekers were thus deprived of domicile and, consequently, access to fundamental services, including employment registration, identification document acquisition, and public health service utilisation, by local authorities (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 242; Della Puppa & Sanò, 2021, p. 16). In addition, neglecting to register precludes a priori the computation of the duration spent as an asylum seeker, a period that may significantly

³⁶ See footnote no. 33.

³⁷ Articolo 3 della Costituzione italiana: Tutti i cittadini hanno pari dignità sociale e sono eguali davanti alla legge, senza distinzione di sesso, di razza, di lingua, di religione, di opinioni politiche, di condizioni personali e sociali. È compito della Repubblica rimuovere gli ostacoli di ordine economico e sociale, che, limitando di fatto la libertà e l'eguaglianza dei cittadini, impediscono il pieno sviluppo della persona umana e l'effettiva partecipazione di tutti i lavoratori all'organizzazione politica, economica e sociale del Paese. [Article 3 of the Italian Constitution: 'All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions. It is the duty of the Republic to remove those obstacles of an economic or social nature which constrain the freedom and equality of citizens, thereby impeding the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organisation of the country'].

surpass the initial six-month period for which the stay permit is issued, to exercise later all those rights that are linked to the duration of residence (Flamini, 2020, p. 558). Furthermore, it is crucial to consider that the absence of residency and the subsequent inability to acquire an identification card hinder participation in training internships, the establishment of postal or banking accounts, the execution of employment contracts, and various other activities and processes that are strategic for achieving integration objectives (Giovannetti & Olivieri, 2021).

As a precautionary measure, numerous anti-discrimination actions were proposed to ensure the asylum applicants' inclusion in the registry. Similarly, acceptance decisions from tribunals of several locations in Italy were numerous. The resistant municipalities were subsequently directed, in accordance with a constitutional interpretation, to promptly register the asylum-seeking applicant in the registry of the resident population (Flamini, 2020, p. 558). Subsequently, in July 2020, the Constitutional Court rendered a decision expunging the provision, that was preventing asylum seekers from registering their residence in the civil registry, due to its inherent inconsistency with the intended purpose of the legislation.³⁸ As a result, asylum applicants were once more eligible to re-enrol and avail themselves of the associated services (Fondazione ISMU, 2021, p. 203; Fondazione ISMU, 2020, pp. 113-114).

Despite the repeal of legislation, 21.1 per cent of reception and integration system (Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione – SAI) centres identified critical issues in the registration processes in 2021 for a variety of reasons (Giovannetti & Olivieri, 2021, p. 123). One of the reasons, for instance, was an improper request for an address. This had an impact on RAS who were homeless, lodging outdoors or lacking a permanent place of residence. In a document issued by the Ministry of the Interior, it is specified that the registration request, which is a citizen's subjective right, is not subject to any conditions; otherwise, it would violate Article 16 of the Constitution on the right to residency and freedom to travel in restricting the freedom of movement and establishment of citizens in the territory.³⁹ Furthermore, the Ministry of the

³⁸ Italian Constitutional Court ruling no.186/2020.
https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/actionSchedaPronuncia.do?param_ecli=ECLI:IT:COST:2020:186.
Accessed on 29 March 2024.

³⁹Articolo 16 della Costituzione italiana: Ogni cittadino può circolare e soggiornare liberamente in qualsiasi parte del territorio nazionale, salvo le limitazioni che la legge stabilisce in via generale per motivi di sanità o di sicurezza. Nessuna restrizione può essere determinata da ragioni politiche. Ogni cittadino è libero di uscire dal territorio della Repubblica e di rientrarvi, salvo gli obblighi di legge. [Article

Interior's document specifies that the notion of residence is established upon an individual's habitual presence within the municipal territory, where they reside consistently and cultivate their social connections and daily routines; thus, the type of lodging cannot pose a hindrance (Bolzoni et al., 2015, p. 406; Zoli et al., 2022).

Another recurrent reason for refusal to enrol in the registry comes from the request to provide documents from the country of origin that are not possible to be provided by RAS, such as passports, birth certificates and family status certificates, which RAS are not always in a position to obtain (ASGI, 2019a, p. 166; Giovannetti & Olivieri, 2021, p. 123; Maculan, 2022, p. 438), or from the lack of a stay permit or an expired one (Spada, 2021, p. 17).

2.2.4 Applying for international protection and stay permit grant

The responsibility for submission of the international protection application and the issuance of stay permits lies with the Questura, however, decisions on asylum applications are made by territorial commissions. Asylum seekers may initially declare their intention to seek protection; this is sufficient legal standing to grant them entry into Italy pending a determination of their application by the appropriate territorial commissions and access to the reception system (ASGI, 2011, pp. 67-68; ASGI, 2019a, p. 92). Rarely does this occur and jurisprudence is frequently consulted for assistance (ASGI, 2023). Furthermore, in cases where asylum seekers formally express their intention by submitting a formal application to the Questura, which represents the next step, the police lack the authority to render a determination or deny the application on the grounds that it is invalid or that, given the circumstances, they believe it will not be granted. Several administrative tribunal decisions required the Questura to accept and formally receive the application in such circumstances (Ambrosini et al., 2022, p. 35; ASGI, 2019a, pp. 93-94; ASGI, 2023). As documented by non-governmental organisations, lawyers' associations, and the media, the Questura and Prefettura have a history of engaging in illegitimate practices, such as requesting a domicile address from individuals who do not have one or denying the formalisation of an application on the grounds that there are no available places in

16 of the Italian Constitution: 'Every citizen has the right to reside and travel freely in any part of the country, except for such general limitations as may be established by law for reasons of health or security. No restriction may be imposed for political reasons. Every citizen is free to leave the territory of the republic and return to it, notwithstanding any legal obligations'.

the reception system (ASGI,2023; Rondi, 2022). The ambiguous nature of these procedures not only induces anxiety but also establishes opportunities for its users. As a result of their interactions with institutions and processes of the state, migrants acquire culturally specific modes of conduct which include exploiting ambiguities of the system. Despite their utility, though, these strategies offer only restricted benefits (Tuckett, 2020, pp. 46-74).

The illegitimate acceptance procedures of some Questure are a prime contributor to the challenges that individuals face when endeavouring to request protection. The reception of asylum applicants is contingent upon an appointment system, which lacks a standardised framework and is instead administered by the respective local Questura. Frequently, appointments are limited to a handful per week, and in-person booking is mandatory in some police offices; office reception is typically staffed for only a few hours per day. Large numbers of asylum seekers and other migrants requesting stay permits or their renewal frequently form disorganised crowds in the vicinity of the offices. Some even pitch tents outside the premises from the previous evening. Such a scenario may culminate in rioting and is likely to be reported in the media (Borelli et al., 2023, p. 7; Carra, 2023; Giuzzi, 2023; Lici, 2017). Yet, administrative tribunals determined that the expression of a desire for protection does not even require a tangible presence; rather, it can be accomplished through the use of certified electronic correspondence [Posta Elettronica Certificata – PEC] (ASGI,2023).

Even once asylum seekers manage to request an appointment, they have to wait a long time, sometimes several months, before it is granted. The legislation mandates that the application be submitted no later than three days after the expression of intent to apply (six days if the intention is expressed at the frontier; in the case of a large influx of applicants, the deadline may be extended by up to ten days); however, these deadlines are seldom adhered to in practice, particularly in major metropolitan areas. Subsequent to the submission of an asylum application, the issuance of stay permits is also subject to delays (Bove & Romano, 2021, p. 26). Immigration offices of the local Questura ascribe the unfortunate situation to structural and organisational deficiencies, such as a lack of personnel, resources, and equipment to promptly fulfil the numerous responsibilities imposed upon them by law (ASGI,2011, p. 269). Nevertheless, in accordance with a recent ruling of an administrative tribunal, they

must utilise adequate and sufficient resources to ensure compliance with the law (ASGI, 2023).⁴⁰ A recently-established national portal facilitates registration and change of residence for both Italian citizens and foreigners.⁴¹ Nevertheless, foreign users encounter challenges in accessing it due to language and technological proficiency barriers, as well as the requirement to provide a digital ID (Zoli et al., 2022).

2.2.5 Discrimination and housing policies

Governments have the ability to either promote or hinder integration through their housing and education policies. Immigrants facing housing market discrimination or exclusion from the market can be viewed as both a result and a catalyst of discrimination in other domains, such as politics, economy, and culture. Improving the housing situation of immigrants is not the sole solution for achieving social integration, rather, providing suitable housing for immigrants is a crucial and essential measure for expediting the integration process in various policy domains, including employment and community relations (Dell'Olio, 2004, p. 117; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021, pp. 1-11).

The Italian housing system exhibits intricacies that render it particularly complex. It is distinguished by a high prevalence of home ownership, a minimal proportion of public structures, a limited amount of social housing in the market, and a significant reliance on the family unit (Colombo, 2019, p. 144). According to the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) 2021 statistics, 70.8 per cent of Italian households are homeowners, with an additional 28.0 per cent owning other properties.⁴² Furthermore, 8.7 per cent of households enjoy the use of their house or apartment without charge, while 20.5 per cent live in rented accommodations. Ownership is not exclusively limited to the affluent. Among the fifth of the least affluent households, 55.1 per cent own (outright or mortgaged) the property they reside in, and this figure progressively rises to 83.9 per cent among the most affluent individuals (CENSIS, 2022). This paradigm stems from housing policies in Italy that have consistently prioritised

⁴⁰ Tribunale ordinario di Roma – XVIII Sezione civile (sezione specializzata in materia di diritti e immigrazione), 30 August 2023. [Tribunal of Rome – Section 18th (specialised migration rights section)].

⁴¹ Anagrafe Nazionale. [National Registry Office]. <https://www.anagrafenazionale.interno.it/>. Accessed on 13 January 2024.

⁴² Istituto Nazionale di Statistica [National Institute of Statistics].

homeownership over renting, particularly since the 1980s but also dating back to the post-war period (Colombo, 2019, p. 145). When discussing the population of migrants, in particular RAS, it is important to acknowledge the significant challenges that arise from the circumstances of those who are compelled to leave their homeland. In addition to the competition for access to social services, there is also the presence of discrimination in housing markets that further fuels competitiveness among economically disadvantaged individuals (Blangiardo et al., 2020, pp. 41-42), including exorbitant rents, declining living conditions, overcrowding, and landlords' reluctance to rent to foreigners at fair market rates (Dell'Olio, 2004, p. 120).

Public residential buildings intended for housing assistance (ERP), also known in Italy as 'case popolari' [social housing], are publicly owned homes rented to individuals or families in disadvantaged conditions. The assignment, management and determination of the rent of these accommodations, calculated on the basis of the family income and assets and the number of members of the assigned family unit, are regulated by regional laws (Regione Lazio, 2023). In contrast to the legal provisions that grant access to housing and eligibility for housing benefits to legally resident foreigners on an equal footing with Italian citizens, subsequent regulatory provisions have imposed additional criteria. These requirements have been the subject of Constitutional Court decisions. One such stipulation is that applicants must have maintained a registered residence in the municipality of application for a minimum of five years; however, Italian nationals are not obligated to adhere to such a time frame. The Constitutional Court rendered a decision in 2020 declaring this additional requirement illegitimate.⁴³ The court reasoned that there is no correlation between the duration of residence and the necessity for housing, and furthermore, that five years of residence in a given area does not necessarily indicate a significant likelihood of continued residence.

Another discriminatory requirement is that applicants must provide official documentation proving the nonexistence of assets in their country of origin or any other location worldwide; Italian nationals, on the other hand, are permitted to provide evidence via self-declaration. The courts also intervened in this matter by quashing

⁴³ Constitutional Court, sentence no. 44, 11 March 2020.
<https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/actionSchedaPronuncia.do?anno=2020&numero=44>. Accessed on 29 March 2024.

this unreasonable requirement (Fondazione ISMU, 2020, pp. 40-41; Colombo, 2019, pp. 146-147; Fondazione ISMU, 2020, p. 111; Guariso, 2020, pp. 530-531; 2023, p. 181).

2.2.6 Discrimination and access to employment

The right to work in Italy is granted to asylum seekers sixty days after the filing of their asylum application (ASGI, 2019b); nevertheless, they encounter a number of impediments when attempting to enter the formal labour market. To begin with, asylum seekers may be situated in regions where the relationship between job demand and supply is especially tenuous, either because centres are geographically isolated or because they are situated in areas with limited mobility and employment opportunities. Furthermore, it is critical to underscore the fact that the right to work becomes operational precisely two months subsequent to the initiation of the asylum process through the submission of the appropriate form [modello C3]. Nonetheless, this form is occasionally completed and submitted to the appropriate authorities well after the migrant has arrived at the reception centre; this effectively delays the possibility of regular employment in the city of settlement for several months (Di Cecco, 2021, p. 6).

With the Security Decree⁴⁴ of 2018 and the Migration Decree⁴⁵ of 2020, asylum seekers were no longer eligible to receive employment orientation and training services in the reception centres, as previously stated. In addition, the potential consequence of the 2018 Security Decree's strict regulations is that an increased proportion of individuals may have been motivated to pursue informal work as a means to obtain quick cash, due to the unpredictability surrounding their legal standing (Dimitriadis, 2023, p. 271). An additional rationale for RAS to engage in informal labour is that their annual income should not surpass around €6,000 if they enter the reception system, as otherwise, they will lose the right to accommodation facilities. This forces individuals to make difficult decisions, as this amount is not sufficient to support themselves if they are denied access to housing (Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021, p. 202; Di Cecco, 2021, pp. 6-7).

⁴⁴ See footnote no. 33.

⁴⁵ See footnote no.35.

Given that the law provides that asylum seekers can be employed 60 days after the submission of the application for recognition of international protection, this right must therefore necessarily also include the right to register at least with the Employment Centre [Centro per l'impiego] (ASGI, 2019b). The Employment Centres are provincial or autonomous region-coordinated public structures, and also serve Italians. They advocate proactive interventions in employment policy and support the alignment of job supply and demand. In addition, they execute administrative tasks including the issuance of unemployment certificates, terminations of employment relationships, and registrations on mobility lists and lists of protected categories. During the 2018 Security Decree⁴⁶ period, access to Employment Centres was denied in many instances because of the Decree prohibition to enrol in the residence registry, even if the National Agency for Work Active Policies [Agenzia Nazionale Politiche Attive del Lavoro – ANPAL]⁴⁷ explicitly acknowledged that the service could be utilised without the requirement of possessing an identity card or a registered residence (ASGI, 2019b). Despite the fact that asylum seekers are formally eligible for unemployment benefits, there is a requirement to show at least two years of pension contributions from past employment. This requirement effectively precludes them from exercising this right, as it is highly improbable that they would be in a position to show the contributions (Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021, p. 203).

Even in 2019, when the Italian government created the so-called 'Citizenship income' [Reddito di cittadinanza], a subsidy for the unemployed, the Constitutional Court had to intervene. Poor Italians, EU citizens, and nationals of third countries with a valid long-term stay permit who had resided in Italy for a minimum of ten years and two consecutive years were eligible to receive this income. The Constitutional Court on multiple occasions issued rulings concerning residency requirements, specifically those that mandated foreign nationals to maintain a continuous presence in the country in order to access specific services. The Court reached the conclusion that indirect discrimination had occurred when the residence requirement applied to services for basic necessities, which disproportionately affected foreigners in

⁴⁶ See footnote no. 33.

⁴⁷ Agenzia Nazionale Politiche Attive del Lavoro [National Agency for Work Active Policies]. <https://www.anpal.gov.it/centri-per-l-impiego>. Accessed on 18 January 2024.

comparison to nationals (Bove, 2020; Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021, pp. 207-208; Flamini, 2020, pp. 537-539).

Negotiating the labyrinth of bureaucracy can prove to be a difficult and even distressing ordeal, particularly in cases where authorities impose varying procedures and interpretations of the law and experience delays in issuing stay permits, including both initial and renewal permits (Dallara & Lacchei, 2021, pp. 85-86; Tuckett, 2020, p. 51). The extended processing times not only give rise to uncertainties concerning the legal standing of the applicants but also present significant obstacles to securing gainful employment (Tuckett, 2020, p. 50). While it is feasible to maintain employment while awaiting the issuance or renewal of a stay permit, an administrative tribunal in Brescia determined that relying solely on its receipt would reduce the likelihood of securing employment (ASGI, 2023).⁴⁸ As a consequence of the deviation of police office procedures from legal requirements—notably, the issuance or renewal of stay permits for asylum applications encounters substantial delays, occasionally surpassing the document's validity period—it is thus not unusual for asylum seekers to obtain their stay permits after the latter have already expired. A document confirming receipt of the application should be carried by centre residents during this time period in lieu of the temporary stay permit. Nevertheless, employers frequently reject these receipts on the grounds that they fail to provide adequate evidence to establish a contractual relationship. Furthermore, asylum seekers frequently encounter situations where they lack a stay permit or receipt as a result of the police office's frequent malfunctions. The migrants' quasi-documented status creates a paradoxical circumstance in which they are unable to engage in employment because, despite theoretically belonging to a protected legal category associated with the pending asylum application, they lack tangible evidence of their status (Di Cecco, 2021, p. 6). In other cases, instead, certain employers' policies prohibit work while the permit is being renewed (Tuckett, 2020, p. 50).

Another example of discrimination and an obstacle to employment is represented by a number of financial institutions that denied requests from RAS to open deposit accounts without a valid identification card or civil registry enrolment. Nevertheless, it is explicitly stated in banking and credit legislation that to open a deposit account,

⁴⁸ Tribunal of Brescia order no. 1440/2022 of 10 March 2022.

every legally residing consumer in the EU, irrespective of their place of residence, including homeless and RAS, is entitled to do so without any form of discrimination.⁴⁹ In addition, neither the provision of an identification card nor the registration for the civil registry are mandated by national policy as prerequisites for establishing a bank account (ASGI, 2019a; ASGI, 2019b, p. 169). Despite this, some asylum seekers were denied access to a deposit account with financial institutions, including with Poste Italiane [Italian Post], on the grounds that they were in possession of a mere receipt for asylum application, during the protracted waiting period for a Questura appointment. A tribunal in Rome was obliged to intervene in one of these cases since the deposit account is a fundamental entitlement required for consistent employment and receiving payment from an employer and ordered Poste Italiane to stop the discriminatory conduct.⁵⁰

2.2.7 Access to the health system

Accessibility to health services is regarded as one of the most important indicators of the degree of integration of RAS in a territory, given that this population is frequently, if not entirely, disadvantaged in this regard, due to linguistic barriers, a lack of comprehension of distinct organisational and cultural codes, and a varying perception of risk and illness (Vercillo et al., 2021, p. 5).

As per the provisions outlined in Article 27 of the Qualification Decree, RAS are entitled to the same health care and social security provisions as Italian citizens and they are required to register with the Italian National Health Service [Servizio Sanitario Nazionale: SSN].⁵¹ As Italian citizens, they are entitled to the same treatment and complete equality of rights with regard to the provision of assistance by the SSN in

⁴⁹ Art. 126 noviesdecies of the '*Testo Unico Bancario*' [Consolidated Banking Act], Legislative Decree 1 September 1993, n. 385, last modified 23 December 2021, n.238, page 298 <https://www.bancaditalia.it/compiti/vigilanza/intermediari/Testo-Unico-Bancario.pdf>. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

⁵⁰ Deliberation of the Ordinary Tribunal of Rome, Section Immigration and Individual Rights, of 21 December 2020, www.dirittoimmigrazione cittadinanza.it/allegati/fascicolo-n-1-2021/diritti-civili/686-2-trib-roma-21-12-2020/file. Accessed on 23 January 2024.

⁵¹ Legislative Decree no. 251/2007 'Implementation of Directive 2004/83/EC on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third-country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted'. Amended by Legislative Decree no. 18/2014. Art. 27. Health and social assistance: 1. Holders of refugee status and subsidiary protection status have the right to the same treatment granted to Italian citizens in the field of social and health assistance. [Art. 27. Assistenza sanitaria e sociale: 1. I titolari dello status di rifugiato e dello status di protezione sussidiaria hanno diritto al medesimo trattamento riconosciuto al cittadino italiano in materia di assistenza sociale e sanitaria].

Italy. Registration remains valid throughout the renewal period of the stay permit and for the duration of the permit itself. The exercise of the right to medical assistance for RAS is hindered by issues pertaining to housing and domicile. This is because the renewal of the stay permit is a prerequisite for the health card, and numerous health services are linked to the domicile specified during the stay permit renewal process (Bove, 2018, p. 148). Yet residency status is promptly revoked upon departure from the reception centres. Moreover, in situations where RAS are compelled to relocate throughout the country due to job insecurity and the temporary place of employment does not align with their registered residence or domicile, the above circumstances render it practically unfeasible for them to access the healthcare system (Medici Senza Frontiere, 2018, p. 12).

RAS also faced challenges in obtaining Covid-19 vaccinations due to the absence of necessary documents, such as Italian identity cards and/or tax file numbers. As a result, they were unable to access other services that required proof of vaccination, such as the Questura for their scheduled appointments. This led to additional delays in their applications and further instances of discrimination (Cheikh Ahmed, 2022; Fornalé & Odasso, 2022, p. 253). In addition, the pandemic worsened pre-existing disparities, and its effects on RAS varied depending on the local policies of the territories in which they resided (Bazurli & Campomori, 2022, p. 1110). For example, the Italian Government implemented a welfare provision to address immediate and widespread food needs. This provision aimed to be universally accessible and municipal administrations were instructed to allocate urgent food assistance to families most affected by the economic consequences of the health emergency and those in dire need, in order to meet their most urgent and essential needs. Regrettably, certain local governments took advantage of this situation to revive the notions of territorial affiliation, thereby choosing to restrict the distribution of shopping vouchers, as stipulated by the ordinance, to Italian or EU citizens and long-term permit residents. This decision implied that only established foreigners were entitled to receive assistance for food solidarity. Once again, the judges had to step in to confirm the invalidity of these restrictions, given that a service that aims to protect the right to life must be considered one of the fundamental rights of an individual (Flamini, 2020, p. 544; Fornalé & Odasso, 2022, pp. 253-254).

All SAI projects initiate procedures for beneficiaries' timely registration with SSN and for more comprehensive oversight of the same in terms of health protection. About 40 per cent of SAI projects in 2021 identified critical elements in SSN registration procedures, with the majority of these issues about the time required to complete the preparatory steps for registration. The concerns raised related to the duration required to complete the entire procedure (17.5 per cent of cases), with particular emphasis on the issuance and renewal of stay permits (26.6 per cent); the issuance of tax file numbers (20.8 per cent); and the necessity to rectify inaccurate personal information or tax codes (15.3 per cent). Although these critical issues have been identified in the past, they were marginally diminished in 2021 in comparison to 2017. The observed enhancement was attributed to the efforts undertaken by local authorities and system implementers within the jurisdiction, by the improvement of the available information to the health service personnel (Giovannetti & Olivieri, 2021, p. 127).

In conclusion, the impossibility of enrolling in the civil registry, as stipulated in the 2018 Security Decree⁵², resulted in confusion regarding access to services, including the health system. This was in contrast to other laws that were providing RAS with health care, including urgent or essential medical assistance, outpatient and hospital care for illness and injury, and preventative medicine programmes, free of charge for applicants who were lacking the necessary funds (ASGI, 2019a, p. 171). Asylum seekers reported being denied access to their health cards and family physicians, being required to pay the full cost of medications, and frequently being unable to afford treatment (Bazurli & Campomori, 2022, p. 1104). Following Constitutional Court resolution, the 2020 Migration Decree⁵³ sought to rectify and surmount the most significant and unconstitutional provisions of the 2018 Security Decree.⁵⁴ Specifically, it addressed the right of RAS to be registered in the civil registry and to obtain an identification card (Vercillo et al., 2021, p. 23), therefore clarifying any doubt.

2.2.8 The Ukraine and Afghanistan cases

The response to the crisis in Ukraine differed from previous 'emergencies' in 2011 in North Africa, as well as the crises in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan (Di Pascale, 2023,

⁵² See footnote no. 33.

⁵³ See footnote no.35.

⁵⁴ Constitutional Court, ruling no. 186, 31 July 2020.

pp. 3-4). The EU border enforced the Temporary Protection Directive No. 55 of 2001 as a reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the subsequent departure of Ukrainians from the country.⁵⁵ Millions of Ukrainians were displaced, they fled their residences in search of protection in other regions of Ukraine or in neighbouring EU countries. The exodus precipitated a humanitarian crisis, aid and support were extended to the displaced Ukrainians during this trying period by neighbouring countries and international organisations. The Ukrainian case highlights the wide-ranging receptive capacities of EU countries, the feasibility of streamlining processes – primarily through the elimination of the Dublin Regulation – and the immediate action to accept additional asylum seekers through the exceptional and temporary protection reserved exclusively for Ukrainians. A further significant example was the case of Poland, where during the refugee crisis of 2015 and 2016, there was a conspicuous absence of cooperation in the process of transferring refugees from the Middle East. Poland imposed a ban on refugees and conducted rejections at the border between Poland and Belarus. Conversely, during the Ukrainian conflict in 2022, Poland accepted immediately more than one million Ukrainians (Caballero-Vélez, 2024, p. 71). This disparity highlights the selective character of refugee admission policies and prompts enquiries about the coherence and inclusiveness in granting asylum to individuals escaping violence and persecution.

The EU presented the opening to Ukrainians as an exception that did not modify the regulatory framework. This implementation brought about innovations that greatly disrupted the structure of the right to asylum. The policy allowed Ukrainians unrestricted movement across borders and the opportunity to obtain a legal status that was valid for up to three years. Moreover, it permitted unrestricted movement within the territory and the choice of a country to seek protection in, which went against the established restrictions of the Dublin regulations (Ambrosini et al., 2022, pp. 11-12; De Coninck, 2023; De Somer & Neidhardt, 2022, pp. 4-5). Lastly, Ukrainian individuals had complete access to the job market, healthcare, education, and social services (Orav, 2022, p. 6). The EU Commission, in particular, established a

⁵⁵ Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2001/55/oj>. Accessed on 29 March 2024.

dedicated website to offer reliable information in the languages of displaced people and provide support regarding their arrival and stay in the EU. In addition, the Commission issued a variety of supplementary materials addressed to the Ukrainian people, including clarifications of procedures and reassuring messages of welcome. Member states were provided with financial and operational assistance for the reception of asylum seekers and the execution of protection measures. This assistance included the creation of a coordination platform to facilitate the exchange of solidarity offerings and operational responses (Di Pascale, 2023, p. 6).

EU member states could have granted temporary protection to other individuals residing in Ukraine, such as stateless people, third-country citizens, or family members; however this did not occur and they were left out of the Directive. As a consequence, approximately five million foreigners were excluded and subsequently prevented from entering the country. The majority of these individuals were temporary workers, students, asylum seekers, or other forms of short-term migrants. Therefore, the Ukrainian case raised questions regarding the potential presence of both implicit and explicit discrimination in the acceptance of asylum seekers, where Ukrainians were being admitted into the EU territory while others were being denied (Ambrosini et al., 2022, pp. 11-12; Bolzoni et al., 2023, p. 453).

A considerably more extensive array of reception arrangements was extended to Ukrainian asylum seekers in Italy.⁵⁶ An illustration of the discriminating Italian political climate was the intervention of the Governor of the Friuli Venezia Giulia, a region situated along the north-eastern Italian border, who made a public declaration of solidarity with Ukrainian nationals who entered the area through the border and expressed his intention to extend a warm welcome to them. He emphasised, nonetheless, the importance of obstructing other asylum seekers' arrivals via the Balkan route (Bove & Romano, 2021, p. 41).

The system was conceptualised according to a logical framework that proposed assisting self-sufficient Ukrainians through a monthly public support contribution of €350, with an additional €150 designated for each minor child. Italy had not previously

⁵⁶ Decreto Legge n.21 del 21 marzo 2022: Misure urgenti per contrastare gli effetti economici e umanitari della crisi ucraina. [Law Decree of 21 March 2022, no.21: Urgent measures to counter the economic and humanitarian effects of the Ukrainian crisis]. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/03/21/22G00032/SG> Accessed on 29 March 2024. Recently the reception measures for Ukrainians were extended until 31 December 2024.

granted RAS the opportunity to independently provide for their needs through the acquisition of a subsidy, in contrast to other nations. To assist individuals who did not avail themselves of this type of assistance, an intervention involving families willing to host in collaboration with third-sector organisations or in accommodations provided by the third-sector organisations themselves was considered in accordance with independent planning, funding from the public, and outside the SAI system. The number of available places in the integration system was expanded; however, upon examining the broader context, a recurring theme becomes apparent: reception of the Ukrainians was determined to prioritise individuals' self-sufficiency before enlisting the assistance of private social workers, families, and society at large (Fondazione ISMU, 2023b, p. 91). The Questura had the authority to issue receipts to individuals arriving from Ukraine who sought temporary protection. These receipts promptly displayed the tax code, granted access to the public health service, and permitted employment. Ukrainians had the ability to access the integration system, subject to the availability of spaces and resources, regardless of whether or not they had submitted their asylum request (Bove & Romano, 2021, p. 20).

In the case of the Afghanistan crisis, the EU did not activate the Directive utilised for the Ukraine case, in response to the evacuation due to the Taliban's takeover in August 2021. The Italian government established the so-called 'humanitarian corridors' through agreements with international organisations in order to obtain permission to legally admit a certain number of individuals in need of protection. Protocols established between the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and specific organisations—to which the Ministry delegates operational authority and the authority to select admitted applicants—instead of legislation governed this measure. There was no established formal process for applicants to adhere to in order to be considered for admission to the corridors, and there was also no established procedure to contest their exclusion from the list. The protocol related to Afghanistan, which was agreed upon in November 2021 and planned to admit 1,200 individuals, had not been executed as of spring 2022. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs permitted a limited number of Afghans who fled their country of origin after August 2021 to submit applications for humanitarian visas in order to enter the territory (Bove & Romano, 2021, pp. 46-47). The majority of Afghans who were evacuated arrived in the country seeking international protection as asylum seekers

(Giovannetti & Olivieri, 2021, p. 97). In order to accommodate Afghan asylum seekers, the Italian government allocated funds for the enlargement of the CAS and SAI centres. While these were initially designated for Afghans, they were subsequently made available to those who had fled Ukraine (Bove & Romano, 2021, p. 156; Fondazione ISMU, 2023b, p. 44; Giovannetti & Olivieri, 2021, p. 32).

2.2.9 Conclusion

Common Basic Principle 6 of the EU emphasises the crucial role of non-discrimination in promoting equal opportunities for immigrants to access goods, services, and institutions. Despite the implementation of policies, the actual situation frequently fails to meet expectations, since institutional prejudice and systemic obstacles hinder authentic integration. The presence of these obstacles, which are both legal and administrative in nature, is firmly rooted in bureaucratic procedures and societal conventions, leading to the continuation of prejudice towards immigrants and RAS, particularly in the areas of housing, employment and health. Although legal victories and alterations in policies may provide temporary respite, the continued existence of prejudiced behaviours highlights the necessity for ongoing watchfulness and support.

The Temporary Protection Directive granted Ukrainians access to vital resources and assistance, but the omission of other migrant groups raises issues over the fairness and equality of asylum policy. The current response to the situation in Ukraine demonstrates the possibility of establishing policies that are more inclusive. At this early stage, the reception and initial integration of Ukrainian migrants appears to have been successful. The issue of Ukrainian migrants is, however, a point of contention, namely that they, as Christians and Europeans, have been much more accepted than Muslims and Africans. Evaluating the reactions of various EU member states to the recent crisis and their attempts to accommodate Ukrainian refugees might provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and shortcomings of current asylum laws. Research should analyse the consequences of selectively including certain groups and provide methods to ensure that all RAS populations are treated fairly during times of crisis.

CHAPTER 3. BACKGROUND

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Introduction

In recent years, the worldwide arena of forced migration and displacement has been confronted with unparalleled challenges. The UNHCR and other international organisations have reported that the number of forcibly displaced people, including RAS, has reached alarming proportions. Asylum seekers have placed Europe at the centre of attention, and the continent has been confronted with the difficult challenge of accommodating and managing those in search of refuge. This chapter presents a thorough examination of the European asylum system, with a particular emphasis on Italy, whose significance as a transit and destination country for asylum applicants is substantial in the context of Europe as a whole.

3.1.2 Asylum routes and statistics

According to the estimation provided by the UNHCR, the total number of forcibly displaced individuals stood at 108.4 million by the conclusion of 2022, 40% of whom were minors. Among these, 35.3 million were refugees (Including 5.9 million Palestine refugees under the United Nations Relief and Work Agency's mandate), 5.4 million were asylum-seekers and 5.2 million were other categories of people in need of international protection. Low-middle-income countries worldwide accepted 76% of these individuals and 52% of all refugees and other individuals in need originated exclusively from Afghanistan, Syria, and Ukraine (UNHCR, 2022b, pp. 2-3).

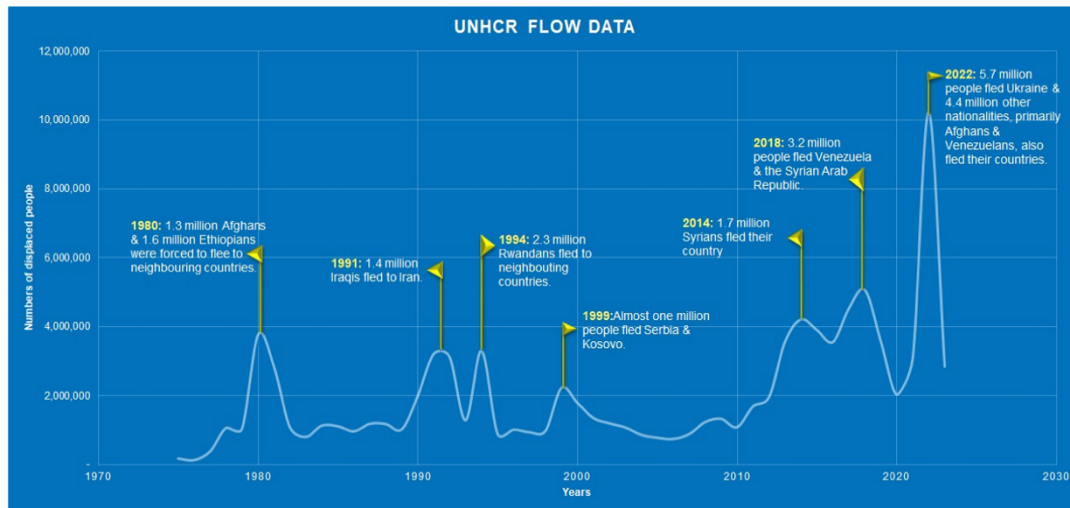
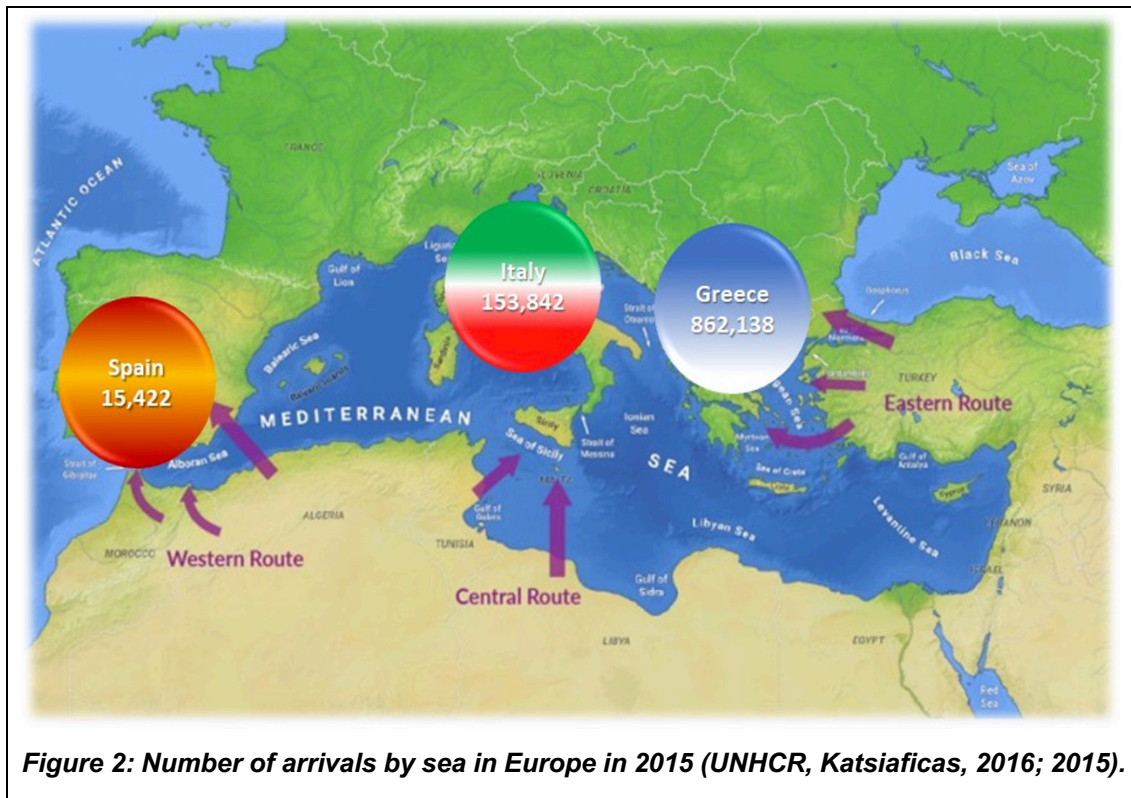


Figure 1: Refugees, asylum seekers and other people in need of international protection displaced between 1975 and 2022 in the world (UNHCR, 2023).

Since around 2014, there has been a substantial surge in the influx of asylum applicants by land and sea to the eastern Mediterranean region of Europe. In 2015, the refugee crisis in Italy, and Greece reached its pinnacle and these countries were confronted with significant management implications involving governments, local communities, and refugees themselves, who arrived primarily via Türkiye and Libya (Gozdziak, 2021, pp. 116-117). In that year, there were a total of 1,032,408 arrivals, the majority of which were a result of the Syrian crisis.⁵⁷ This was a substantial rise compared to the previous year's total of 225,455 arrivals (UNHCR, 2020).

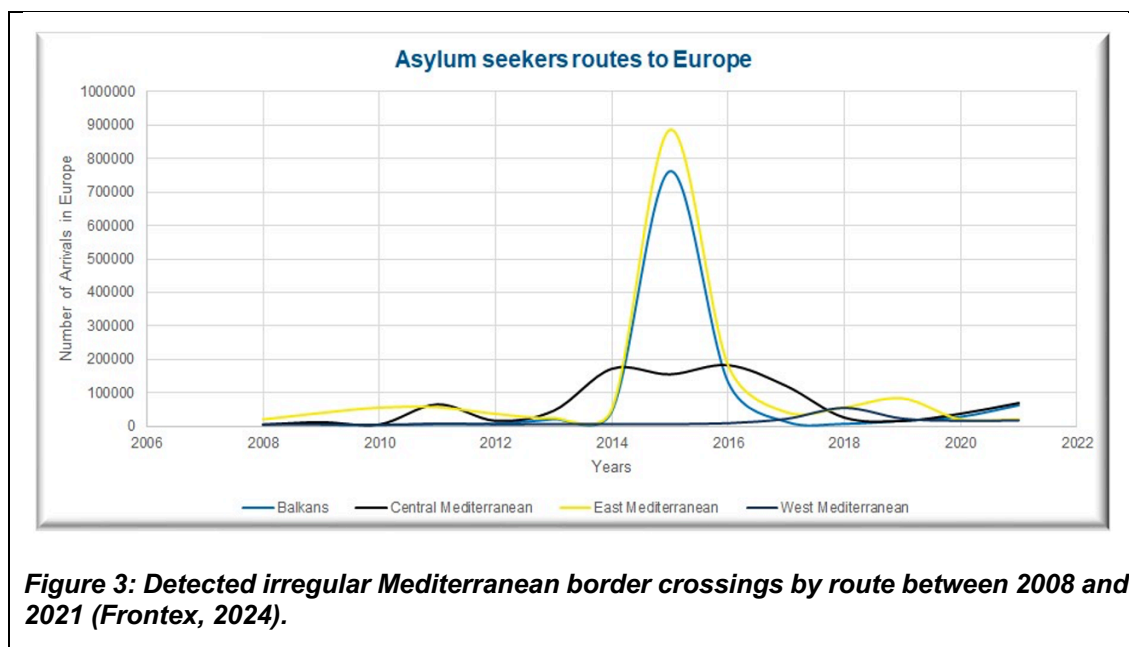
⁵⁷ Including sea arrivals to Italy, Cyprus, and Malta, and both sea and land arrivals to Greece and Spain (including the Canary Islands).



In an effort to reach Europe, asylum seekers frequently alter their routes in response to shifting migration patterns, geopolitical developments, or modifications in enforcement measures. The primary pathways utilised to reach Europe have undergone transformations throughout history, with decisions being shaped by geographical proximity, the presence of established networks, and the perception of security hazards. Migration routes exhibit intricate dynamics, wherein rapid transformations can transpire in reaction to a multitude of factors. Four primary routes are utilised to reach Europe.

Asylum seekers from the Middle East and South Asia have historically utilised the Eastern Mediterranean route when traversing the Aegean Sea via Türkiye and Greece en route. Syrian refugees frequently traversed this pathway. As a result of the 2016 EU- Türkiye agreement, which sought to reduce irregular migration, arrivals via this route decreased. Despite this, asylum movements continued in pursuit of alternative routes. Asylum seekers originating from North Africa, specifically Morocco and Algeria, endeavoured to reach Spain via the Western Mediterranean route or the Strait of Gibraltar. Enhanced enforcement efforts in the Strait of Gibraltar precipitated an upsurge in crossings via the Western Mediterranean, via routes extending from Morocco to the southern coastlines of Spain. The Central Mediterranean route was

historically traversed by asylum seekers from diverse African nations in an attempt to reach Italy via Libya and Tunisia. The Central route has historically been one of the most frequently travelled, but fluctuations in the number of arrivals have been caused by changes in political dynamics in Libya and increased enforcement efforts. The Balkan route is used by asylum seekers from the Middle East and South Asia, traversing the Balkan countries, specifically Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, in order to reach Western Europe. Along the Balkan route, border closures and increased security measures precipitated a decline in its usage. Nevertheless, asylum seekers may endeavour to traverse portions of this route (Katsiaficas, 2016; Kuschminder et al., 2015, pp. 36-46).



3.1.3 Italy from emigrant to immigrant country

Italy is renowned as a country with a history of emigration since Italians have gone to various regions of Europe and the Americas since the early 1800s. Subsequently, they travelled to several other regions throughout the globe. Emigration from Italy peaked at the start of the 20th century and continued steadily, shifting towards European nations after World War II. Need compelled entire families to venture to far-off lands in pursuit of wealth (Strozza & Venturini, 2002, p. 263). Nearly half of the 19 million Italians who left between 1876 and 1942 crossed the oceans, initially to Argentina, Brazil, the United States, Austria, Hungary, and Germany till the early 1900s. Between 1901 to the start of the First World War, 600,000 expatriates a year

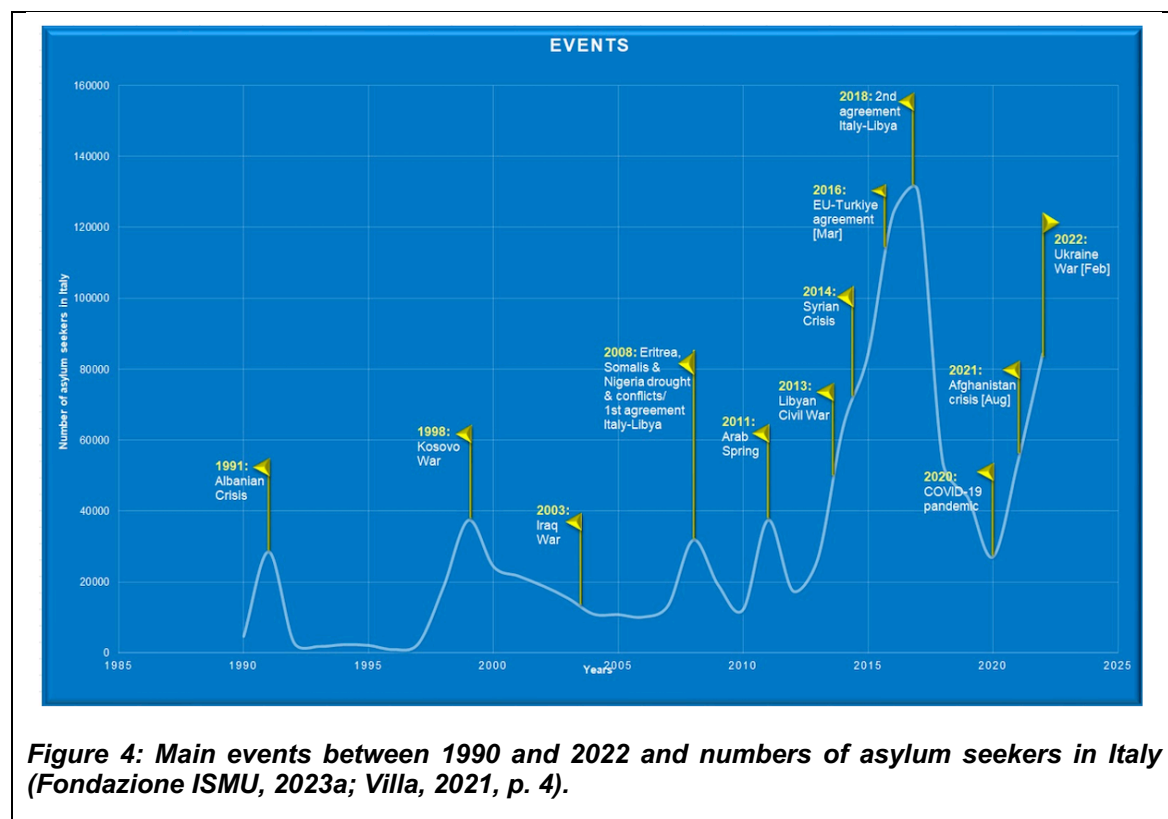
went to the most popular destination, the United States. Emigration varied between 1918 and 1930, but fascist anti-emigration policies in the 1930s caused significant reductions. After 1945, emigration grew again until the 1970s, with many going to Germany, Belgium, France, and Switzerland (Mascitelli & De Lazzari, 2021, pp. 54-55).

In the 1970s, emigration from Italy decreased steadily, leading to a shift in the net migration rate from negative to positive. This indicates that more people were returning to Italy than leaving the country. Italian emigration ceased due to supply and demand considerations. The rise in domestic per capita income reduced the incentive to emigrate. Economic growth in the north-west led to significant internal migration. The recession following the 1973 petrol price hikes decreased industrial growth and the need for more labour across Europe (Strozza & Venturini, 2002, p. 263). Labour markets in neighbouring European countries like the UK, Germany, and France closed as a result (Mascitelli & De Lazzari, 2021, pp. 49-50).

By the late 1970s, Italy transitioned from being a nation from which people emigrated to one in which people immigrated. Per capita income had significantly increased, salaries were marginally lower than in France, and Italy became an appealing alternative as northern European countries grew less receptive to international workers. By the late 1970s and early 1980s, Italy became an unintended destination for immigrants from neighbouring Mediterranean nations, more distant African countries, the Philippines, and Latin America seeking to live in northern Europe. During the 1990s, the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union rendered Italy appealing to immigrants from Eastern European nations, particularly the Balkans and Romania (Strozza & Venturini, 2002, p. 263).

Italy received an average of 23,000 maritime asylum seekers yearly until 2010, peaking at 50,000 in 1999 (due to the economic crisis in Albania and the war in Kosovo) and 37,000 in 2008 (due to conflicts and famines in Somalia, Eritrea and Nigeria). A drop followed in 2009-2010, as a result of the agreement between Italy and Libya (Fondazione ISMU, 2023a). The Berlusconi government identified illegal immigration control as a crucial aspect of an economic settlement with Libyan Leader Muammar Gaddafi, who fulfilled his 2008 Friendship Treaty commitment to police Libya's beaches and receive Italian-returned asylum seekers. Non-governmental organisations criticised the deal as a result of the inhuman treatment of the asylum

seekers in Libya, but the agreement was successful for Italy, resulting in a 98% decrease in arrivals from 37,000 in 2008 to 405 in 2010 (Lombardi, 2011, p. 39). During the Arab Spring in 2011, 63,000 migrants landed on Italian coasts. From 2013, due to the war in Syria and conflicts, famines and political and economic instability in many African countries, Europe and Italy faced a large influx of migrants seeking protection with the highest figure of 181,000 arrivals in 2016. From the late months of 2017 onward, landings declined alongside Italy's second accord with Libya. In 2019, there were only 11,000 arrivals, but in 2020 (34,154) and 2021 (67,040), they rose again. In 2022, over 105,000 people arrived by sea in Italy, up 57% from 2021 (Fondazione ISMU, 2023a).



The prevalence of certain asylum applicant nationalities in Italy has fluctuated over time, contingent upon the circumstances in their countries of origin, changes in routes and legal restrictions (see Figure 5).



Figure 5: Asylum seekers' top nationalities between 1990 and 2022 (Dipartimento per le libertà civili e l'immigrazione, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023).

3.1.4 Conclusion

Over the last several years, the worldwide situation of forced migration and displacement has posed exceptional difficulties, as the number of persons who are forcibly displaced has reached concerning proportions. Europe, especially Italy, has taken a leading role in providing housing and handling asylum seekers throughout this crisis.

The movement of peoples has been a natural aspect of history since time immemorial, but no state has completely acknowledged this over the years; not even Italy, which has a history of emigration and has since become a country where immigrants choose to relocate. Moreover, no state has fully accepted that statistics indicate that the number of movements will continue to rise. Therefore, there has been no attempt to establish a suitable policy and a long-term strategy to resolve the phenomenon, much less the will to transform it into something positive, as it is primarily perceived as a problem for the host society. The problem has not been tackled due to an absence of vision, a lack of political determination and the shifting of responsibility to the nations of origin or transit, rather than the host nation.

3.2 Recurrent narratives about asylum

3.2.1 Introduction

Political forces and the media have mounted intense campaigns for border closures in recent years. Conversely, civil society organisations have defended RAS and worked to ameliorate their circumstances. Eventually, numerous reception facilities and the individuals housed were left to fend for themselves, disappeared from the public-media narrative, which had speculated so heavily on them, and were absent from the government's crisis management intervention planning (Ambrosini et al., 2022, p. 253).

3.2.2 The image of the asylum seeker

There is a divergence between government and political narratives on the one hand, and narratives propagated through personal contact, the media, social media, and related channels on the other. Top-down and bottom-up narratives may present positive approaches, such as regarding immigration as a benefit or source of pride, or negative attitudes, viewing migration as a threat and pushing a range of social and political agendas. Such narratives have an important influence on migration policy. Through marketing campaigns or official statements, it is possible to massage and manipulate public attitudes and opinions. These narratives can spread through peer-groups, networks of acquaintances, the media, social media, and ultimately influence legislators at all levels.

Institutions are ultimately responsible for construct policy narratives that satisfy certain fundamental requirements of consistency, coherence, and plausibility. They must be consistent with the available facts of the issues and case-studies at hand (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2021, p. 1; Fleay et al., 2016, pp. 8-9). The final criterion of these narratives is that the story must be convincing: it must be comprehensible, compelling, and plausible enough for the actors in question. Narratives do not need to be precise in order to be persuasive; in fact, they can acquire credibility by oversimplification, distortion, or omission of details (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2021, p. 9). Moreover, the persuasiveness of policy narratives does not even imply that actors share a consistent set of policy beliefs (Boswell et al., 2011, p. 6).

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted competing conceptions of migration. The virus was first detected in China in December 2019, reached Italy on 20 February 2020

(according to the Italian Ministry of Health)⁵⁸ and was officially declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 11 March 2020.⁵⁹ In some locations, the pandemic was used to depict migrants as a burden on scarce resources or as disease carriers in order to gain support for more restrictive migration policies. Meanwhile, in other locations, immigrants have been lauded as essential employees and significant community contributors during the health emergency (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2021, p. 5; Bazurli & Campomori, 2022, p. 1096). The pandemic has reinforced the ongoing marginalisation, lack of visibility, and reduction of rights of individuals living in reception facilities. These locations experienced a substantial transformation when the pandemic commenced. The epidemic worsened the living conditions of RAS in reception centres, resulting in the justification of stringent limitations on personal liberties, occasional use of force, and indiscriminate tactics of monitoring and repression. Although the humanitarian regime was designed to respond to emergencies and expected to balance between providing care and exerting control, there was a clear tendency to prioritise control over care (Sanò & Firouzi Tabar, 2021, pp. 165-166).

In addition, the lack of emphasis on RAS social participation as a primary objective is exacerbated by a political and media discourse prominently characterised by threats of national security, cultural dangers, and social costs more than RAS social inclusion (Armillei, 2017; Avallone, 2021, pp. 44-45; Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021, p. 195; Colombo, 2018, pp. 146-147; Zetter, 2009). The act of making migration illegal has become a key aspect of the strategy of governing by means of criminal justice. The act of redefining a social problem as a criminal matter, and labelling the individuals affected by it as criminals, serves as a political tactic to justify additional involvement in areas that were not previously considered to be criminal in nature (Simon, 2007, p. 271).

Asylum-seekers are perceived as 'welfare freeloaders' and even the EU emphasises the prevention of the exploitation of asylum applications, to avoid

⁵⁸ Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Prevenzione e risposta a COVID-19: evoluzione della strategia e pianificazione nella fase di transizione per il periodo autunno-invernale [Prevention and response to Covid-19: evolution of the strategy and planning in the transition phase for the autumn-winter period]. www.iss.it/documents/20126/0/COVID+19+strategia_ISS_ministero+%283%29.pdf/e463c6e7-6250-109c-1c74-d2f8262f5056?t=1602672178859. Accessed on 23 March 2024.

⁵⁹ World Health Organisation (WHO), Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic. <https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/situations/covid-19>. Accessed on 23 March 2024.

undermining the system's credibility and the increase in administrative and financial costs for member states (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 235). Due to the tone of such conversations, the phase that follows the period of first reception, namely the phase of integration, is generally obscured from both the general public and the design of appropriate procedures. Instead, emphasis is placed on external border controls, even at the risk of subverting international conventions and human rights norms, and asylum applicants are criminalised as undocumented immigrants (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 240; Semprebon & Pelacani, 2020, p. 15).

At the end of the 1980s, both the Italian government and the public became aware of Italy's increasing immigration rate, which led to political exploitation. Since 1986, political parties and affiliated media have portrayed illegal immigrants and legal immigrants as spectacles, depicting the immigration problem in contradictory and even fictitious ways. In Italy's political discourse, two opposing viewpoints persist. Typically, these are associated with right-wing or left-wing ideologies.

The first is the 'massive invasion', a right-wing ideology prevalent in Europe (Gozdziak, 2021, p. 73) that originated in Italy nearly concurrently with the initial Albanian boat landings in 1991. This political instrumentalisation coupled with negative media portrayals has contributed to the perception of asylum seekers and migrants in general as criminals, particularly of asylum seekers arriving by boat, although the majority of asylum applications usually come from people arriving by plane, land, or on a tourist visa (Armillei, 2017, pp. 144-150; Colucci, 2019, p. 432). This view is inconsistent with the total foreign population figures. As of 1 January 2023, Italy had over 5 million foreign nationals, constituting 8.7% of the entire population, of which around 3,727,000 were non-EU citizens.⁶⁰ In 2023, 106,000 stay permits were granted for asylum purposes, including special permits for Ukrainians, who were the highest represented population of non-EU citizens at the end of the year.⁶¹

⁶⁰ National Institute of Statistics. We Italy 2024. Population and Society. Foreigners. [Istituto Nazionale di Statistica. Noi Italia 2024. Popolazione e Società. Stranieri]. <https://noi-italia.istat.it/pagina.php?id=3&categoria=4&action=show&L=0>. Accessed on 26 November 2024.

⁶¹ National Institute of Statistics. Statistics report. [Istituto Nazionale di Statistica. Statistiche report]. https://www.istat.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/REPORT-CITTADINI-NON-COMUNITARI_Anno-2023.pdf. Accessed on 26 November 2024.

Conservative demographics exhibit an increased tendency to perceive asylum seekers as a threat and suspect that they are submitting fraudulent claims; as a result, they support restrictive policies (Mancini et al., 2020, pp. 751-767) in order to reject the 'undeserving' RAS (Bazurli & Campomori, 2022, p. 1094; Borrelli, 2022, pp. 1093-1116; Casati, 2018, p. 794; Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2023b, p. 14; Hynie, 2018, pp. 269-270; Marchetti, 2020, pp. 236-252; Sales, 2002, pp. 456-478). On the other hand, upon examining the accounts of local individuals who possess knowledge about immigration, it has been found that discussions about 'invasion', instability, or anxieties related to the presence of RAS may have less impact when one examines the actual occurrences inside local communities. Put simply, concerns about 'invasion', terrorism and crime seem to be baseless when it comes to actual instances of the settlement of RAS in local communities. The concerns of the citizens are minimised to mere annoyance or discomfort, while RAS 'group together and spend all day in the parks or squares' (Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2023b, p. 18). An alternative paradigm advocated by humanitarian organisations and left-wing parties is that of the victim. As the term implies, immigrants are portrayed as persecuted or living in absolute destitution (Giudici, 2021, pp. 27-28; Riso & Mazzilli, 2014, pp. 52-53). Scholarly investigations suggest that debates within societies concerning compassion, tolerance, care, and humanitarianism may contribute to the propagation of cultural biases that impede the successful resettlement of RAS. Presenting RAS as helpless victims may have an adverse effect on how society perceives them, which might lead to policy modifications aimed at completely discouraging RAS (Lee et al., 2020, p. 200).

3.2.3 Conclusion

Policy development and public perception are significantly influenced by the conflicting narratives and diverse interpretations of migration, which frequently perpetuate stereotypes and misconceptions about RAS. These depictions, which present RAS as either a burden or as individuals in need of assistance, are indicative of broader cultural attitudes and political agendas, which in turn influence the development and execution of migration policies. Restrictive measures are fuelled by narratives of 'invasion' and criminality on the one hand, while humanitarian initiatives are encouraged by stories of compassion and solidarity on the other. Nevertheless, both viewpoints are susceptible to oversimplification and fail to adequately represent

the complex realities of social engagement and integration. Furthermore, the political manipulation and sensationalist media coverage of migration in Italy during the Covid-19 pandemic have further polarised public discourse and policy responses. This has led to an exacerbation of the challenges encountered by RAS, exposing the structural inadequacies and inequalities within reception systems.

The interaction of media influence, political dynamics, and civil society efforts may be the focus of future research. Studies may investigate the narratives that encircle asylum in Italy, examining the impact of various stories on social cohesion and integration initiatives. Research could also evaluate the efficacy of counter-narratives that are designed to facilitate a more inclusive public discourse and challenge stereotypes.

3.3 EU and Italian asylum policies

3.3.1 Introduction

Asylum and migration policy is one of the areas in which the EU and the member states share competence, meaning that the member states have not ceded all their authority to the EU in this field. This implies that while the EU can create uniform criteria and procedures for asylum, it cannot require member states to comply. The absence of legal authority over its member states is due to Europe's institutional structure: the EU is built on the concept of conferral, which means that the EU can only operate in those areas in which the member states have expressly delegated power to it.⁶² The implementation and enforcement of European regulations on asylum ultimately depend on the political will of the member states, which maintain a significant degree of sovereignty in this field. Therefore, despite the multiple treaties that comprise European legislation, but which lack any legal power, and despite offering instructions to its member states, guidance remains of a general nature and leaves a great deal of leeway for interpretation as a result of the states' determination to maintain control over their border policies (Carta, 2019, pp. 25-34). Consequently, states interpret and implement the directives in their own way, failing to provide a consistent and harmonious approach to the social inclusion of RAS. In 2016 the

⁶² Article 5 of the Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union of 7 June 2016. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12016ME%2FTXT>.

Common European Asylum System (CEAS) called for a reform to harmonise the policies, the proposal was met with reluctance from states, and no significant progress has been made in this regard (European Asylum Support Office, 2021, p. 29) with the result that the EU has remained a 'collection' of national asylum systems (Garlick, 2015). Similarly, the integration plan issued by the European Commission in 2016, and subsequently renewed for the period 2021-2027, outlines the main objectives of integration, including social cohesion, anti-discrimination measures, education and training, employment, health and housing. These plans provide member states with suggestions on how to achieve these objectives. (European Commission, 2016, 2020).

3.3.2 EU asylum politics: internal conflicts and the Dublin system

The EU program known as the Dublin system establishes which country is responsible for receiving asylum seekers and has become the primary source of conflict between the various member states of the EU. The Dublin Regulation, which was established to prevent RAS 'asylum shopping' in other EU countries following an initial rejection by one of them, led to an uneven allocation of responsibility among states for hosting asylum seekers, mostly owing to factors like attractiveness and geographical proximity to the country of origin or third country. Consequently, governments have increased their control measures in order to transfer the burden of asylum to other nations. From its inception, then, the Dublin system has led to hostility and strife among states (Ambrosini, 2014, pp. 237-238; Colucci, 2019, p. 433; Rossi, 2017, p. 50; Tsourdi & De Buycker, 2022, pp. 27-28). For instance, the Italian government granted temporary humanitarian visas to several asylum seekers in 2011 and explicitly admitted that granting these permits would facilitate their movement to France, where a substantial number of them had relatives and connections. France protested and a significant political crisis ensued, resulting in the implementation of checkpoints and the deportation of individuals (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 240; Caponio & Cappiali, 2018, p. 125).

A further consequence of this conflictual policy has been significant variations among EU member states regarding who is recognised as a refugee or a beneficiary of subsidiary protection. Even for equivalent applicants from the same country, the odds of recognition vary significantly (Tsourdi & De Buycker, 2022, p. 7). States have

yet to find a common ground for acceptance and integration, as the 'crisis' of the EU's asylum policy also reflects the ideological conflicts involved in converting the EU from a predominantly regulatory entity into a political Union (Lavenex, 2018, p. 1208). Nevertheless, they remain in agreement in opposing to the increase of asylum seekers. In fact, the EU has committed to protect its borders and prevent them from being easily accessed. This includes establishing agreements with specific third countries that asylum seekers pass through, in order to hinder their movement towards Europe. The EU entered into an agreement with Türkiye in 2016 (Colucci, 2019, p. 434), whereas Italy established a separate arrangement with Libya in 2009, before the Arab Spring (Armillei, 2017, p. 142; Lombardi, 2011, pp. 39-42), later renewed in 2018.

Criticism has been directed at the policies of European asylum externalisation, which were aided by the persuasive impact of the language employed in official documents on political and popular narratives of migration, rendering otherwise unthinkable actions justified and necessary (Casaglia & Pacciardi, 2022, pp. 1659-1676). These policies violated international law, shifted responsibilities, and failed to achieve their intended goals. To keep migrants and asylum-seekers out, European governments partner with autocratic nations with abysmal records on human rights. As a result of outsourcing asylum services, European governments may lose control over RAS detention, leading to abuse, neglect, and brutality towards asylum seekers. In addition, European governments may be avoiding addressing the root causes of the migrant problem, with the result that asylum seekers are forced to take more dangerous, illegal routes into Europe, risking exploitation and death (Frelick et al., 2016, pp. 191-220).

In the asylum plan presented in September 2020 by the president of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, the term 'return' appears 321 times, which is significantly more than terms such as reception, integration, and protection. The chasm between security policies and welcome politics could not be wider (Ambrosini et al., 2022, p. 11) and this has also manifested in a number of Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) decisions of non-compliance with international law (European Asylum Support Office, 2021, pp. 52-58). To date, the issue has been resolved using ad hoc policies designed expressly for each circumstance, therefore establishing a 'permanent state of national insecurity' (Armillei, 2017, p. 144).

This strategy has been adopted at the expense of considerably more organised long-term programmes and as a direct result, the objective of achieving a fair distribution of RAS, followed by their social inclusion, remains unmet (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 239; Tsourdi & De Buycker, 2022, p. 22). Even though the EU has created several practical tools in the area of integration, such as the 'Common Basic Principles for Integration' (CBPI) adopted in 2004 by the Council of Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs, as well as action plans and financing instruments, these are still non-binding guidelines.⁶³ They aim to assist member states in creating their integration policies and, in this respect, the CBPIs remain a set of broader and practical principles, reflecting a general agreement among member states (Tsourdi & De Buycker, 2022, p. 22).

3.3.3 Exploiting the so-called 'emergency' and adopting ad hoc policies

Since 2014, the increase in migrants and asylum seekers has been characterised by certain European and EU political parties, including Italy, as an 'invasion' or a migrant 'crisis,' leading to the widespread adoption of these terms in political and public discourse to suggest an ostensibly endless influx of individuals attempting to enter the EU through various routes. Despite a significant increase in asylum seekers' arrivals since 2015, the issue has not been sufficiently resolved through the reformation of established norms (Archibugi et al., 2022, p. 487; Gozdzia, 2021, pp. 116-117). In fact, certain political leaders have exploited these deficiencies to advance anti-immigration policies and secure electoral backing. The recurring pattern of inaction that has emerged due to the inadequacy of existing approaches has caused the issue to appear insurmountable and compelled European institutions to enact a succession of emergency policies (Archibugi et al., 2022, p. 487; Bazurli & Campomori, 2022, p. 1094; D'Amico & Siccardi, 2022, p. 27). The decisions and discourses regarding the capacity to accept and integrate asylum seekers are based on political rather than economic arguments. This is highlighted by the crisis in Ukraine resulting from the Russian invasion of 2022. Millions of Ukrainians were displaced, fleeing their residences in search of protection in other regions of Ukraine or in neighbouring EU countries. The exodus precipitated a humanitarian crisis, aid

⁶³ The Common Basic Principles have been presented by the Justice and Home Affairs of the Council of the EU in the 2618th Council Meeting in Brussels in November 2004. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES_04_321. Accessed on 17 March 2024.

and support were extended to the displaced Ukrainians during this trying period by neighbouring countries and international organisations. The Ukrainian case highlights the wide-ranging receptive capacities of EU countries, the feasibility of streamlining processes – primarily through the elimination of the Dublin Regulation – and the immediate action to accept additional asylum seekers through the exceptional and temporary protection reserved exclusively for Ukrainians. A further significant example was the case of Poland, where during the refugee crisis of 2015 and 2016, there was a conspicuous absence of cooperation in the process of transferring refugees from the Middle East. Poland imposed a ban on refugees and conducted rejections at the border between Poland and Belarus. Conversely, during the Ukrainian conflict in 2022, Poland accepted immediately more than one million Ukrainians (Caballero-Vélez, 2024, p. 71).⁶⁴ This disparity highlights the selective character of refugee admission policies and prompts enquiries about the coherence and inclusiveness in granting asylum to individuals escaping violence and persecution.

In 2011, the Italian government and media organisations collectively embraced the term ‘emergency’ to describe the highly anticipated influx of migrants and asylum seekers from North Africa, which had been prompted by political unrest and subsequent socioeconomic turmoil, during and after the so-called Arab Spring (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 239; Semprebon & Pelacani, 2020, p. 15). A formal ‘state of emergency’ was proclaimed on 12 February 2011 (The North Africa Emergency Provisions Decree). An initial response from the government involved generating temporary humanitarian visas and accommodating the influx of individuals seeking asylum by ‘stocking’ them in hastily procured accommodations, the majority of which ultimately degenerated into substandard, unsuitably large first reception centres (Ambrosini, 2014, pp. 242-243; Armillei, 2017, p. 143). In the worst cases, numerous profit and non-profit organisations that administered these facilities were incapable of providing adequate services due to a lack of resources, expertise, or even motivation, leading to uneven and detrimental outcomes for RAS (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 142; Giannetto et al., 2019, p. 35). They petitioned the government unsuccessfully to

⁶⁴ UNHCR data reveal that there were 1,756,777 Ukrainians registered with temporary protection in Poland as of February 2024. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine/location/10781>. Accessed on 17 March 2024.

increase the selection standards of the public tenders and accountability of the organisations administering first reception centres (Caponio et al., 2019, p. 40; Semprebon & Pelacani, 2020, p. 21).

A number of these ‘emergency’ facilities were initially established without the knowledge or consent of municipalities. As time passed, mayors grew fatigued by this by-passing of their municipal responsibility and they began to either vehemently oppose it or seek alternatives to the proliferation of reception facilities on their municipal land (Ambrosini, 2020, p. 7; Caponio et al., 2019, p. 36). Certain municipalities engaged in governance negotiations with the aim of coordinating and providing support for facility management. Conversely, other municipalities maintained steadfast opposition with unequivocal anti-immigration stances or chose to remain mute on the issue in order to safeguard their electoral consent for their future re-election (Caponio et al., 2019, p. 36).

The media also reported cases of infiltration of organised crime in the system (Pasciuti, 2018a; Pianigiani, 2017), and Luca & Proietti’s (2022) research reveals a significant correlation between the likelihood of a municipality hosting a centre and the level of local mafia presence.⁶⁵ Furthermore, this research provides substantial exploratory evidence that reception contracts are significantly more likely to be awarded through direct awards in municipalities with a high mafia intensity, whereas the opposite holds true for open procedures (Luca & Proietti, 2022, p. 2113). In a notorious case in Sicily, public contracts were awarded to a select group of third-sector organizations that were willing to pay bribes, and that, in turn, employed local people in exchange for political votes’ (Pianezzi & Grossi, 2020, p. 161).

The oversight of the first reception facilities, under the purview of the Prefettura, while significantly enhanced in recent years, remains deficient and primarily concerned with verifying adherence to regulations rather than evaluating results.

⁶⁵ See for example: Pasciuti, M. (2018, June 26). Latina, inferno dei centri migranti privati. Il gestore intercettato: per farli mangiare ‘spendo 1,6 euro al giorno, pranzo e cena’. [Latina, hell in private migrant centres. The manager intercepted: to feed them ‘I spend 1.6 euros a day, lunch and dinner’]. *Il Fatto quotidiano*. <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2018/06/26/latina-inferno-dei-centri-migranti-privati-il-gestore-intercettato-per-farli-mangiare-spendo-16-euro-al-giorno-pranzo-e-cena/4451928/>. Accessed on 8 November 2023. Also: Pianigiani, G. (2017, July 17). Mafia in Italy siphons huge sums from migrant centres. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/17/world/europe/italy-migrants-mafia-edoardo-scordio.html>. Accessed on 8 November 2023.

Furthermore, more extensive monitoring initiatives have been initiated since 2016, enabling the central government to delegate monitoring responsibilities to external entities, including international organisations (Giannetto et al., 2019, p. 36).

The shipwreck that claimed the lives of nearly 400 asylum seekers off the island of Lampedusa in Sicily at the end of 2013 prompted a re-evaluation of the reception system. From then until 2017, the number of available places in the integration facilities, which offered access to integration activities, was expanded. Despite this, the system remained inadequate. The municipalities' reluctance to participate in the system, which remained entirely voluntary, was not the only factor; the system's implementation was also complicated by an extensive bureaucracy (Giannetto et al., 2019, pp. 14-15).

3.3.4 Conclusion

The EU asylum and migration policy underlines the difficulty of reconciling supranational norms with national sovereignty. Member states maintain substantial autonomy in the enforcement and implementation of migration policy. This tension between central directives and national priorities, particularly as a result of the Dublin Regulation, has resulted in a fragmented policy landscape, and in inconsistencies and inequitable treatment of RAS throughout the EU. Additionally, the implementation of externalisation policies, which entail the outsourcing of asylum proceedings to non-EU countries, undermines human rights and violates international law. There have been no genuine attempts to reform and harmonise asylum policies, and responses have frequently prioritised security concerns over humanitarian needs, thereby perpetuating cycles of exclusion and marginalisation.

Research could evaluate the long-term consequences of outsourcing asylum processing and investigate alternatives that are consistent with international law and humanitarian principles. Furthermore, the influence of ideology on asylum and migration policies throughout the EU could be investigated in order to examine the ways in which various political ideologies affect national policies and to propose strategies for overcoming ideological divisions in order to achieve more unified policies.

3.4 The Italian integration system

3.4.1 Introduction

The Italian Legislative Decree no. 18 of 21 February 2014 mandates that every two years, the Italian Ministry of the Interior, in collaboration with local authorities, develop a comprehensive national strategy for interventions and measures aimed at promoting RAS integration.⁶⁶ With an emphasis on socio-work integration, the National Integration Plan delineates the specific intervention channels, promoting focused initiatives that tackle concerns such as education, language learning, and accommodation, in addition to ensuring fair and equal access to social services and healthcare, and opposing discriminatory practices (Ministero dell'Interno, 2017, p. 8).

Although the initial National Integration Plan was ratified in September 2017, it was not revised until 2022, despite the fact that such revisions were mandated by law every two years. The lack of strategic planning during that period emphasises the inclination towards emergency planning over long-term vision (Coresi & Maugeri, 2023, p. 159). In addition, throughout the evaluation process for the new revised strategy, the regions themselves acknowledged that the plan implemented a reception approach that originally prioritised the integration of the individuals, even in cases where they had not yet received refugee status. In contrast, subsequent legislation altered this perspective, thereby transforming the plan's basic principles (Ministero dell'Interno, 2020, p. 1). In the following subsections, I describe how this occurred.

3.4.2 The administrative pathway from arrival to integration facilities

The initial stage of the asylum application, the expression of intent to request international protection, is not constrained by any particular procedure. It may be conveyed orally, in writing, in person, or through conduct that manifests a conspicuous commitment from the non-citizen. Asylum candidates must physically submit the request for officialization, irrespective of their method of entry into the country or the

⁶⁶ Decreto legislativo 21 febbraio 2014, n. 18: Attuazione della direttiva 2011/95/UE recante norme sull'attribuzione, a cittadini di paesi terzi o apolidi, della qualifica di beneficiario di protezione internazionale, su uno status uniforme per i rifugiati o per le persone aventi titolo a beneficiare della protezione sussidiaria, nonché sul contenuto della protezione riconosciuta. Gazzetta Ufficiale Serie Generale n.55 del 7 marzo 2014. [Legislative Decree no. 18 of 21 February 2014: Implementation of the EU directive 2011/95/UE containing rules on the allocation, to citizens of third countries or stateless individuals of the status of beneficiary of international protection, on a unified status for refugees or for persons entitled to benefit from subsidiary protection, as well as on the substance of the identified protection]. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2014/03/07/14G00028/sg>.

type of stay permit they hold if they are already in Italy. The application process should be initiated at the Questura or the frontier police station. Upon completion, the applicant is identified and cross-referenced to ensure that they have not previously sought asylum in another EU country (as required by the Dublin regulation). Foreigners acquire the status of applicants for international protection the moment they declare their intention to seek asylum. As such, they are permitted to remain on state territory, excluding certain exceptions, until the assessment decision of the competent Territorial Commission, the administrative body responsible for the initial evaluation of asylum applications. In addition, they are granted access to the reception facilities and services, according to Legislative Decree No. 142/2015 and subsequent modifications (ASGI, 2019a, p. 92). According to the same law, they have the option to appeal to the administrative tribunal with jurisdiction over asylum if they receive an unfavourable decision or a lower protection status level than anticipated. Should they receive a second negative or unsatisfactory decision, they are entitled to a court-level appeal at the second level (Gill & Good, 2018, p. 221).

Asylum applicants may be accommodated in two distinct categories of centres throughout the process, pending a determination on their international protection application: first-level reception centres offering limited services; or second-level reception centres incorporating integration services (Camera dei Deputati, 2023). The placement of the reception centre assignment lacks any discernible logical pattern. RAS are assigned to facilities arbitrarily, without regard for the social or economic conditions at the site or the fact that they frequently arrive without the necessary skills or familial support to obtain employment in the local economy. Subsequently, RAS are frequently relocated a third or second time, which disrupts the formation of social networks and destroys social capital acquired in any of the transient communities (Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021, p. 8).

Prefetture, the provincial authorities responsible for public security, oversee the first-level reception centres, referred to as 'CAS' [Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria – Centres of Extraordinary Reception]. These centres are responsible for directing asylum seekers to integration centres, provided there is space or when their international protection is authorised (Camera dei Deputati, 2023). The current designation for the second-level reception facilities, also known as integration centres, is 'SAI' [Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione - Reception and Integration

System], although, in prior years, they were referred to by other titles. Local municipalities oversee the management of the integration centres and initiate the project voluntarily (Ministero dell'Interno, 2024). Therefore, their distribution over the Italian area is not predetermined. 687 SAI projects for ordinary beneficiaries were activated in 2022, with 1,378 municipalities involved in the system, and a total of 37,361 places available for ordinary beneficiaries. The southern region of Italy accounted for the majority of these places. 54.4% of the local municipalities that were part of the SAI network were characterised by very minor demographic dimensions and had a population of less than 5,000. Additionally, nearly half (43.6%) of the municipalities that were part of the SAI network were in regions that were characterised by negative demographic, economic, and social trends.⁶⁷

The annual financial expenditures and fund utilisation of each SAI centre are required to be comprehensively reported to the Central Service office (Servizio Centrale del Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati, 2018b, 2020a). The beneficiaries, who request to utilise the integration centre services and who have an income less than the equivalent of the annual individual social allowance (€5,889 in 2018 increased gradually to €6,085.43 in 2022),⁶⁸ are expected to be admitted into the SAI centre for a total of six months from the date notification of recognition of international protection is received.⁶⁹ In the event that these measures fail to guarantee the successful completion of the beneficiary's integrated reception path in order to accomplish the goals of the SAI, an extension request may be pursued. The SAI services to the beneficiary may come to an end for the following reasons: voluntary abandonment; revocation for violent or serious episodes of non-compliance with the reception regulations; term expiration; socioeconomic integration (exceeding the income level

⁶⁷ Sistema accoglienza e integrazione. (2022). Rapporto annuale SAI. [Reception and integration system. (2022). 2022 SAI annual report]. <https://www.retesai.it/rapporto-annuale-sai-atlante-sai-2022/>. Accessed on 12 November 2024.

⁶⁸ Data from the Social Security National Institute [Istituto Nazionale per la Previdenza Sociale (INPS)]. <https://www.inps.it/it/it/dettaglio-scheda.schede-servizio-strumento.schede-servizi.assegno-sociale-50184.assegno-sociale.html>. Accessed on 11 August 2024.

⁶⁹ Articolo 14 del Decreto Legislativo n.142 del 18 agosto 2015: Attuazione della direttiva 2013/33/UE recante norme relative all'accoglienza dei richiedenti protezione internazionale, nonché della direttiva 2013/32/UE, recante procedure comuni ai fini del riconoscimento e della revoca dello status di protezione internazionale [Article 14 of the Legislative Decree no. 142 of 18 August 2015: Implementation of Directive 2013/33/EU on rules relating to the reception of applicants for international protection, as well as Directive 2013/32/EU, on common procedures for the recognition and revocation of international protection status]. <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2015/09/15/15G00158/sq>

of the social allowance); assisted voluntary repatriation; or transfer in accordance with the Dublin regulation (Servizio Centrale del Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati, 2018a, pp. 110-111). Upon consistent completion of the SAI course, the recipients may receive a modest contribution to assist them in commencing their independent lives. This contribution may include covering the initial months of rent, purchasing furnishings, or covering travel expenses if they choose to relocate (Servizio Centrale del Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati, 2018a, pp. 55-56). The subsequent subsections will provide a more comprehensive description of the CAS and SAI centres in relation to the government policy changes from 2018 onward.

3.4.3 The integration system before the 2018 Security Decree

Before 2018, both asylum applicants and recognised refugees could utilise the integration system, which was then known as the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR). The SPRAR system was established in 2002 through the Bossi-Fini law, named after two right-wing Ministers, who were allied with Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi at the time. This law was perceived as a repetition of previous immigration reforms, as it introduced limitations on new immigrants entering the country while also providing a new amnesty for irregular immigrants already residing in Italy (Colombo & Sciortino, 2003, p. 163). The system was funded mainly by the Ministry of Interior (National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services) and partly by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) from the EU (Giannetto et al., 2019, pp. 26-27; Semprebon & Pelacani, 2020, p. 19). SPRAR consisted of the provision of services such as food and accommodation, Italian language courses, employment guidance, health and psychology services, social and legal assistance, cultural mediation and multicultural activities. As the primary component of the integration procedure, the SPRAR system gained considerable prominence and in 2016 it was expanded (Semprebon & Pelacani, 2020, pp. 18-20). The system instigated the formation of a network comprising both public and private entities operating within and across small municipalities. This network expanded its scope beyond RAS reception to encompass a more comprehensive strategic plan for the welfare and redevelopment of the local community, providing the opportunity for public

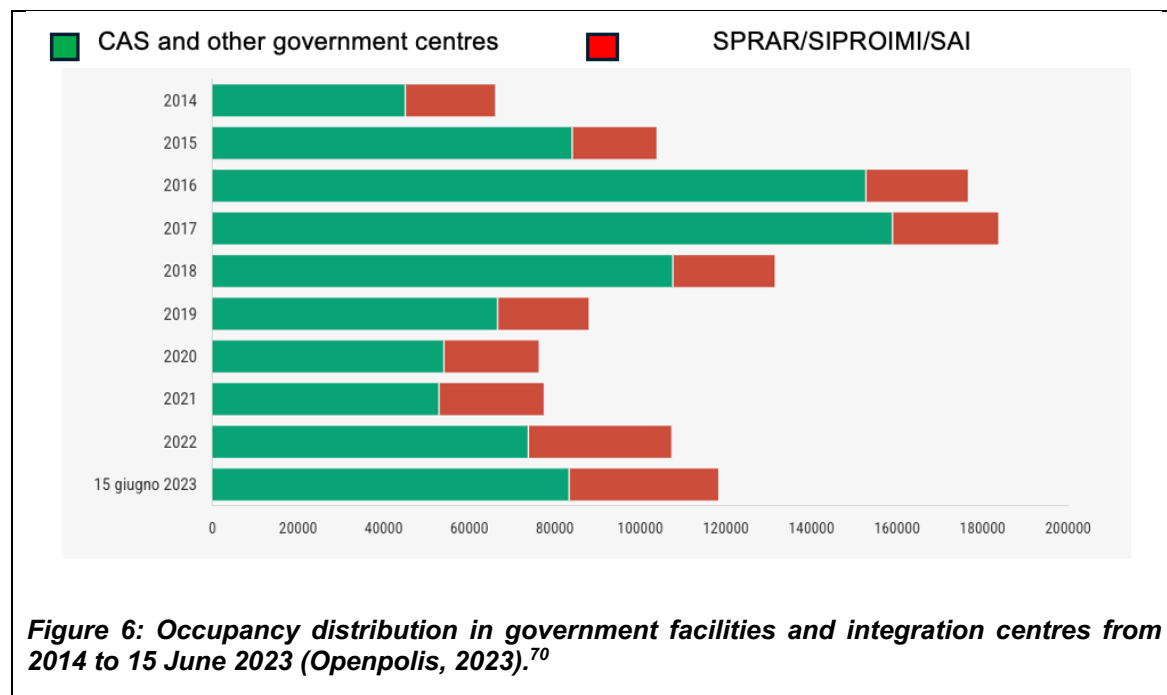
and private actors and residents to engage in a dialogue for a future vision of change (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 251).

The SPRAR system demonstrated its greatest efficacy in the compact municipality of Riace, situated in the Calabrian region of southern Italy. Mayor Domenico (Mimmo) Lucano spearheaded an innovative approach by fostering collaborations among diverse non-governmental organisations and the local population. Local emigrants who had sought employment elsewhere in Italy or abroad had abandoned Riace, leaving it with a derelict town predominantly inhabited by elderly individuals. RAS were housed in the dilapidated dwellings abandoned by Italian emigrants, revitalising a community that had previously been in a state of decline. Numerous national and international authorities, including EU politicians, researchers, and members of the media, visited the town to gain insight from this model (Driel, 2020, p. 150), which moreover served as an inspiration for neighbouring municipalities. Nevertheless, despite employing identical strategies, not all of them achieved success due to the critical factors of the influential leadership of the promoters and the benefits derived by each local population (Driel, 2020, p. 166).

By effectively managing legal structures and challenging pervasive Italian ethno-nationalism, the Riace initiative aimed to facilitate the integration of RAS while simultaneously alleviating the hostile environment that surrounded them. Political backlash and paranoia arose in response to this experiment, which sparked fears of an ethnic replacement for Italians. Mayor Mimmo Lucano became the focus of attention and a target of right-wing politics. His indictment in 2018 on charges including facilitating illegitimate immigration, bid-rigging, and arranging marriages of convenience between migrants and residents was widely believed to be politically motivated. In contrast, his supporters perceived his approaches as a strategic mode of opposition to the bureaucracy in order to safeguard the inherent right to pursue asylum. Lucano was given a sentence of thirteen years and two months in prison in September 2021, which was notably disproportionate (Carbone, 2023, pp. 415-416). Subsequently, on appeal, he was acquitted of the primary offences, leading in 2023 to a substantial reduction in his sentence to one year and six months (Marrazzo, 2023).

Apart from this and other successful local initiatives in Italy, the number of available SPRAR places has never been adequate to accommodate all requests. As capacity

ran out, asylum applicants were relocated to temporary emergency centres, the previously mentioned CAS, that were instituted in 2014 across the country, resulting in a significant disparity between CAS and SPRAR's numbers even in subsequent years (Openpolis, 2023; Pannarale et al., 2017, p. 11; Penasa, 2017, p. 3). For example, in 2017, CAS places accounted for around 80 per cent of the total reception places in Italy (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 236).



The CAS system was initially distinguished by minimal levels of governance and a fundamental provision of services, consisting primarily of shelter and sustenance. Over time, however, the standard agreements additionally stipulate the provision of a nominal monetary amount (pocket money) and a limited range of integration-oriented services, including but not limited to linguistic and cultural support (Pannarale et al., 2017, p. 36).

CAS operators expressed dissatisfaction with the CAS's inherent limitations, which include a constant sense of urgency, a lack of organisation, planning or integration, and the ability to only respond in an emergency manner. Many organisations that

⁷⁰ Included in the term 'government centres' are all government initial reception centres, primarily CAS, as well as those that have implemented a hotspot approach in their different iterations throughout the years. The 'integration centres' comprise the entirety of the three systems, namely SPRAR, SIPROIMI, and SAI, that have been developed throughout the years. Annual occupancy calculations shall commence on 31 December, excluding the year 2023.

oversee integration centres and CAS attempt to manage the structures concurrently despite having inferior economic resources and human resources compared to the integration centres, while attempting to maintain an acceptable level of quality for the CAS (Pannarale et al., 2017, p. 159). Several local actors facilitated a multitude of dialogue and exchange opportunities, which enabled service providers to enhance their competencies, develop standardised procedures, and strengthen collaboration with the Prefettura. These efforts were aimed at improving the consistency of services and the influence on the territory (Caponio et al., 2019, p. 40).

Nevertheless, until 2018, the government and media mostly concentrated on guaranteeing optimal conditions for asylum seekers who were crossing the Mediterranean Sea. At that time, Italy's primary goal for its receiving system was to establish SPRAR and implement an integrated strategy for reception. Meanwhile, CAS would continue to serve as an emergency supplement that would eventually be removed (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 237). The 'dispersal policy' ultimately failed to achieve an optimal equilibrium between distributing a small number of beneficiaries among SPRAR centres and consolidating a larger number of beneficiaries in CAS facilities across the territory (Campo et al., 2020, p. 11). This scenario, which was further exacerbated by inadequate integration services in CAS centres and the exclusion of local institutions, incited community discontent and catalysed political change, bolstering support for extreme-right parties (Campo et al., 2020, p. 41).

3.4.4 Analysing the consequences of the 2018 Security Decree

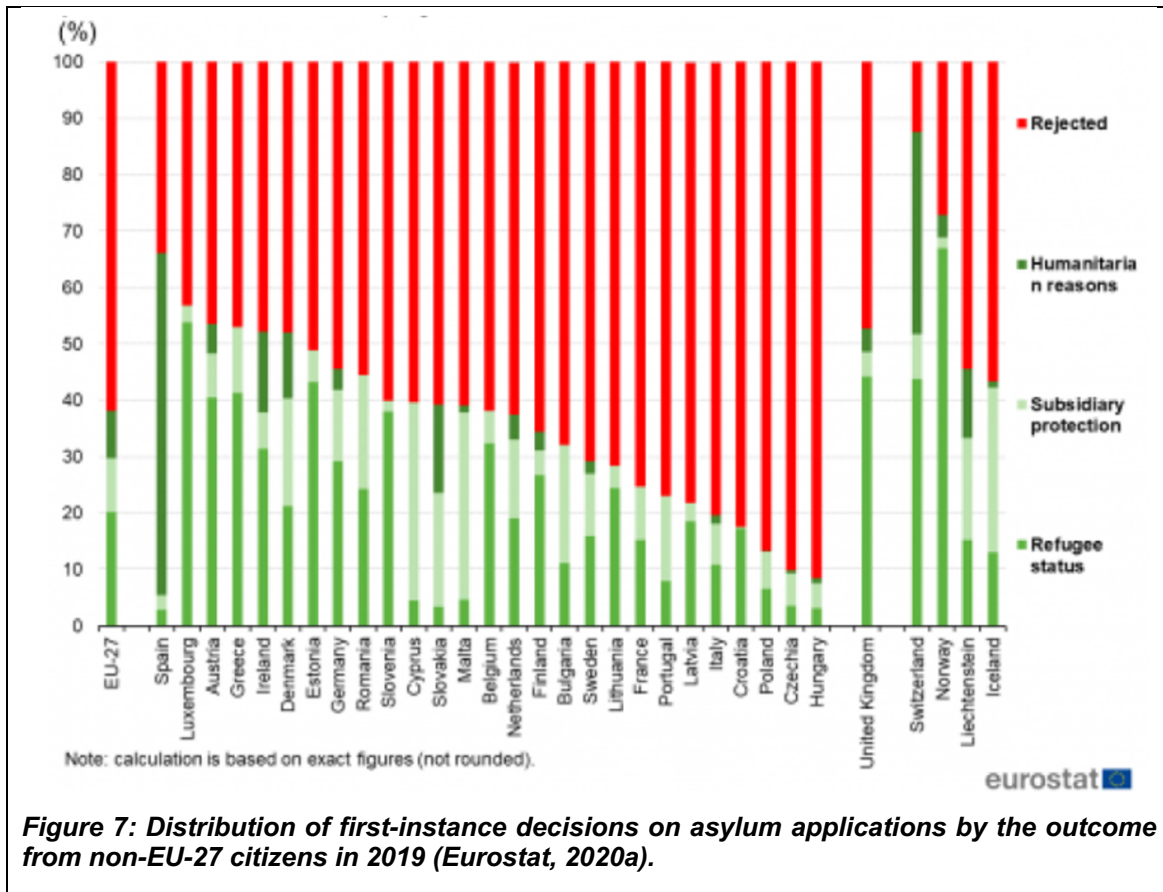
The anti-immigration front attained leadership status within the centre-right coalition in the March 2018 elections (Campo et al., 2020, p. 18). During that year, a pivotal moment in the progression of the Italian reception system occurred with the implementation of a reform proposed by the right-wing League and the populist Five Star Movement party, the Decree on Security and Migration (also known as Security Decree or Salvini Decree, after the Minister of Interior appointed in 2018 in a government coalition with the Five Star Movement).⁷¹ The implementation of this Decree occurred without prior consultation with regional and municipal authorities, international organisations, and civil society organisations (Giannetto et al., 2019, p. 24).

⁷¹ See footnote no. 33.

Under the Minister Salvini, Italy implemented a strict anti-immigration policy in 2018, despite a substantial decrease in migrant arrivals. The policies prohibited the use of Italian ports by rescue ships, notably those operated by NGOs engaged in Search and Rescue (SAR) missions in the vicinity of the Libyan coast. These NGOs were instrumental in the rescue of nearly 120,000 migrants between 2014 and 2019. However, they were subjected to increasing criticism, as their actions were alleged to have indirectly promoted irregular migration. This criticism resulted in a succession of restrictive policies that targeted NGO-operated rescue ships and legal investigations by Italian courts. Despite the fact that these organisations were ultimately cleared of facilitating migration, the combined impact of criminal investigations and governmental restrictions, which commenced in 2017, significantly disrupted their SAR operations and restricted their capacity to provide life-saving assistance (Cusumano & Villa, 2021; Paynter, 2022, p. 298).

Following the reform, the examination of asylum requests and their results, while also considering variations in the countries of origin of asylum seekers, demonstrates that 2019, the year after the Decree, was unquestionably the most stringent year in terms of asylum requests, given that it was the only year entirely governed by the Security Decree.⁷² By examining the nationality of applicants, the standardised rate indicates that the number of negative decisions increased from 42 per cent in 2017 to 69 per cent in 2019 (Fondazione ISMU, 2023b, p. 72) while the number of appeals seeking to reverse the adverse results rose by 20 per cent (Giovannetti, 2021, p. 8). This stood in opposition to the majority of EU member states, which maintained a significantly higher proportion of favourable outcomes of initial determinations regarding asylum applications. Only Croatia, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, which also had stringent anti-immigrant policies at the time, performed worse than Italy (Eurostat, 2020).

⁷² See footnote no. 33.



Furthermore, the media were frequently impacted by the political discourse encircling the role of maritime NGOs in saving lives at sea in 2018. The political characterisation and criminalisation of NGOs due to their attributed role in attracting asylum seekers detracted focus from other crucial facets of arrival management and reception. Yet, NGO vessels were involved in only a very small proportion of the overall landings that occurred in Italy. According to the annual Dossier published by the Ministry of Interior, 53 per cent of asylum applicants entered Italy by their own means; the remaining 47 per cent were rescued at sea and subsequently arrived in Italian ports. On the other hand, the involvement NGOs in rescue operations was 16 per cent, given that the Coast Guard successfully rescued most asylum seekers (Fondazione ISMU, 2023b, p. 45).

With regard to the integration system, SPRAR centres were renamed, in accordance with the Decree, 'SIPROIMI' centres [Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati - Protection system for holders of international protection and for unaccompanied foreign minors] and could only accommodate beneficiaries of international protection; asylum applicants

and holders of humanitarian protection permits were excluded by the SIPROIMI centres (Caponio et al., 2019, p. 12) and could thus only be hosted by the CAS centres (Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2023a, p. 4). The revision imposed by this Legislative Decree was seen by CAS and SIPROIMI operators as a sudden suspension of the process and jeopardised the achievements obtained up to that time (Caponio et al., 2019, p. 40).

As a result of the reception system change, the services and standards that had to be maintained were also affected. This meant that for CAS and the other government centres, only fundamental services such as food, shelter, and the provision of essential products and services were considered, while services that were more focused on facilitating the integration of the beneficiaries were excluded (Pannarale et al., 2017, p. 40). In addition, asylum seekers were no longer permitted to use their stay permits as legal documents to register at the Civil Registry office, per the new decree (Giannetto et al., 2019, p. 22; Ministero dell'Interno, 2019). This led to an ongoing incapacity to access other services outside the CAS system due to administrative obstacles (Giannetto et al., 2019, p. 22). The core principle of a reception system, which was to aid recipients in attaining independence throughout the entire process, was thereby compromised. A tangible separation between asylum seekers and refugees was implemented by the system at this juncture, a substantial reduction in the budget allocated to reception was observed, and integration assistance for asylum seekers was discontinued (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 237).

The reimbursement to operators in charge of reception centres was a significant modification (Caponio & Cappiali, 2018, p. 12). Prior to the Security Decree⁷³, the government would compensate each operator €35 per day per RAS, both in the case of CAS and SPRAR centres. The €35 was intended to pay for all the recipients' daily pocket money of €2.50 as well as the price of food, lodging, employees' salaries, and other services provided by the organisation (Genoviva, 2016). Following the Security Decree, SIPROIMI (ex-SPRAR) centres continued to obtain the same payment of €35, while CAS centres received reimbursements ranging from €19 to €26, depending on the size of the facility (Giannetto et al., 2019, p. 20; Ministero dell'Interno, 2019, p. 10). According to one owner of these facilities interviewed by a local newspaper, a

⁷³ See footnote no. 33.

profit margin of approximately €5 could only be achieved with a large number of beneficiaries in order to amortise the fixed expenses. In addition, he mentioned that it took roughly a year to recover the costs of the investment (Barlassina & Siviero, 2016). The system progressively marginalised small organisations, thereby creating space for large-scale for-profit entities to emerge (Pannarale et al., 2017, p. 106; Spada, 2021, p. 121), posing a threat to the 'dispersal policy' of the former SPRAR, which determined the allocation of migration to each municipality proportionally to the resident population (Campo et al., 2020, p. 3). Many operators objected to the reduction since they could no longer provide even basic services with those sums (Giannetto et al., 2019, p. 20). Several services, including job placement, professional development training, seminars involving stakeholders to foster the growth of soft and relational skills, paid apprenticeships, and public transportation ticket provision, were reduced in scope. Notwithstanding certain proactive measures and the active participation of local associations and volunteers, as well as the engagement of local civic society, these initiatives appeared insufficient to offset the reduction (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 248). Besides, security issues would have surfaced because of the need to subsequently limit the number of staff (Pasciuti, 2018b), as well as the loss of skills resulting from personnel reduction and task minimisation (Bolzoni et al., 2022, pp. 249-250).

Those in charge of administering both the CAS and SIPROIMI centres made every effort to provide equivalent services to both beneficiaries (Pannarale et al., 2017, p. 166), while many SIPROIMI centres sought assistance from local organisations and the population (Marchetti, 2021, pp. 56-62). While many new calls for tenders set up by the Ministry of the Interior for new CAS centres went unfulfilled, most operators who had both SIPROIMI and CAS centres, decided to keep the SIPROIMI facility rather than the CAS, which consequently limited the overall number of spots available for beneficiaries (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 249; De Cesco, 2018; Pasciuti, 2018b; Prefettura di Lecco Ufficio Territoriale del Governo, 2023). The rationale for the budget reduction was bolstered by the dissemination of false information, which was backed by the right-wing League party. This misinformation claimed that the RAS received €35 per day in addition to lodging and board and lived in opulent hotels with swimming pools. Instead, the beneficiaries received pocket money of just €2.50 per day and the remaining money was used to pay the operators' expenditures and to generate jobs,

while the hotels used for their accommodation had only basic furniture or were hotels that were no longer financially viable for the owners (Gagliardi, 2018; Genoviva, 2016).

An additional adverse consequence stemming from the Security Decree⁷⁴ was the revocation of the permit for national humanitarian protection. Individuals who were previously authorised to access the SPRAR system and had been granted that type of permit were excluded from the SIPROIMI system and proceeded to contribute to the growth of the irregular migration (Giannetto et al., 2019, p. 20; Pontiggia, 2021, p. 77; Villa, 2018). Access to and maintenance of the status of humanitarian protection were only granted to individuals with critical health conditions or histories of abuse, those from countries afflicted by natural disasters, the veracity of which was often challenging to establish. Those who were able to obtain or maintain humanitarian protection status were, nevertheless, restricted to CAS centres without integration services for accommodation (Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2023a, p. 4). Therefore, in light of the reductions in integration services for asylum seekers and the exclusion of humanitarian protection holders from the reception system, local governments, job centres, and health and social services were compelled to meet an increased need for social assistance and basic services without the help of cultural mediators (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 248). In addition, reports were made regarding unoccupied places that had been previously funded for recipients whose access was denied; this development also had implications for the local economy. The regulatory change, which altered the rights and opportunities associated with various statuses, in conjunction with a discourse that portrayed both migrants in general and the reception initiatives as criminals, fostered an atmosphere of unpredictability and insecurity; consequently, the prevailing positive sentiment of local transformation that was shared locally in these small municipalities was diminished (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 252). Giannetto et al. found that, in March 2019, beneficiaries of the reception system had not yet been divided and were still mixed up in the CAS and SPRAR centres (Giannetto et al., 2019, p. 22).

3.4.5 Management of the integration system amidst the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenges associated with the reception

⁷⁴ See footnote no. 33.

of the beneficiaries. In March 2020, the Central Service [Servizio Centrale] office, the governing body located in Rome entrusted with the administration of the reception system on behalf of the Minister of Interior, dispatched a communication to all integration centres and their management organisations, providing guidance on how to handle the situation. The guidelines stipulated the management of isolation for Covid-19-positive cases, the suspension of monitoring activities, and a brief extension of the centre's financial reporting procedures by several months, in order to provide the entities with additional time to organise. Moreover, guidance was provided concerning the discharge of individuals who had fulfilled their integration period and the transfer of the newly appointed beneficiaries. The allocation of places for the new beneficiaries who were required to participate in the integration facilities was deemed valid, but suspended, if the projects were unable to execute the transfer within the normal time and manner, as a result of the unforeseen circumstances associated with the health emergency and the specific directives issued by the health authorities. Consequently, in light of the cessation of the extraordinary health provisions, it would have been the responsibility of each local reception centre overseeing the project to ensure the successful resumption of the suspended receptions.

It was also permitted to halt the discharge of beneficiaries who were expected to be released following the completion of their integration process in order to safeguard the security of the territories during an unprecedented period of social and health vulnerability (Servizio Centrale del Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati, 2020b). In pursuit of this objective, an extension request could be submitted and, at first, a six-month extension was granted until 30 June 2020. Subsequently, another six months were granted until 31 December 2020, thereby allowing beneficiaries who were also excluded by the Security Decree⁷⁵ to extend their stay in the facilities (Servizio Centrale del Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati, 2020a)⁷⁶. However, the Covid-19 outbreak and the restrictions it brought negatively impacted asylum seekers living in receiving facilities. This was mainly a result of their extended marginalisation from integrating programmes and the

⁷⁵ See footnote no. 33.

⁷⁶ See also Legislative Decree 'Cura Italia' [Italy Cure] no. 27 section 86 bis, issued on 24 April 2020 (as amended from the Decree no. 18 issued on 17 March 2020). <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/17/20G00034/sq>.

limited possibilities they had to form social bonds, which provoked further exclusion and emotional suffering among persons who were already susceptible since their aspirations and intentions were hindered (Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2023b, p. 14).

A survey was undertaken to assess the effects of Covid-19 between 11 May 2020 and 12 June 2020. The findings pertain to 5,038 reception facilities out of a total of 6,837 that were officially registered by the Ministry of the Interior, representing a coverage rate of 73.7 per cent. The coverage in relation to the number of beneficiaries was approximately 70 per cent, given that, as of 31 May 2020, data from the Ministry of the Interior indicated that the total number of individuals accommodated in the reception system amounted to 85,730. 74.4 per cent of the participating structure categories were represented by CAS centres, while 24.4 per cent were represented by SIPROIMI centres. There were 572 suspected Covid-19 cases and another 239 confirmed cases. Most facilities that had one or more confirmed cases of Covid-19 were situated in the northern region of Italy. There were no reported deaths among them. The survey results emphasised a prevalence of positive cases comparable to those of the general population as well as to all types of migrants in Italy (Fondazione ISMU, 2020, p. 12), accompanied by a North-South gradient in the geographical distribution of cases, which is consistent with the pattern observed across the nation (Costanzo et al., 2020).

The observation that most positive cases occurred in reception centres with the highest population saturation illustrated the criticality of maintaining a safe physical distance. Furthermore, only 54 per cent of individuals testing positive who received an indication for isolation from the local health authority were confined to a single room with exclusive services. This compares to 23.0 per cent who were isolated in a room with other individuals testing positive for the virus, and 8.2 per cent who were isolated in a single room with shared facilities (Costanzo et al., 2020). Reception centres were granted permission to utilise available and unoccupied SIPROIMI structures, whose spaces were not scheduled to be utilised for pre-arranged assignments, in order to accommodate beneficiaries undergoing quarantine containment measures and fiduciary isolation under health and safety surveillance during the Covid-19 emergency. The purpose of the intervention was to assist the Prefettura in locating the structures required to implement the recommended health

measures (Servizio Centrale del Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati, 2020a, p. 9).

The pivotal functions of the SIPROIMI system, which comprised high-quality, small-scale reception centres, as opposed to the larger CAS centres, were instrumental in mitigating the pandemic's most severe consequences. This is primarily attributable to the satisfactory housing conditions of the SIPROIMI centres. By sharing well-appointed apartments with a limited number of roommates, beneficiaries were able to minimise the potential for contracting infections and pass the time during periods of isolation in an appropriate setting. Similarly, confirmed or suspected Covid-19 cases could be readily identified and subsequently segregated in dedicated apartments to prevent the spread of the virus (Bazurli & Campomori, 2022, p. 1102).

3.4.6 Transition and continuity: the 2020 Migration Decree

Late in 2019, a number of internal party disputes precipitated a crisis in the Italian government. The government crisis that ensued led to a partially substituted government in which the Democratic Party and the populist Five Star Movement shared the majority. Non-political technocrat Luciana Lamorgese assumed the position of Minister of the Interior, replacing Salvini. The goal was to depoliticise the immigration issue, in contrast to the stance taken by the preceding right-wing minister. Practically speaking, the situation after 2018 did not return to its pre-2018 state, and only marginally improved in comparison to the stringent Security Decree (Dennison & Geddes, 2022, p. 451).⁷⁷ Regarding access to integration systems, the SAI system replaced SIPROIMI. With this in mind, the so-called Migration Decree or Lamorgese Decree, issued on 21 October 2020, once more granted asylum seekers access to integration facilities; nevertheless, the services provided were insufficient in comparison to those available to officially recognised refugees (Pannarale et al., 2017, p. 159).⁷⁸

The SAI was organised with two reception standards that differentiated between services. Basic services were provided to all beneficiaries, including asylum seekers. These services did not specifically focus on integration, but they did include measures such as Italian language courses and legal and territorial orientation services that are

⁷⁷ See footnote no. 33.

⁷⁸ See footnote no. 24.

indirectly related to integration. Further services, instead, which were specifically aimed at integration, particularly in terms of job orientation and professional training were only available to individuals who had been granted some form of stable international protection. On the whole, the plan seemed reasonable given the circumstances. It would be impractical to invest heavily in integration efforts without first assessing the individual's eligibility for long-term residence in Italy, especially considering the high number of rejected protection applications at that time. Moreover, certain pathways, such as language learning, require a significant amount of time to yield satisfactory outcomes (Fondazione ISMU, 2020, pp. 117-118). However, the asylum recognition process in Italy is notoriously protracted, particularly in cases involving appeals, as a result of resource scarcity, which was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. According to the Asylum Information Database (AIDA), the database managed by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), the formalisation and processing of asylum applications in Italy takes between six months and a year, and appeals after denials are processed with delays of approximately three years (Bove, 2017, 2018, 2020; Bove & Romano, 2021; Della Puppa & Perocco, 2021, p. 10; Dimitriadis, 2023, p. 267; Giovannetti, 2021). An Italian Tribunal deliberation explicitly stated that these delays in formalising asylum applications cannot be justified by the emergency caused by the pandemic (ASGI, 2023).

UNHCR recognises that a protracted asylum process might hinder migrants' social, economic, and cultural integration. In its 2007 note on the integration of refugees in the EU, the UNHCR pointed out that if the status decision involves uncertainty and inactivity, long periods of restricted opportunity for RAS to live a full and active life can lead to despair, apathy, and low self-confidence, which can affect their abilities and social life following recognition. Reception procedures for asylum seekers should thus limit isolation and separation from the host society and help them acquire language and professional skills and find work: this is particularly important to counter the effects of long-term instability when assessment processes are protracted. Such an approach would improve individual skills and resources and allow RAS to become active citizens, enhancing their chances of successful integration in the host nation or reintegration upon return to the country of origin (UNHCR, 2007, p. 5). This is especially true when asylum seekers are held up in CAS facilities, which are commonly referred to as 'parking facilities'. This becomes a significant issue when

individuals housed in large CAS centres are 'invited' to vacate the premises the moment notification of international protection approval arrives, in some cases they are requested to leave in a few days or even in 24 hours (Bove, 2017, pp. 126-127).

Acquiring the international protection documentation is considered a vital milestone that signifies the shift from a period of anticipation and uncertainty to a new phase, during which some asylum seekers have excessive expectations. In practice, individuals lacking an immediate access network of family or friends, or who do not access the integration process at the SAI centres, are abruptly abandoned and placed in extremely marginalised circumstances (ASGI, 2011, p. 303; Ghizzi Gola, 2015).

A further change brought by the Migration Decree⁷⁹ was the introduction of the stay permit for special protection, which aimed to reintroduce a form of protection after the Security Decree⁸⁰ abolished the so-called humanitarian protection. The special protection was intended to safeguard fundamental rights, social integration, and the regularisation of the unlawful residence status of a large number of foreigners who could not be expelled from Italian territory, in a flexible and situation-specific manner. Most importantly, this form of protection enabled them to be hosted in the SAI reception facilities (Bonetti, 2021).

3.4.7 Conclusion

Over the years, Italy's reception system for RAS has undertaken legal reforms and policy adjustments, and has encountered practical challenges. The SPRAR system, an early initiative that prioritised integration, demonstrated optimistic outcomes. Nevertheless, the Salvini Decree of 2018⁸¹, which significantly altered the framework for receiving and integrating RAS, was the result of political opposition that was fuelled by social anxieties and misinformation. The exclusion of asylum seekers from integration programmes, the reduced funding allocations, and an increase in the transition towards emergency-focused reception were the consequences of these changes. The Covid-19 pandemic introduced additional challenges to Italy's reception system. Nevertheless, the Salvini Decree's impact was mitigated due to the extension of the integration programme of hosted RAS, in order to prevent their dispersion in

⁷⁹ See footnote no.35.

⁸⁰ See footnote no. 33.

⁸¹ See footnote no. 35.

the pandemic environment. In 2020, the Lamorgese Decree⁸² superseded the Salvini Decree and partially reinstated the previous measures that had been abolished, allowing asylum seekers to be accepted into the SAI system once again, although they were prevented from using the employment services. Overall, the Lamorgese government, though, failed to recognise the necessity of an extensive redesign of the integration system, which still remains dependent on an emergency-oriented approach.

3.5 Assessing RAS integration: parameters and methods

3.5.1 Introduction

A study of RAS integration in the EU has found that the potential long-term social economic and fiscal benefits may outweigh the initial expenses despite the high costs incurred by the government budget in facilitating RAS integration through measures such as welfare benefits, language and professional training. Besides, it is noted that over a significant period, the overall advantages of investing in RAS integration increase proportionally with the level of investment made upon their arrival. Proper inclusion of RAS can potentially lead to employment and advancement within the EU, with the potential to enhance Europe's economy and prosperity in the future. The costs of non-integration, in the long term, are expected to surpass the investment costs of RAS integration in the short term; however, confining the scope of RAS integration research solely to social and economic impacts would present a constraint. In reality, policymakers must consider a multitude of factors, including but not limited to humanitarian concerns, security measures, equality and social inclusion, in the development of migration and RAS integration policies (Kancs & Lecca, 2018). In order to comprehensively identify the factors that hinder the integration of the RAS workforce, it is imperative to incorporate multiple disciplines such as ethnic and migration studies, social work, sociology, psychology, and political science (Lee et al., 2020).

Research has revealed that RAS typically exhibit a propensity for risk-taking behaviour and despite having undergone traumatic violence and displacement, individuals often develop remarkable strength and resilience (Shergold et al., 2019).

⁸² See footnote no. 33.

The individuals arrive with the aim of establishing livelihoods for themselves, their families and kin, and seek their localities that provide a secure environment of stability, structure, and good prospects (Shergold et al., 2019). RAS exhibit a strong inclination towards integration into host societies, as they are unable to repatriate to their countries of origin. This inclination is manifested in their concerted efforts to enhance their proficiency in the local language, acquire local certifications, and procure employment that aligns with their competencies and credentials. The elevated levels of motivation frequently result in a corresponding increase in the drive to secure employment. Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated that precarious economic circumstances can give rise to discontent among RAS, restricted social connections, and inferior physical and psychological health consequences, ultimately culminating in reduced motivation and diminished self-confidence (Lee et al., 2020).

So, what criteria are used to define a successful integration? Which parameters are taken into consideration? The majority of theoretical frameworks posit that the achievement of successful integration for newly arrived individuals is characterised by fair and impartial availability of opportunities and resources, active involvement in the community and society, and a sense of assurance and inclusion in their new place of residence (Ager & Strang, 2008; Phillimore & Goodson, 2008). However, it is imperative to contemplate strategies for examining additional facets of integration, such as the host community and institutional adaptation (Phillimore & Goodson, 2008; Scott Smith, 2008, p. 322).

3.5.2 The integration indicators

Integration indicators can aid policymakers in considering the various facets of integration and facilitating interagency or coordinated efforts to develop more comprehensive integration strategies. In order to effectively target ethnic groups, it is necessary to gather data at a sufficiently detailed level that enables the identification of both high-performing and low-performing subgroups within the population. The accessibility of services is influenced by demographic variables such as age, race, and gender, and therefore necessitates their consideration. Individuals place varying degrees of importance on different indicators. If utilised appropriately, the indicators have the potential to detect marginalised groups within every policy domain. The improvement of RAS' lives can only be achieved through the monitoring of immigrants

to ensure parity with the host community (Phillimore & Goodson, 2008, pp. 322 - 323). The significance of quantitative, longitudinal data to evaluate integration is emphasised by Puma et al (2018). The absence of such data would impede the identification of crucial factors that could be utilised by receiving nations, at both national and local levels, to facilitate integration and guarantee the prosperous resettlement of RAS globally (Puma et al., 2018). Furthermore, the evaluation of integration necessitates the establishment of a standard against which results can be evaluated. It is recommended that the outcomes of the target population be compared to those of the non-target population. Precise definitions must be established, as the term 'immigrants' for example, encompasses various categories. It may refer to all foreign-born individuals, whose place of birth is a fixed characteristic, unlike citizenship, which can be altered over time (OECD, 2018b, pp. 18 - 19).

A proposal put forward by the ECRE suggests that European governments should consider establishing centralised information resources about RAS. The provision of such resources would aid in the compilation of pertinent statistical information, thereby empowering European governmental bodies and non-governmental organisations to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the calibre and efficacy of programmes aimed at integrating RAS. Longitudinal data collection that facilitates analysis of the circumstances of second-generation refugees should also be considered (ECRE, 2002, p. 25). However, there is still a shortage of information regarding the socio-economic status of RAS and individuals granted complementary protection in the majority of European nations (ECRE, 2002; Wolffhardt et al., 2020). A comprehensive analysis of the implications of immigrant integration requires careful consideration of the demographic composition of the immigrant population. The initial entry category significantly influences the starting point: RAS are individuals who have been forcibly displaced from their homes and are granted entry into a country solely on the grounds of humanitarian considerations. Conversely, labour migrants are admitted into a country based on their skills and the economic prospects available in the host nation (OECD, 2018b, p. 25).

The EU policy emphasises the importance of establishing unambiguous objectives, measurable indicators, and effective evaluation mechanisms to facilitate policy adaptation, assess advancements in integration, and enhance the efficiency of information exchange. Integration, despite being a process and not a final result, has

the potential to be quantified and assessed through policy evaluation. Besides, the utilisation of integration indicators, objectives, assessment methods, and benchmarking can facilitate the measurement and comparison of advancements, as well as the monitoring of trends and developments. The objective of the evaluation is to derive insights from prior experiences, mitigate potential shortcomings, adapt policies accordingly, and demonstrate a vested interest in each other's endeavours. The effectiveness of knowledge-sharing can be enhanced through the sharing of evaluative tools among member states at the European level, and the development of European criteria such as indicators, benchmarks, and gauges for comparative learning, where applicable (Council of the European Union, 2004). Immigrant populations exhibit significant variations in terms of their demographic characteristics such as size, duration of stay, age, educational attainment, language proficiency, and primary entry categories. Hence it is possible to classify destination countries into distinct groups based on these contextual variables. These clusters of nations frequently encounter comparable obstacles to integration that are associated with the above traits. The cross-cultural sharing of experiences can be a valuable learning opportunity for states. The exchange of experiences is likely to be most effective when it occurs between countries with comparable immigrant demographics, still considering the economic and social contexts specific to each country (OECD, 2018b, pp. 21 - 25).

The EU utilises migrant integration indicators that are sourced from Eurostat data and are founded on the Zaragoza Declaration, which was agreed upon officially in April 2010 by EU Ministers who held the responsibility for integration. The aim was to streamline the evaluation of the condition of migrants throughout the diverse member states of the EU. The selection of indicators was based on a mutual agreement that prioritised the use of comparable and easily accessible data, a restricted number of indicators, the ability to facilitate longitudinal comparisons, cost-effectiveness, comprehensibility, and a focus on outcomes (Presidencia Española de la Unión Europea, 2010). So far, four priority areas of integration have been identified: employment, education, social inclusion, and active citizenship. The integration process is subject to significant influence from employment, and educational pursuits are instrumental in enabling the achievement of success and increased involvement of immigrants in the wider community. The importance of social inclusion transcends

mere access to the labour market and encompasses a wider integration into society. The participation of immigrants in the democratic process as active citizens promotes their integration and enhances their sense of belonging (Presidencia Española de la Unión Europea, 2010).

The indicators enable a comparative examination of different age groups among the local-born population and immigrant population, including third-country nationals and foreign-born individuals, while also considering gender disparities. The utilisation of indicators is aimed at achieving three key policy objectives, which are to comprehend the contexts of integration and the outcomes of immigrants' integration, to assess the effectiveness of policies, and to incorporate integration into overarching policies (Presidencia Española de la Unión Europea, 2010). Subsequently, the EU commissioned an assessment of the Zaragoza indicators, resulting in the publication of a report in 2013. The report substantiated the soundness of the system, recommended the incorporation of supplementary indicators and proposed the addition of a fifth area, namely a 'welcoming society', to the four primary domains. This new area would evaluate various factors, including experiences of discrimination, trust in public institutions, and a sense of belonging (Huddleston et al., 2013). Other studies also consider residency, family reunification, social security, mainstreaming, and access to home and health (Blangiardo et al., 2022, p. 3; Wolffhardt et al., 2020, p. 25). Eurostat annually updates its indicators by utilising pre-harmonised data sources, including the EU Labour Force Survey and the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions. Moreover, Eurostat has commenced the publication of certain indicators at the regional level and by the level of urbanisation since 2018. This is to consider the sub-national aspect of the immigrant integration (OECD, 2018b, p. 225).

Algan and Aleksynska (2010) have also previously advocated the inclusion of a regional perspective coupled with an ethnic criterion of reference. Upon conducting an analysis of the progress made by first-generation immigrants in comparison to both local-born individuals and second-generation immigrants, they discovered that the heterogeneity of the local-born population in Europe poses a significant challenge to this type of examination. As an illustration, the authors note that the dissimilarities between Bretons and Corsicans residing in France may surpass those among Italians dwelling in Switzerland. Therefore, they recommended that future research should consider adopting a regional and ethnic perspective instead of relying on an 'average'

local-born individual as a reference point for immigrants, in order to enhance the richness of the findings (Aleksynska & Algan, 2010).

3.5.3 Conclusion

The allocation of resources for the integration of RAS results in enduring social, economic, and fiscal advantages that surpass the initial costs. Research suggests that the initial amount of investment upon their entrance is directly related to the long-term benefits obtained. RAS show a tendency to integrate into the cultures they settle in. They frequently have a great desire to improve their language skills, get local qualifications, and find employment. Successful integration is defined by equitable access to opportunities, active engagement in the community, and a feeling of security and belonging. Scholars believe that assessing integration necessitates a comprehensive strategy that takes into account several elements such as humanitarian considerations, equality, and social inclusion. In order to thoroughly assess integration, policymakers need to integrate several disciplines and develop precise indicators, benchmarks, and assessment systems, for example, collecting longitudinal data and exchanging experiences across different cultures across EU member states can significantly improve integration efforts and policy adaption. In addition, integrating a regional and ethnic viewpoint into research might enhance comprehension and aid in tackling the varied integration obstacles encountered by distinct immigrant communities. Utilising migrant integration indicators, which focus on key areas such as employment, education, social involvement, and active citizenship, enables the evaluation of integration results and the efficacy of policies.

CHAPTER 4. INSIDE ITALY'S SAI CENTRES: CHALLENGES, ADAPTATIONS, AND FINANCIAL DYNAMICS.

4.1 Introduction

This section will examine the results of the interviews conducted with SAI operators, highlighting various elements of the operation and management of these facilities. It will also explore their perspectives on the complexities and challenges involved in the integration of refugees. These insights align with the major issues emphasised in the existing literature and background material. A total of 53 interviews were conducted, with 31 female and 22 male interviewees. The majority of the interviewees were SAI centre administrators and managers (10 in Bologna, 7 in Torre Pellice, and 23 in the Benevento area). The remaining interviewees were legal professionals, mayors, and associated policy makers.

Subsection 4.2 explores the reasons and methods behind the creation and functioning of SAI centres in the Italian municipalities of Torre Pellice, Bologna, and Benevento and emphasises how the local context and community dynamics influence the implementation and efficacy of integration programmes for RAS. Subsection 4.3 examines the complex difficulties related to Italy's integration policies in the last twenty years, emphasising a period characterised by lack of progress and ineffectiveness. The subsection examines Italy's integration system, highlighting its ongoing deficiencies. It specifically explores the long-lasting effects of the 2002 Bossi-Fini law and the influence of the EU on integration policies. In addition, the subsection discusses the controversial nature of the Italian reception system, specifically the division between the CAS and SAI systems (the latter being introduced in 2020) and the criticisms made against CAS centres. Subsection 4.4 analyses the structure of Italy's reception system for RAS, with a specific emphasis on the central role played by the Central Service office located in Rome. This subsection offers a comprehensive examination of the Central Service's supervision of the SAI system, which involves managing the distribution of resources, ensuring adherence to regulations, and facilitating communication between municipal SAI centres and the Ministry of the Interior. Subsection 4.5 examines the substantial effects of policy modifications on the reception and services provided to RAS in Italy between 2018 and 2022. Integration

centres encountered a tumultuous and demanding atmosphere during this time, characterised by extensive legal modifications that had a direct impact on their activities and the well-being of the asylum seekers they assist. Finally, subsection 4.6 delves into the complex financial mechanisms that support Italy's RAS integration and reception systems. The subsection explores the sources of funding for these systems, the difficulties encountered by managing organisations, and the consequences of policy modifications on the financial viability and provision of services.

4.2 Motivations behind the SAI centres and approach of the operators

4.2.1 Torre Pellice

The implementation of inclusion programmes in Torre Pellice was initiated as part of the Waldensian Church's greater dedication to assisting persons with diverse challenges. Over time, the initial focus expanded to include a wide range of services, such as humanitarian corridors, CAS centres, SAI centres, and community-based projects.⁸³ The Torre Pellice municipality made the decision to establish a SAI centre in order to address the issue of depopulation in the town, while acknowledging the significance of offering comprehensive assistance to vulnerable populations, such as RAS, as part of its social obligation. This decision is rooted in the municipality's longstanding tradition of welcoming diverse communities, as evidenced by the presence of 52 nationalities and seven different Churches in the area.

The initial integration centre was set up in 2011 when the SPRAR system was under the leadership of the previous mayor. In 2017, when a significant number of asylum seekers arrived, the municipality objected to the Prefettura's arbitrary imposition of a large number of CAS centres in the area. To address this, the municipality of Torre Pellice collaborated with the Prefettura and neighbouring municipalities in the valley to establish the SPRAR integration centre. Under this policy, the municipality of Torre Pellice took ownership of the project, while a further nine municipalities in the area accommodated asylum seekers in apartments within their respective territories. The other towns were persuaded based on the economic rationale of using their numerous vacant apartments, as well as the assurance that Torre Pellice would handle all economic and administrative aspects, rather than

⁸³ Interviewee no. 1.

accepting ethical and political considerations. Their conviction mostly sprang from apprehension over the influx of numerous asylum seekers and the undesirable presence of CAS facilities. One interviewee stated that the previous Prefect in charge was highly cooperative⁸⁴ but, with the appointment of a new Prefect and the administrative elections in seven towns in 2019, maintaining the same level of collaboration became challenging. Despite a decrease in the number of asylum seekers arriving and the subsequent reduction in public concerns about an ‘invasion’, other mayors who had initially accepted reluctantly decided to terminate their collaborations. Consequently, the number of SAI centres in the area decreased. The interviewee reported the entire experience to be favourable, encompassing both social and economic aspects. They leased 30 apartments and purchased food from nearby sources, which proved to be economically advantageous for the local companies. Initially, the local community, particularly the elderly population, harboured scepticism and suspicion, primarily in the years 2017-18, as a result of the prevailing right-wing political ideologies and media influence. Initially, RAS were perceived as individuals who were unwilling to engage in employment. Nevertheless, after initiating interpersonal engagement with the general population and arranging opportunities to become acquainted with one another, the locals made remarks like the following: ‘I don’t know about the others (RAS), but mine is really good’.⁸⁵

The personnel skills in Torre Pellice demonstrate a combination of specialist positions and a dedication to meeting the varied needs of RAS with a proactive stance towards integration. Nevertheless, as immigration is a specialised field, one of the interviewees emphasised the importance of employing specialised personnel as opposed to simply generically qualified operators, as well as the necessity of allocating funds towards recruitment with consistent training to prevent a decline in quality standards.

4.2.2 Bologna

In Bologna, the choice to establish SAI centres has been a result of its longstanding social policy and a cooperative initiative including the local government and many third-sector organisations. This approach also recognises the importance of involving

⁸⁴ Interviewee no. 6.

⁸⁵ Interviewee no. 6.

civil society actors in tackling social concerns and fostering inclusive societies. Moreover, the Bologna SAI system employs a system of familial foster care for RAS who have recently turned 18 years old. The families actively participate as volunteers and undergo a rigorous selection process followed by comprehensive training. Families include individuals, parents with young children, elderly couples, same-sex couples, and student groups. The services offered by the SAI system remain the same, with the sole exception being the kind of accommodation supplied.⁸⁶

Interviewees have stated that the Bologna municipality's practice of allocating a portion of services to management organisations necessitates collaboration rather than rivalry among these organisations in order for the system to function well.⁸⁷ Furthermore, collaborating with other organisations is advantageous due to the frequent coordination meetings and the transfer of expertise that takes place among them. Occasionally, it may be necessary to contact operators from other organisations for urgent concerns, which might potentially cause a delay in taking action, but such occurrences are seldom, as regular update meetings are often held.⁸⁸ Although this approach enhances the sharing of knowledge and resources, which is valued by interviewees, it can also pose administrative difficulties in terms of coordination and alignment of goals. As one interviewee pointed out, having cross-functional services through external organisations has the benefit of specialised expertise, but it may lead to divergent objectives. For instance, the interviewee recounted a situation when they engaged in disputes with operators from a different organisation who were providing job services in an 'office manner', claiming that their approach was not practical for RAS.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the dependence on many entities for delivering services emphasises the necessity for efficient governance structures and methods to guarantee transparency and effectiveness in allocating resources.⁹⁰

The involvement of numerous entities in Bologna SAI operations presents intricacies in personnel and coordination. While certain operators work on a permanent basis, others may be hired on a temporary basis, which might create difficulties in ensuring a consistent and uninterrupted supply of services. Furthermore,

⁸⁶ Interviewee no. 15.

⁸⁷ Interviewee no. 6, 16, 17.

⁸⁸ Interviewee no. 17.

⁸⁹ Interviewee no. 17.

⁹⁰ Interviewee no. 4.

the significant rates of staff turnover, which may be linked to variables such as the complexity of the job and burnout, emphasise the necessity for extensive support systems and possibilities for professional growth.⁹¹

4.2.3 Benevento

The introduction of SAI centres in Benevento and its province is in line with greater goals of reducing population, fostering entrepreneurship, promoting social inclusion, and facilitating community development. During an interview in the small town of Chianche, a participant expressed the objective of revitalising the historical centre of a village, which had several vacant buildings.⁹² Another interviewee from a different town in the vicinity discussed the risk of public school closures owing to a decrease in student enrolment as residents relocate to seek services and work elsewhere, given that local industries are restricted only to agriculture and construction, and that there is insufficient public transportation and inter-town connections within the region.⁹³ In fact, in certain instances, SAI operators have relocated from nearby towns to improve their accessibility to work.⁹⁴ Another interviewee emphasised that depopulation due to unemployment was a recurring subject raised throughout the campaigns for the 2021 administration elections.⁹⁵ In 2017, a mayor from a neighbouring small town established the SAI facility, despite the challenging circumstances created by the right-wing Minister of the Interior, Salvini. He enumerated a number of advantages that the SAI opening brought to the local community: maintaining the number of students to ensure the school's continued operation; organising school projects and summer camps in which Italians were also able to participate; creating jobs for locals to staff the SAI centre; and appreciating the cultural diversity and international enrichment.⁹⁶ One of the SAI managers emphasised how the Consortium rethought its role in the community and established itself as a significant contributor to the community's progress and growth.⁹⁷ Primarily, the organisation functions as a supplier of both material assets and intangible assets to society, encompassing cultural and social contributions. The Consortium is a collective of cooperatives and a network that

⁹¹ Interviewee no. 18.

⁹² Interviewee no. 32.

⁹³ Interviewee no. 39.

⁹⁴ Interviewee no. 42.

⁹⁵ Interviewee no. 29.

⁹⁶ Interviewee no. 25.

⁹⁷ Interviewee no. 23.

operates across the territory, addressing various social issues affecting vulnerable individuals such as migrants, former prisoners, and those with mental health conditions. In addition, they provide guidance to municipalities interested in establishing a SAI centre, but eventually the decision to accept this invitation is contingent upon the current Mayor's discretion. They emphasise that this initiative would serve as an effective strategy to combat population decline while also securing financial resources. Within the province, there are no comparable large organisations. The establishment of the Consortium in Benevento was motivated by the intention to utilise the SAI system as a means to foster the growth of the local region and community. The aim was to create an environment where young local people would be inspired to remain in their town rather than seek opportunities elsewhere.⁹⁸ The primary objective of the Benevento Consortium is to support socially disadvantaged persons, by implementing a civic economy model, which combines SAI operations with wider community development projects, effectively utilising social capital and resources to foster equitable growth and resilience. This model aims to not only give aid to these individuals but also facilitate their autonomy and integration into local society.⁹⁹

The Benevento Consortium's emphasis on hiring local residents, particularly those who are vulnerable, demonstrates a dedication to promoting community empowerment and social inclusion. The Consortium's objective is to improve the abilities and expertise of personnel via training and professional development opportunities. It argues that this will contribute to the long-term integration efforts and economic resilience of the community.¹⁰⁰ The network of cooperatives employs a total of 380 individuals, with around 10 operators in each SAI centre. Among these employees, with the majority of them having permanent employment, 70% are women and 80% of the overall workforce is over the age of 50. Operators are educated to not just to operate in the integration centre but also to incorporate all community services. The Consortium has initiated entrepreneurial business endeavours (such as a cafe, a social orchard, an inclusive hotel, and so on) that provide employment opportunities for disadvantaged individuals and sustain themselves financially through the earnings

⁹⁸ Interviewee no. 24.

⁹⁹ Interviewee no. 23.

¹⁰⁰ Interviewee no. 24.

generated by these operations. In addition, the Consortium established a cooperative for each SAI facility, which actively participates in community initiatives. Each cooperative maintains a workforce ratio of 1:2 between migrant employees and locals. The interviewee estimates that around 20-30% of SAI RAS remain locally beyond the completion of the integration project.¹⁰¹ Another manager believes that the renowned Riace town concept had some positive aspects, but there was an issue with the concentration of RAS in a limited area.¹⁰² This created a situation where the local economy became overly reliant on the existence of the SAI facility. Instead, the Consortium was based on the dispersion of the number of RAS throughout a wide region, integrating them with the local economy to achieve mutual sustainability. The Consortium managers discovered that the municipalities in the region were unaware of the existence of an SAI system, while mayors were familiar with the CAS centres and their detrimental consequences, hence the decision to engage in communication by notifying local administrations and assisting them in the application process for SAI projects approval. The Consortium took part in around 30 competitive bidding processes and was successful in 11 of them.¹⁰³ According to another interviewee, the Consortium won a tender to replace a previous NGO because the municipality preferred the programme presented by the Consortium, given that, in addition to providing the standard services the previous organisation also offered effectively, the Consortium proposed to add employment inclusion projects for the RAS after the integration programme ended.¹⁰⁴ This is because the Consortium also carries out external parallel activities. On another occasion, the Consortium lost control of an SAI facility during the renewal process, because a group external to both the Consortium and the territory won the tender. It should be noted that each municipality has the authority to set the rules for the tender. The operators complained with the municipality that had issued the tender, given they were denied access to the opponents' proposal, resulting in a lack of transparency of the process.¹⁰⁵ While this information reported by the interviewees cannot be verified, it does raise concerns about abnormalities in the system.

¹⁰¹ Interviewee no. 23.

¹⁰² Interviewee no. 24.

¹⁰³ Interviewee no. 24.

¹⁰⁴ Interviewee no. 42.

¹⁰⁵ Interviewee no. 22.

While the Consortium hires local individuals in every town, it seems that locating specialists, such as psychologists and other professionals, is a challenge in small towns. Consequently, the Consortium must seek out and attract such professionals from the big cities.¹⁰⁶ From the perspective of an interviewee, the presence of an SAI facility in small towns presents a favourable prospect for young Italians to remain in their local communities and obtain employment, rather than seeking job opportunities elsewhere.¹⁰⁷ A second interviewee, who holds a law degree, expressed that despite being offered another job and being prepared to relocate to Milan, he ultimately chose to stay where he was. Similarly, a third interviewee, who possesses a Master's degree and has prior work experience in different regions, made the decision to remain in his hometown upon securing the job with the Consortium.¹⁰⁸ A manager remembers instances where the employment of RAS in the local vineyards led Italians to reconsider working in the same industry (the area is known for producing a prestigious grape variety called 'Greco di Tufo'). Previously, Italians may have viewed such jobs as low-skilled and unappealing. Over time, operators, over time, do not continue working for the Consortium only for the sake of having a job, but rather because they align with the shared mission of the organisation.¹⁰⁹

4.2.4 Commonalities and divergences among the selected refugee integration centres

The interviews emphasise the importance of considering contextual factors when evaluating integration outcomes, as emphasised by Geddes & Wunderlich (2009, p.196), OECD/EU (2018, pages.21-25), Szkudlarek et al. (2021), Valtonen (2016), Puma et al. (2018), and Fioretti et al. (2021, pp. 2 - 4). The experiences of operators in different regions of Italy highlight the influence of local factors, such as economic circumstances, social unity, and availability of services, on the process of integration. In addition, research on the employment of refugees and migrants highlights the impact of local economies and labour markets on the integration process. The emphasis on community development and economic resilience in Benevento and its province reflects a broader recognition of the potential benefits of migrant labour for local economies, particularly in rural areas facing declining population and economic stagnation. Fioretti et al. (2021)

¹⁰⁶ Interviewee no. 23.

¹⁰⁷ Interviewee no. 22.

¹⁰⁸ Interviewee no.30.

¹⁰⁹ Interviewee no.23.

suggest implementing a place-based approach to integration that considers the geographic characteristics of migrant communities and leverages local assets and partnerships. The interviews validate the congruence of the experiences with this method, particularly in Benevento and its province, where SAI centres actively contribute to local growth and rejuvenation of the community.

Lee et al. (2020) and Szkudlarek et al. (2021) highlight the importance of several stakeholders and organisational frameworks in shaping the outcomes of integration. The interviews highlight the pivotal importance of collaboration among municipalities, management organisations, and local communities in guaranteeing effective service delivery and support to RAS. The existing research on integration highlights the importance of collaborative endeavours that involve many stakeholders, active engagement of the community, and the cultivation of skills and resources to attain favourable integration results. The Bologna model of service provision, which involves the cooperation of several institutions to deliver comprehensive help, adheres to the recognised best practices documented in the literature. This approach acknowledges the complexity of integration processes and the need for coordinated efforts among several sectors and stakeholders.

Obstacles such as high employee attrition rates and complicated and, often, inefficient administrative procedures highlight the limitations of the system. Some individuals leave due to the complex nature of the job, which may not be suitable for everyone. The job is reported to be exceedingly exhausting, requiring work on weekends and long hours (with shifts ranging from 9 am to 10 pm). Operators were often performing tasks outside of their contracted hours, occasionally even working additional hours without compensation, when there was a need to handle administrative management chores for new arrivals, crises, or minor requests of RAS.¹¹⁰ An interviewee highlighted instances where they were contacted by RAS to replenish a cooking gas cylinder or to be rescued while stuck in the neighbouring village and RAS appreciated and acknowledged the effort made in these situations.¹¹¹ The long-term employed operators generally exhibited a disposition of complete willingness, acceptance, and selflessness for the betterment of society in their work,

¹¹⁰ Interviewee no. 18, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37, 39.

¹¹¹ Interviewee no. 31.

which one interviewee referred to as 'a mission'.¹¹² At the same time, according to an interviewee in Bologna, there is a significant staff turnover due, for example, to individuals pursuing specialised Master's degrees, such as psychology or neuropsychology. On completing their studies, these individuals seek new opportunities elsewhere. This issue exacerbates the unappealing salary, hence contributing to the substantial employee attrition. In fact, some individuals engage in employment for a duration of one year, after which they intentionally terminate their position in order to qualify for one year of unemployment benefits, namely the 'reddito di cittadinanza' [citizenship income] subsidy, amounting to monthly €700 per month. The typical wage for operators is around €800-900 for part-time positions and €1,200-1,300 for full-time positions, which includes overtime. Therefore, there is minimal disparity between a salary and a subsidy.¹¹³ An operator in the vicinity of Benevento has stated that the implementation of the government's employment subsidy programme has resulted in increased job availability during the summer season. This is because individuals receiving the subsidy are reluctant to accept short-term contracts, as doing so would result in the loss of their subsidy. There has been a significant rise in seasonal job opportunities in the town as a result.¹¹⁴ Another interviewee in the Benevento region, who had firsthand experience of the administrative procedures involved in the distribution of the unemployment benefit during previous employment, similarly expressed challenges in recruiting employees since the government implemented the subsidy.¹¹⁵ The interviewee, who holds a negative perspective towards these forms of subsidies but acknowledges their necessity in some situations, observed that jobless local Italians respond differently when they receive unemployment payments.

There exists a group of individuals, particularly those who are no longer young, who possess a strong feeling of obligation and want to contribute to the community. As a result, they actively engage in municipal initiatives known as projects of social usefulness. Participation is obligatory to continue receiving the subsidy, with the exception of certain cases. Instead, individuals, particularly the young people, who have been accustomed to relying on assistance, persist in maintaining that mindset

¹¹² Interviewee no. 32.

¹¹³ Interviewee no. 18.

¹¹⁴ Interviewee no. 42.

¹¹⁵ Interviewee no. 29.

and devise justifications to evade engagement in mandatory activities.¹¹⁶ At certain SAI centres, operators with limited working hours may choose to leave the job if they secure a more favourable employment opportunity that increases their working hours.¹¹⁷ In other cases, several of the junior staff members lack competence or reliability to perform their tasks. Numerous operators possess expertise in social services but not in working with migrants.¹¹⁸

Furthermore, the task of recruiting personnel becomes challenging due to the phenomenon of staff burnout that occurs after a few years.¹¹⁹ Despite efforts by the operators to instruct RAS to refrain from contacting them on weekends or public holidays unless absolutely necessary, there is an unavoidable general burden that builds up. This burden is not only due to the long working hours, but also stems from the nature of the job and the intense experiences that RAS encounter.

One interviewee expressed her profound satisfaction with her job and willingly committed to working additional hours, despite it not being explicitly required in her employment agreement. Nevertheless, by the end of the day, she carries all work-related concerns home, resulting in the accumulation of stress inside her personal domain. Another interviewee expressed difficulty in maintaining emotional detachment from the RAS. A lawyer practising in Turin, outside of the SAI system, has expressed that she has ceased working in immigration law due to burnout. She believes that only young individuals with abundant energy can effectively handle such cases.¹²⁰

4.3 Exploring the complexities of Italy's integration challenges: two decades of unproductive policies

Based on the interviews conducted, it was evident that everyone believed that, irrespective of the policy changes, the absence of an effective integration system has been a longstanding issue, and the 2002 Bossi-Fini law continues to be the fundamental basis for immigration in Italy. It is regarded as the legislation that has resulted in the situation where seeking asylum is the sole viable course of action to

¹¹⁶ Interviewee no. 29.

¹¹⁷ Interviewee no. 40.

¹¹⁸ Interviewee no. 18.

¹¹⁹ Interviewee no. 18, 32, 33, 35, 36, 39, 48.

¹²⁰ Interviewee no. 48.

enter Italy. As one of the interviewees explains it, there exists a correlation between asylum and immigration. If the immigration system is closed, individuals will resort to the asylum system (Colombo & Sciortino, 2003, p. 163). In Italy, the commencement of substantive discussions regarding integration planning necessitates a fundamental societal and governmental acceptance of refugees and asylum seekers. Nevertheless, evidence indicates that such acceptance has frequently been absent, as Italian authorities have expressed opposition to the long-term presence of refugees, favouring policies that prioritise deterrence and external relocation over authentic acceptance. This reluctance is evident in policy frameworks, which frequently prioritise border control and restrictive measures over the promotion of integration (Paynter, 2022, p. 295). In fact, the integration system has remained unchanged since its inception in 2002 and has not undergone any innovation. Even after two decades, it remains in the experimental stage and participation of the municipalities is voluntary. Despite its name, it has not evolved into a 'system'; instead, it remains a project. There is a lack of political foresight or determination to enforce the rule for every town, even with gradual implementation.¹²¹ This perspective aligns with the longstanding 'emergency' policy implemented by the Italian government, which has lacked a comprehensive integration strategy (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 239; Coresi & Maugeri, 2023, p. 159; Semprebon & Pelacani, 2020, p. 15).

The European Union is unable to compel its member states to implement the policies outlined in their action plan on integration (Carta, 2019, pp. 25-34; Garlick, 2015; Tsourdi & De Buycker, 2022, p. 22). According to the interviewee from the European Commission, states are willing to engage in discussions and acknowledge the need of efficient migration policies, even if they hold anti-migrant views and do not agree to accept any more migrants or there may be differences in their vision of integration. Generally, local actors show more interest in the matter as they experience the issues on a daily basis. States have the option to adopt certain aspects of the policy and customise it to their own needs. Alternatively, some states may choose to completely ignore the plan and not participate in the process of integration. Moreover, there are states that may selectively adopt only certain parts of the policy. The EU can never ultimately 'twist the arm of a member state' to compel it to adhere to its integration plans. When there is a significant transition in political ideology (either

¹²¹ Interviewee no. 51.

left or right), the collaboration with the EU regarding the integration plan is profoundly affected. Nevertheless, low-profile local actors may be able to alleviate this effect. However, the impact is mitigated if, for instance, Sweden, Germany, or France, which already have robust integration policies, witness little to no change, whereas Bulgaria, whose legislation in this regard is minimal, would have little enthusiasm for participating in the conversation. Countries that hold an anti-immigrant stance continue to be active participants in implementing EU policy, albeit with a limited commitment; this does not imply that all activities cease. Moreover, priorities in other policy areas then come into play, and states might abandon certain projects in the migration sector or fail to utilise the entire allocated budget.¹²²

Even UNHCR interviewees affirm that, in general, all governments consult with the organisation but the extent to which the organisation can exert influence is debatable. The UNHCR is essentially powerless in a political sense. The Ministry of the Interior Lamorgese, for instance, consulted the UNHCR regarding the review of the 2017 National Integration Plan [Piano di Integrazione Nazionale – PNI], which, according to law, ought to have been reviewed every two years but has never been carried out. Some regions are governed by parties that have no interest in promoting or giving visibility to integration programs. This adds to the issues of heterogeneity of the programs and the territory. In the end, RAS can rely for sure only on personal relationships. Therefore, the UNHCR tends to promote projects that create relationship and mentoring.¹²³

The interviewee from the Emilia Romagna regional policy office affirms the ongoing trend of inadequate oversight over municipalities' decisions to join the SAI system. Thus, achieving a fair integration system becomes unattainable when the activation of the system in municipalities is influenced by local policies based on political affiliations or illogical decisions, such as the disproportionate concentration of SAI centres in the southern regions with higher unemployment rates compared to the northern regions. One reason is that the SAI system generates employment opportunities and allocates resources to areas lacking them. While this may be a comprehensible motive, it does not constitute a valid reception system. Due to the voluntary activation of the SAI system by municipalities, it does not operate

¹²² Interviewee no. 53.

¹²³ Interviewee no. 46.

systematically with equal distribution. This is the weak point in the integration system, resulting in a small number of participants, despite the need to support and strengthen this model. The management of the tenders is centralised at the state level, with no involvement or authority given to the regions. Consequently, the integration policies implemented by the regions are influenced by the state's management of reception policies. For instance, if the state prioritises increasing CAS over SAI centres, it becomes more challenging to facilitate integration, given the CAS system provide less services than the SAI system. For the purpose of improving the system, the Emilia Romagna region implemented a regional law¹²⁴ that established three-year programmes for all foreign citizens, including RAS, in order to offer the same integration services to all of them, without distinction.¹²⁵

A manager from the Consortium in Benevento provided additional information regarding the allocation of SAI centres and their relationship to the socio-economic conditions in southern Italy: in that manager's opinion, the populist narratives regarding migrants in Italy were justified by the prevailing circumstances. When asylum seekers receive housing, sustenance, and financial assistance upon arrival, while local residents are unemployed and facing financial difficulties, it is understandable that feelings of anger and protest arise. For instance, in a nearby local community where a CAS centre was established, the remuneration for agricultural labourers decreased from €20 per day to €10. This reduction occurred because RAS, who were already provided with housing and meals, were willing to accept lower wages. It is highly probable that the competitors of RAS were most likely the migrants who arrived years earlier and were employed at a rate of €20 per day, as well as the Italian citizens who were legally supposed to receive €55 per day. In addition, the manager made reference to the CAS centre located in a neighbouring town, which employed approximately 70 individuals who were engaged in informal labour within the vicinity. Some of these individuals had been hosted at the CAS facility for as long as six years. Furthermore, he highlighted the existence of CAS centres in other cities and regions in the southern area, where exploitative employers (so called 'caporali')

¹²⁴ Legge Regionale n. 5/2004: Norme per l'integrazione sociale dei cittadini stranieri immigrati [Regional Law no. 5/2004: Regulations for the social integration of foreign immigrant citizens]. <https://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/immigrati-e-stranieri/temi/norme/legge-5-2004>. Accessed on 18 May 2024.

¹²⁵ Interviewee no. 10.

were known to directly recruit workers. Therefore, at that particular moment, the lack of acceptance by the Italian citizens had a foundation, but the appropriate solution was not the idea of expelling all migrants from Italy, as suggested by a politically simplistic theory. According to the interviewee, the correct strategy is to incorporate various groups of marginalised individuals, including migrants, ex-prisoners, disabled individuals, and the elderly, with the shared objective of promoting development and inclusion. Investing in services and infrastructure that do not yield any additional benefits, like constructing aged care homes when ‘the whole town is already an aged care home’, is futile.¹²⁶

The policy maker in Emilia Romagna is of the view that the SAI system should be integrated into the overall welfare framework. This means that municipalities should consider utilising the SAI services to cater to the needs of other vulnerable individuals within the local community. Consequently, they would serve as a valuable asset accessible to all individuals, rather than a select few. Moreover, this would foster greater agreement among the Italian population. Emilia Romagna has approximately 2000 individuals in the SAI, whereas the CAS currently has around 6000 individuals. Moreover, in Emilia Romagna, there is a total of 560,000 foreign nationals, out of which 14,000 individuals are classified as refugees or asylum seekers. For instance, in the case of Bologna, a dedicated job desk was established due to the fact that the Bologna branch alone accommodates approximately 1500 beneficiaries, whereas the other projects in the region are all relatively small. Therefore, it may be logical to initiate targeted projects for RAS in such circumstances. However, the municipalities typically coordinate comprehensive activities that encompass the entire local population, including both Italian citizens and immigrants with various types of visas.¹²⁷

All interviewees have expressed strong criticism of the CAS system—a criticism also highlighted by the literature (Ambrosini, 2014, pp. 242-243; Armillei, 2017, p. 143), and they emphasised that it was established in 2015 solely to temporarily address a surge in the number of asylum seekers arriving. However, CAS centres continue to exist as of today. As one interviewee put it, ‘there is no dignity in the CAS

¹²⁶ Interviewee no. 24.

¹²⁷ Interviewee no.10.

system'.¹²⁸ According to a UNHCR representative, there are vested interests, like funding and local employment, that make it difficult to eliminate this overcrowded system. The interviewee is of the view that asylum seekers living in a CAS centre in southern Italy, along with 1,500 other individuals, are 'wasting their time', which aligns with the longstanding perspective consistently conveyed by the UNHCR to the EU (UNHCR, 2007, p. 5). According to the UNHCR representative, the integration should be managed on an individual basis instead. An individual residing in an apartment can achieve autonomy, as even the act of purchasing groceries is regarded as a significant endeavour that fosters independence and community engagement within the local area. There are no strategies that can be employed to arrange training or employment workshops for a large group of one thousand individuals. For example, asylum seekers engage in football tournaments or Italian classes, but the dynamics change significantly when these activities take place within a small community, where individuals must interact with locals rather than remaining isolated. This interaction becomes crucial even for language acquisition. Under a spread reception policy, small villages may only have a limited number of RAS, but these individuals have the opportunity to secure employment within local businesses.¹²⁹ One psychologist at SAI centres observed that beneficiaries coming from CAS centres are more resistant to participating in the integration programme. This is because they have become accustomed to the CAS system, which only provides them with basic welfare services without requiring active involvement. Consequently, they mistakenly believe that this passive approach to reception is the norm in Italy, and they rely solely on welfare support. This phenomenon arises due to the extended duration of their stay in CAS centres, which can span several years. I believe that this issue could potentially reinforce the local population's perception of asylum seekers, portraying them as individuals who exploit welfare benefits without contributing (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 235). When RAS are enrolled in a SAI centre, it is not logical to restart the program from scratch since they likely already possess a fundamental understanding of the environment.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Interviewee no.23.

¹²⁹ Interviewee no. 46.

¹³⁰ Interviewee no. 35.

4.4 The organisation of the reception system and the relationship with the Central Service office

The responsibility for overseeing the SAI system stage of reception and resource allocation for RAS in the various municipalities lies with the Central Service office located in Rome. The Central Service acts as an intermediary between the SAI centre owners and the Ministry of the Interior. Primarily, the Central Service office maintains relationships with the third-sector organisations that oversee municipal SAI centres. The Central Service is responsible for assigning RAS to the various facilities, overseeing the centres to ensure compliance with SAI system regulations, and receiving and evaluating proposals to extend RAS reception beyond the statutory six-month period. Moreover, the Central Service gathers information regarding RAS housed in SAI centres throughout Italy and the services rendered to them. A questionnaire is distributed by the Central Service to each SAI centre, requesting information such as nationality, age, education, the number of training or work placements facilitated for hosted RAS, and other relevant details. As became evident in the interviews, the operational dynamics of SAI centres are the result of a number of administrative procedures and pragmatic considerations.

4.4.1 Torre Pellice

The Waldensian Deaconry operates both a CAS and a SAI centre in Torre Pellice; this affords them the flexibility to administer both facilities. Normally, asylum applicants are permitted by law to remain in CAS centres until they are granted international protection. However, in accordance with the 2020 Migration Decree¹³¹, if they are officially relocated to a SAI centre, their stay would be limited to six months (with option to extend), but they would not be offered the same level of integration services as they would normally have in the SAI centres until they receive international protection. This discrepancy extends the time that individuals must depend on state assistance and impedes their progress towards social and economic integration. Nevertheless, the approach taken at Torre Pellice is to ensure extended periods of occupancy in the CAS facilities while offering services that, despite not being funded by both CAS and SAI systems, may be reimbursable via alternative funding sources, such as regional funds or funds from some other of their projects.

¹³¹ See footnote no. 35.

This ensures that even asylum seekers residing in the CAS centres can avail themselves of these benefits. The management's cautious approach to transitioning beneficiaries from CAS to SAI centres highlights the lengthy and prolonged nature of the asylum procedure. Some individuals have been waiting for decisions for many years. In fact, one of the interviewees reported hosting an asylum seeker for six years in the facility.¹³² This is consistent with the existing literature and background information on the asylum application procedure, emphasising the impact of the prolonged processing periods (Bove, 2017, 2018, 2020; Bove & Romano, 2021; Della Puppa & Perocco, 2021, p. 10; Dimitriadis, 2023, p. 267; Giovannetti, 2021). Asylum seekers must navigate a complex bureaucratic process to start their applications. The interviews reveal the challenges of this procedure, as individuals often face delays and administrative hurdles in obtaining the necessary documents and support. Therefore, it is preferred to keep asylum seekers in the CAS system until they receive international protection. However, whenever feasible, efforts are made to provide services such as training and employment opportunities that would otherwise be denied by the CAS system.

4.4.2 Bologna

In Bologna, there is a public office within the ASP (the municipal agency that oversees SAI groups and other social assistance programmes in the city) where anybody, including newly arrived asylum seekers, can seek support. Asylum seekers arrive through informal communication or are referred by the Questura. Typically, these individuals are single adults who enter the country undetected or come from CAS or hotspots. Families, on the other hand, frequently arrive through police referrals. On average, the ASP office, at time of interview, received around 150 attendees every day, which they were unable to accommodate. They also receive referrals from the Central Service office as well. The ASP operators promptly submit a request to the Prefettura to be accommodated in CAS centres, despite the limited available capacity. Moreover, they seek a place in SAI centres in other regions of Italy through the Central Service office. Ultimately, there exists a substantial queue. Bologna is renowned for its welcoming policies, attracting numerous asylum seekers. However, at times, RAS may experience disappointment owing to the large influx of

¹³² Interviewee no.1

people. The majority of arrivals originate from the southern region of Italy, where economic chances are limited, or from the north-eastern border region of Friuli Venezia Giulia. Bologna is the only Italian city to have a governmental office dedicated to providing legal aid.¹³³

In case of Central Service referrals, the ASP office is contacted by the Central Service and provided with a concise overview of RAS characteristics. The ASP office then assesses whether they can make arrangements to house those individuals. Subsequently, the Central Office is notified of the decision. If individuals are currently located in a CAS facility, their arrival will be coordinated by the Central Service office, which normally is already aware of their presence through the local Prefettura. Typically, they accept all the regular recipients that are sent to them by the Central Service office, provided that they have vacancies. On the other hand, RAS who visit directly the ASP public office are assessed by the ASP operators through many meetings to determine their eligibility for inclusion in the SAI facility.¹³⁴ Even if there are officially vacancies listed at the SAI centre, it does not guarantee that the beneficiary can be readily hosted, given that the availability of lodging is not immediate since it takes time to find an apartment and there are legal procedures that need to be fulfilled.¹³⁵ Furthermore, when it comes to housing asylum seekers with local families, the preference is always given to those who have been residing in a CAS centre rather than those who have recently arrived in Italy. This is because operators prioritise matching families with asylum seekers who have already spent a considerable amount of time in Italy and are familiar with the area and language. In 2021, they welcomed several individuals from Albania, Morocco, and Tunisia; however the composition of nations may vary over time.¹³⁶

The method in Bologna, which includes both Central Service referrals and auto-referral systems, reflects the many ways in which asylum seekers reach the reception system. Central Service referrals give a systematic framework for distributing resources, whilst auto-referrals enable flexibility in addressing individual needs and choices. Nevertheless, there are still difficulties that remain, namely in housing irregular migrants and guaranteeing fair and equal access to services. The strong

¹³³ Interviewee no. 14.

¹³⁴ Interviewee no. 4.

¹³⁵ Interviewee no.12.

¹³⁶ Interviewee no. 15.

demand for SAI places in Bologna highlights the ongoing requirement for increased capacity to accommodate the rising number of asylum seekers.

4.4.3 Benevento

In the area of Benevento and its surrounding municipalities, the Central Service office is responsible for sending new beneficiaries. However, local associations or operators themselves can also propose new beneficiaries. Moreover, the Prefettura contacts asylum seekers who have received international protection and have to leave a CAS centre. The Central Service office evaluates the case and communicates with the SAI coordinators, who conduct additional checks before approving the beneficiary. This is the standard operating procedure of the Consortium, as the coordinators seek to ensure thorough assessment of any potential issues and be well-prepared from the beginning.¹³⁷ A coordinator stated that the SAI operators do not have the authority to select the beneficiaries. Instead, it is the responsibility of the Central Service to assign them. However, the interviewee mentioned that the management of the Consortium declines to accept beneficiaries if the SAI centres are unable to meet certain criteria for specific services. For instance, the interviewee cited cases of individuals with severe psychiatric conditions that necessitate round-the-clock assistance. Moreover, she mentioned that they have accepted some pregnant women, but they are reluctant to do so given the nearest hospital is a 35-minute drive away. Each area has a regional Central Service responsible person and the interviewee argued that these Central Service officers should be informed at some point about the special features of certain SAI centres, and that the selection of beneficiaries should be more precise. Nevertheless, in the event that the Consortium is unable to provide a service, the Central Service will locate an alternative facility.¹³⁸

4.4.4 Critical concerns regarding the Central Service's operations

All interviewees at all three sites are aware of a database overseen by the Central Service office that keeps count of the system-available places throughout Italy. However, disparities were identified in both the use and the nature of referrals received by the SAI centres. Although it is theoretically claimed that the database is consistently updated and the availability of vacant spaces in the SAI centres can be

¹³⁷ Interviewee no. 12.

¹³⁸ Interviewee no. 40.

viewed, it appears that the coordinators of the SAI centres primarily rely on personal communication with the Central Service office to convey the availability of apartments. It is unclear whether the uncertainty among some interviewees is just because of disorganisation or if it is also related to the database not functioning properly. However, in certain cases, SAI centres choose to keep certain areas unoccupied for various reasons, so although some places may be listed as available on the database, they are, in fact, not. For instance, during the Covid-19 pandemic, some apartments were left vacant as a precautionary measure in case any of the current beneficiaries at the centre were to become contagious and required isolation.¹³⁹ This opportunity to quarantine individuals who have tested positive for Covid-19 has proven effective in reducing the spread of the virus, as confirmed by other researchers (Bazurli & Campomori, 2022, p. 1102). In addition to the pandemic, another instance occurs when a family of three or four individuals occupies an apartment with a capacity of five. Consequently, they opt not to accommodate any additional individuals in the same apartment, as they would be unfamiliar to the family and could potentially disrupt harmonious cohabitation.¹⁴⁰ It is also the case that some SAI centres have received approval for certain locations, but they are not yet able to rent all the apartments since they do not meet the minimal legal standards for lodging.¹⁴¹ Thus, in summary, I believe that the digital organisation is either ineffective or incapable of functioning optimally due to the inability to easily determine the total number of available spaces in the entire system. This lack of information may lead to delays in allocating other asylum seekers who are in the CAS centres.

A lawyer, who was interviewed and whose arguments were substantiated by other operators of SAI centres, emphasises a crucial aspect: RAS are eligible for the integration programme only if they are intercepted and referred by an association, the local Prefettura, or other relevant authorities. Although it is legally required to assign asylum seekers without financial support to a CAS centre, there is no obligation to include asylum seekers or recognised refugees in a SAI integration centre. It is entirely arbitrary and dependent on chance. Lawyers are prohibited from entering hotspots, which are the identification centres after landing. As a result, they are unable

¹³⁹ Interviewee no. 1 and 32.

¹⁴⁰ Interviewee no. 30.

¹⁴¹ Interviewee no. 12.

to provide information to asylum seekers regarding the possibility of being housed in a SAI centre.¹⁴² Therefore, if RAS are not introduced to the SAI system, as other researchers have discovered (ASGI, 2011, p. 303; Bove, 2017, pp. 126-127; Ghizzi Gola, 2015), there is a significant risk of them being abandoned and marginalised. Furthermore, the arbitrary allocation of beneficiaries to SAI centres without taking into account social or economic variables worsens inequalities in service delivery and weakens efforts towards integration. Another interviewee stated that the Central Office should transport beneficiaries to a SAI centre within a maximum distance of 75km.¹⁴³ Others mentioned instances where they received asylum seekers who had recently arrived in Sicily, a major entry point for asylum seekers in southern Italy. They also mentioned receiving asylum seekers who had been residing in CAS centres in the south for an extended period and were subsequently relocated to a SAI centre in the north. One of the interviewees discussed the situation of a young child who resided in Sicily for a duration of two years, attending schools, before being relocated to Torre Pellice. By the time of the transfer, the child was speaking a robust Sicilian dialect that did not align with the new surroundings.¹⁴⁴ However, some of the beneficiaries are individuals who express a desire to relocate to northern Italy due to a perceived lack of prospects in the southern region. In general, the coordinators of the SAI centres prefer including beneficiaries who are already present in the local territory. This is because it enhances the prospects of integration, as RAS may make use of the existing network they have established in the region. This approach would be consistent with the existing research on integration, which emphasises the significance of the local environment and the establishment of a support network for RAS in order to enhance their employment prospects (Cheung & Phillimore, 2013, p. 33; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Valtonen, 2004, p. 76).

All interviewees expressed a positive relationship with the Central Service, specifically in terms of its willingness to provide an additional six-month period to RAS who have already completed the initial mandatory six months and require extra time to complete certain tasks, like obtaining school certifications or a driver's licence. While it is necessary to have a purpose to request extensions, it is rare that these are

¹⁴² Interviewee no. 48.

¹⁴³ Interviewee no. 32.

¹⁴⁴ Interviewee no. 1.

denied, especially for families. One operator stated that they do not initially disclose the option of gaining an additional six months or more to finish the project to recipients. This is because they are concerned that the beneficiaries would exploit the situation and not fully commit to completing the assigned responsibilities.¹⁴⁵ All interviewees concur that a period of six months is insufficient to achieve the autonomy of the beneficiaries, particularly for those asylum seekers who arrive without proper documentation: during this timeframe, a beneficiary may only be able to secure an appointment with the Questura or typically, beneficiaries may only be able to begin a training programme around the conclusion of the 6-month period. Irrespective of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the duration is said to be quite brief.

4.5 Effect of change of policies on RAS reception and deliverable services

From 2018 to 2022, integration centres in Italy saw a dynamic and demanding environment characterised by significant changes in refugee policy and legislation. The integration centres were assigned the responsibility of implementing and complying with a set of policy modifications presented by the Italian government, which included restrictions to the system and laws controlling the integration of asylum seekers. This included assuring adherence to new regulations while simultaneously upholding the rights and respect of RAS. The integration centres that were studied aimed to optimise resource allocation efficiency, while also dealing with conflicting demands and objectives within limited financial resources. However, they faced challenges in planning long-term programmes due to a lack of policy continuity.

The most significant policy change was embodied by the Security Decree¹⁴⁶ formulated by the right-wing Minister of the Interior, Salvini. A lawyer argued that the immigration legislation in Italy had already proven to be unsuccessful, but the modifications implemented by Minister Salvini had taken it to a new level, almost as if they were intentionally designed to impede integration. The Decree¹⁴⁷ revoked the entitlement of asylum seekers to be housed in integration centres and remain in CAS centres until a decision on their asylum application was reached. It also eliminated the provision of humanitarian protection, which was substituted with an impractical

¹⁴⁵ Interviewee no. 27.

¹⁴⁶ See footnote no. 33.

¹⁴⁷ See footnote no. 33.

and highly improbable form of protection due to the unattainable documentation required. The lawyer believes that despite the media's extensive coverage of a non-existent migrant 'invasion', Minister Salvini's political position is owed to his anti-migrants campaign, as without it he would not have been appointed.¹⁴⁸ According to a judge's interview, the elimination of humanitarian protection as an alternative to international protection through the Salvini Decree¹⁴⁹ resulted in significant delays in tribunal reviews, confirming the available research (Bove & Romano, 2021; Della Puppa & Perocco, 2021, p. 10; Dimitriadis, 2023, p. 267; Giovannetti, 2021). There was an 'explosion' in the number of reviews conducted as a result of a significant rise in the rejection of international protection applications, even occurring before the Decree entered into force, as also confirmed by other researchers (Fondazione ISMU, 2023b, p. 72). The judge stated that although the Territorial Commissions that assess asylum requests maintain their independence, they still conform to the position of the Ministry of the Interior.¹⁵⁰ Another factor contributing to the rise in asylum refusals was the restriction on the provision of legal assistance and the assistance of a cultural mediator by CAS centres. These services are exclusively available within the integration system. Regrettably, the judge noted that in the majority of instances, asylum seekers were assisted by government-funded public defenders, who, although provided at no cost to the applicants, lacked expertise in the relevant field. Evidently, asylum seekers possess limited knowledge regarding the system and lack comprehension in discerning the quality of advice they receive, as well as the prerequisites for obtaining international protection.¹⁵¹ Humanitarian protection was a form of asylum provided under Italian legislation, rather than European legislation, allowing the Minister to make modifications to it.¹⁵² Another lawyer confirmed the same problem, stating that due to the Salvini Decree¹⁵³ and the subsequent elimination of humanitarian protection, the Territorial Commissions responsible for evaluating asylum applications were instructed not to grant any humanitarian protection, even before the law was officially approved. The significant decline in the rate of protection grants between 2018 and 2020 cannot be attributed to other factors,

¹⁴⁸ Interviewee no. 48.

¹⁴⁹ See footnote no. 33.

¹⁵⁰ Interviewee no. 53.

¹⁵¹ Interviewee no. 53.

¹⁵² Interviewee no. 9.

¹⁵³ See footnote no. 33.

as there were no major geopolitical shifts and the nationalities seeking asylum remained relatively consistent. Therefore, it can be inferred that the decline is solely politically motivated.¹⁵⁴

The Salvini Decree¹⁵⁵ reduced funding for the CAS system and closed several centres. A lawyer suggested that when a government wishes to prevent the development of a system, the easiest way is to reduce the allocation of funds.¹⁵⁶ Interviewees confirmed that there were few organisations that participated in the tenders for the new system. This was either due to a lack of interest in an unsustainable model or for ethical reasons, as confirmed by other research (Giannetto et al., 2019, p. 20). As a result, the Prefettura had no choice but to extend the tender contract to the previous participants, while other organisations were able to come to agreements with the Prefettura. CAS operators lack the motivation to develop long-term strategies within the system as they also face uncertainty regarding their own job security. They are aware that they may be terminated or relocated if CAS centres shut down, while their contracts are only extended on a monthly basis. The Prefettura struggle to cope with this situation due to their adherence to the Ministry of the Interior's guidance and the implementation of new legislation. However, the government fails to anticipate the challenges faced on the ground.

In Torre Pellice, the Waldensians operated a CAS centre with a contract that was set to expire in 2019. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the contract was extended. Regrettably, in response to Salvini's policy shift, the Waldensians chose not to extend the contract, mirroring the actions of numerous other organisations across various regions in Italy (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 249; De Cesco, 2018; Pasciuti, 2018b; Prefettura di Lecco Ufficio Territoriale del Governo, 2023). The revised CAS regulations, among other things, introduced the provision of meals in plastic containers and disposable bed sheets, which was met with dissatisfaction due to a significant decline in service quality. The closure of the CAS centre in Torre Pellice, managed by the Waldensians, remained uncertain. The tender took place in May 2021; however, the Prefettura was unsuccessful in locating a new organisation. None of the cooperatives that specialise in quality participated in the tender. As a result, the

¹⁵⁴ Interviewee no. 51.

¹⁵⁵ See footnote no. 33.

¹⁵⁶ Interviewee no. 48.

contract with the Waldensians was extended for a few additional months. The CAS had a capacity of 119 places, but only 55 people were present at that time. They did not accept new asylum seekers due to the limited duration of the CAS extensions, which were only granted for a few months at a time.¹⁵⁷

The Salvini Decree¹⁵⁸ failed to produce an immediate or indeed any discernible impact in most locations. The repercussions were varied. Asylum seekers who had just arrived in Sicily were reportedly still being assigned despite the fact that the new law was intended to prevent them from entering the integration system. One source described the situation as ‘chaotic’,¹⁵⁹ which is consistent with the literature (Giannetto et al., 2019, p. 22). As per the findings of the research, asylum seekers who were already residing in integration facilities were, in the majority of instances, not promptly expelled. Rather, their stay was extended as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact, the Central Service, at the direction of the Ministry of the Interior, granted special extensions to prevent the asylum seekers from dispersing in the community following their departure. Moreover, the number of asylum seeker arrivals was drastically reduced due to the pandemic; consequently, their allocations also plummeted. All stay permits were renewed automatically beginning in February 2020, and asylum seekers continued to receive the same services. However, one operator mentioned that, at one of the integration facilities in the Bologna region, three-quarters of the female asylum seekers were forced to leave. Although the asylum seekers were relocated to other sizable CAS centres in the far reaches of the countryside, an effort was made to continue providing them with all previous services. Despite this, the experience was distressing.¹⁶⁰ In a separate instance, the operator stated that had the pandemic not spread, all the beneficiaries in their centre would have been compelled to vacate the premises due to the absence of any officially recognised refugees at that moment. Consequently, the facility would have remained deserted.¹⁶¹ In other instances, where a number of asylum seekers were compelled to vacate, the integration centre was unable to provide the rent contribution that is customarily extended to refugees who leave the project with the intention of

¹⁵⁷ Interviewee no. 1.

¹⁵⁸ See footnote no. 33.

¹⁵⁹ Interviewee no. 4.

¹⁶⁰ Interviewee no. 18.

¹⁶¹ Interviewee no. 34.

commencing an autonomous existence. In certain instances, however, the Central Service authorised the financial contribution.¹⁶²

In instances where integration centres had recently been established, the issue of asylum seekers was not a concern, as the newly enacted legislation restricted their capacity to officially house only recognised refugees. Nevertheless, numerous places remained unoccupied. Although this resulted in reduced personnel requirements for assistance, it nonetheless constituted a 'difficult period'.¹⁶³ One integration centre, according to an interviewee, had only three women and one child out of a total of twenty available spots.¹⁶⁴ A separate centre had a mere ten recipients for every twenty-five available positions.¹⁶⁵ In the Benevento region as a whole, over one hundred positions remained unoccupied due to the complete blockage of asylum seekers in the CAS centres.¹⁶⁶ In all locations, operators were compelled to seek alternative funding sources from regional governments or other institutions to cover the costs of discontinued services. Moreover, they were tasked with persuading employers to provide their own funding for training. The Emilia Romagna region has executed this endeavour in a highly collaborative fashion. All of the integration centres that were researched made an effort to offer the same level of services to all beneficiaries. They did this by taking proactive measures, as described in existing literature (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 248; Marchetti, 2021, pp. 56-62; Pannarale et al., 2017, p. 166).

Integration centres were prepared to evacuate asylum seekers around August 2020; however, the change in government that followed the 2019 crisis and subsequent elections prompted a re-evaluation of immigration policies. The 2020 Lamorgese Migration Decree,¹⁶⁷ named for the new Minister of the Interior, removed Salvini's SIPROIMI system and instituted the SAI system. Although services for asylum seekers remained restricted under the SAI system, they were permitted to be housed in SAI facilities. According to operators, this caused the majority of asylum seekers in their centres to remain within the facilities. Thus, it can be concluded that

¹⁶² Interviewee no. 35.

¹⁶³ Interviewee no. 32.

¹⁶⁴ Interviewee no. 38.

¹⁶⁵ Interviewee no. 32.

¹⁶⁶ Interviewee no. 24.

¹⁶⁷ See footnote no. 35.

the Salvini Decree¹⁶⁸ had little impact expelling asylum seekers from integration centres, at least in the selected locations that were examined.

Special protection was also established with the Lamorgese Decree¹⁶⁹. One of the features of this form of protection was that it could be granted if the applicant provided evidence of integration (Bonetti, 2021). Although there was no precise definition, numerous individuals whose international protection had been denied, including those affected by the Salvini Decree¹⁷⁰, could rely on their accomplishments in integration, such as securing employment contracts, acquiring language proficiency, or obtaining school certificates, which were achieved during the extended waiting periods.¹⁷¹ However, despite an increase in the success rate of applications, special protection had not yet reached the same magnitudes as humanitarian protection, primarily due to the fact that special protection does not encompass all circumstances, unlike the more comprehensive humanitarian protection. Despite Salvini's previous modifications restricting reception, as other researchers found (Pannarale et al., 2017, p. 159), the Lamorgese Decree¹⁷² continued to face widespread criticism on account of the continued differentiation of services for refugees and asylum seekers. One interviewee stated:

*'...the fact that the protection system can no longer provide a few more resources to increase the number of training placements, the number of internships, the number of courses, etc., today pushes the protection system, so to speak, towards a parking system. And this can be very dangerous, because one of the characteristics of the SPRAR system, now SAI, which must be recognised is that it was not a parking lot, it was certainly a path, unlike the CAS, the extraordinary reception centres, which are on average a catastrophe. And now this tends to make the CAS look a bit like the SAI, and it is a truly silly choice, I have no other words.'*¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ See footnote no. 33.

¹⁶⁹ See footnote no. 35.

¹⁷⁰ See footnote no. 33.

¹⁷¹ Interviewee no. 53.

¹⁷² See footnote no. 35.

¹⁷³ Interviewee no. 51: [...il fatto che il sistema di protezione non possa più mettere qualche risorsa in più per aumentare il numero delle borse lavoro, il numero dei tirocini, il numero dei corsi eccetera, oggi spinge il sistema di protezione, come dire, verso il parcheggio. E questo può essere molto pericoloso, perché una delle caratteristiche del sistema SPRAR, oggi SAI, che va riconosciuto è che non era un parcheggio, sicuramente era un percorso, diversamente dai CAS, dai centri accoglienza straordinari, che sono mediamente una catastrofe. E ora questo tende un po' a far assomigliare i CAS al SAI, ed è una scelta veramente sciocca, non avrei altre parole.]

While one could argue that investing in asylum seekers is unwise due to the uncertainty surrounding their eligibility for protection, the interviewee believes that the additional expense of a training course is negligible compared to the overall cost of the integration system:

*'... it is a motivation that contrasts with the entire history of reception in Italy, at least the best history of reception in Italy, which has always done the opposite. And it is also a motivation that I find, let's say, ethically reprehensible at the very least, not only not shareable, because the fact that that person has learned a trade, has followed a pathway, has grown socially, culturally, etc., is in itself a value. It is indifferent if the person will not remain in Italy. This is a form in exchange for a truly minimal economic commitment, because the real costs are in the reception system: it is certainly not the fact that if I pay you for the registration of the training cost... so in exchange for minimal real costs, therefore a saving that is ridiculous for the public funds, there is enormous damage to people and to society. And then, if I may also say, it is even more bizarre if you then look at it with the fact that at the same time the law on special protection is introduced, where integration pathways are rewarded and then you can't say that you won't pay for the training course. So, if the idea behind it is that those, who are working to recognise this pathway, if this is the philosophy, it is even more disconcerting that the integration system is not supported.'*¹⁷⁴

It is contradictory that asylum seekers are not included in work integration programmes, even though they are granted a work permit within 60 days of applying for asylum.¹⁷⁵ An instance of differentiation of services is cited by one operator in which the operators coordinated a summer camp for children in which two children, who were born to asylum seekers, were not permitted to attend on legal grounds because the initiative constituted an integration activity. To use the funds for them, she was required to petition the Central Service office for special permission, citing

¹⁷⁴ Interviewee no. 51: [...è una motivazione che contrasta con tutta la storia dell'accoglienza in Italia, almeno la storia migliore dell'accoglienza in Italia, che ha fatto sempre l'opposto, ed è anche una motivazione che io trovo diciamo quantomeno eticamente riprovevole, non soltanto non condivisibile, perché il fatto che quella persona abbia imparato un mestiere, abbia fatto un percorso, comunque sia cresciuta socialmente, culturalmente, eccetera, è di per sé un valore. E' indifferente se poi la persona non rimarrà in Italia. Questa è una forma a fronte dell'impegno economico veramente minimo, perché i veri costi sono l'accoglienza: non è certo il fatto che se ti pago l'iscrizione del costo di formazione... quindi a fronte di costi reali minimi, quindi di un risparmio che è ridicolo per le casse pubbliche, c'è un'enorme danno per le persone e per la società. E poi, se posso anche dire, è ancora più bizzarro se poi lo si guarda col fatto che nello stesso momento si introduce la norma sulla protezione speciale, quindi si premiano i percorsi di integrazione e poi però non si dice che non ti pago il corso. Allora, se l'idea che sta dietro è che chi si dà da fare al riconoscimento di questo percorso, se questa è la filosofia, è ancora più stridente il fatto che non si sostengono i percorsi di inserimento.]

¹⁷⁵ Interviewee no. 10.

the fact that the parents were unable to stay with the children while continuing their Italian classes. In essence, a legal loophole had to be discovered so that the emphasis would be on the parents' right to attend school rather than the discrimination against the children.¹⁷⁶

The UNHCR interviewees also believe that the unequal treatment of RAS in terms of services is unjust and undermines progress. As asylum seekers are present in the host country, they should focus on developing their skills. Even if they eventually return to their home country, they would do so having acquired valuable skills. Conversely, if they are recognised as refugees, they would be better prepared to begin the integration process in Italy.

4.6 Funding complexities of the integration and reception systems

The Ministry of the Interior funds the reception centres on an annual basis through the National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services. This fund consists of both domestic resources and yearly allocations from the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, which is proportionally distributed to EU member states based on statistical data.¹⁷⁷ The Ministry of the Interior transfers funds to the municipalities that own the reception centres, and the municipalities in turn remunerate the managing organisations. CAS centres receive funds based on a specific amount per person per day of presence, while SAI centres receive funds based on the initial budget agreed upon during the tender process and the number of available spaces in the facility. The SAI centres allocate funds for the beneficiaries utilising their facilities throughout the year. Any remaining money resulting from unused funds is then refunded to the Ministry. For example, in Torre Pellice, the Waldensians' CAS facilities are apartments; when the beneficiaries become independent, the management terminates the rental agreement to avoid excessive costs. In some cases, Waldensians are compelled to use their own funds.¹⁷⁸ This is due to the fact that funds for the CAS system only cover occupied facilities. Following the reduction in funding for the CAS system caused by the Salvini Decree,¹⁷⁹ as mentioned earlier, Torre

¹⁷⁶ Interviewee no. 22.

¹⁷⁷ Interviewee no. 53.

¹⁷⁸ Interviewee no. 1 and 3.

¹⁷⁹ See footnote no. 33.

Pellice made the decision to gradually terminate the CAS and retain only the SAI system. In Benevento, the Consortium deliberately chose not to have CAS facilities from the beginning. In Bologna, on the other hand, both CAS and SAI centres have been present and continue to operate. Bologna benefits from more resources, especially through collaboration with the Emilia Romagna region, which enables it to sustain the CAS facilities.

A common criticism expressed by the interviewees is that the funds allocated are exclusively focused on supporting RAS, without taking into account the importance of promoting integration with the local population. Consequently, this lack of consideration for integration hinders the possibility of implementing activities that involve both RAS and the local community. Indeed, even the funds provided by the EU are exclusively designated for the support and assistance of asylum and migration related individuals. Nevertheless, in all the locations studied for this thesis, the management had successfully coordinated diverse activities by utilising regional or other European Union funds, as well as funds generated from their organisations' other initiatives. A mayor from a small town recounted an episode in which he sought to procure a small bus to enhance transportation within the town. However, the Central Service mandated that the bus could only be utilised by RAS. Ultimately, he utilised the financial resources of his municipality to buy it and make it accessible to everyone.¹⁸⁰ In another instance, in Bologna, given the SAI funds do not provide coverage for health services, the Bologna municipality usually request funding from the local health unit in accordance with regional laws or in cases where certain costs cannot be covered, they explore the possibility of obtaining coverage from alternative EU funds.¹⁸¹ This was also the case in Torre Pellice, where the operators mentioned extra costs to cover private health treatments when the public system fails to be responsive due to lengthy appointment wait times (but these delays apply to Italian residents and citizens as well).¹⁸²

To add more complexity, although there is little concern regarding the spending of funds in CAS centres, the SAI system is subject to rigorous monitoring and employs a sophisticated financial reporting system. Some interviewees posit that this stringent

¹⁸⁰ Interviewee no. 20.

¹⁸¹ Interviewee no.4.

¹⁸² Interviewee no.1.

methodology stems from the fact that, during the past sudden surge of asylum seekers, numerous individuals engaged in speculation regarding the system; however, one interviewee emphasised that this change also penalised all the other competent and honest operators.¹⁸³ That said, this phenomenon has been mainly documented in CAS centres rather than SAI centres, according to the literature (Luca & Proietti, 2022) and the media. When the operators of a SAI centre intend to initiate a new project, they submit a proposal along with the associated expenses and seek approval from the Central Service. All purchases and activities related to the project must be thoroughly documented and photographed, including a photograph (with consent) of the beneficiaries who are present during the activity. It is highly intricate and includes every cent spent. At the conclusion of the year, the management submits the financial records to the municipality office. These records are then examined by an external auditor. Eventually, they are forwarded to the Ministry, where they will likely undergo a review process that may take several years. The Consortium in Benevento, for instance, chooses to seek authorisation from the Central Office for every project undertaken to establish a contingency plan in the event that the Ministry does not approve it in the future.¹⁸⁴

While most operators acknowledge that the government-allocated funds for the projects are sufficient, there is often a delay in receiving these funds, either from the Ministry of the Interior to the municipality or from the municipality to the managing organisations. Therefore, it is necessary for all managing organisations to provide the necessary funds to carry out activities and cover expenses in advance. For example, one of the interviewees for example mentioned that at time of the interview, July 2021, her organisation had only received part of the 2021 yearly funds, given their municipality typically transfers only the funds that have been expended up to that point. Therefore, it is essential for organisations to proactively forecast their financial resources themselves. According to the interviewee, the reason for the delay within this municipality is the opposition of a political minority that has never supported the integration project.¹⁸⁵ For instance, in Torre Pellice, the Waldensians have access to additional resources, such as donations and funds from taxpayers. In Benevento, the

¹⁸³ Interviewee no. 4.

¹⁸⁴ Interviewee no. 32.

¹⁸⁵ Interviewee no. 32.

Consortium has established a partnership with Banca Etica, a bank that exclusively utilises clients' funds for ethical projects. Therefore, it seems that only organisations with ample financial means can establish and sustain a SAI centre. This observation is supported by examples in the literature where municipalities that are already experiencing financial difficulties also faces negative consequences for their SAI centres (Casati, 2018, p. 797).

A typical SAI centre with a capacity for 20 individuals, usually receives funding totalling €300,000 per annum. According to one participant, if there are 10 employees, approximately half of the funds will be allocated to salaries.¹⁸⁶ The remaining funds are allocated to cover expenses such as facility costs, a daily pocket money allocation of €2.50 for the beneficiaries, and in certain instances, allowances for food or clothing. Moreover, these funds contribute to rental expenses upon exit, training placements, and other miscellaneous costs. Beneficiaries receive their pocket money through either a bank account or a prepaid card to prevent the use of physical currency and ensure that all transactions are traceable. In addition, the SAI management has now transitioned to providing the payment on a monthly basis, mirroring the structure of a salary, which is customary in Italy. This change is intended to help individuals become accustomed to receiving a regular income, as weekly payments may be perceived as a form of allowance typically given to children. All goods are procured from local sources, unless a specific item is unavailable, in order to bolster the local economy. Another effective way to optimise the use of funds is to employ operators across multiple SAI centres that are located in close proximity or are part of a CAS and SAI centre, when the managing organisation is the same. Moreover, combined projects that cater to the needs of vulnerable Italians and are organised through other projects can further optimise resource utilisation (for example the job desk or meal distribution in Torre Pellice)¹⁸⁷.

The operators interviewed expressed no complaints regarding the punctuality of their salary payments. However, this is not the case in other organisations in Italy, which leads to dissatisfaction among operators and poses a risk to the services

¹⁸⁶ Interviewee no. 22.

¹⁸⁷ Interviewee no. 1.

provided by these organisations and ultimately affects the beneficiaries (Casati, 2018, p. 797).

4.7 Conclusion

The establishment of SAI centres in Torre Pellice, Bologna, and Benevento, and the operational approaches of the operators, provide insights into the complex dynamics of asylum integration initiatives in Italy, as well as the approaches adopted by their administrators. These experiences demonstrate the SAI system's potential, as well as the persistent obstacles it encounters, such as the substantial emotional and psychological burden on operators, high employee attrition, and administrative complexities. To ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of these centres, continuous support systems, professional growth opportunities, and sustainable employment practices are required. In the future, research should focus on the development of models for long-term sustainability in the operation of SAI institutions, with an emphasis on addressing these challenges.

Moreover, a landscape profoundly influenced by inert policies and structural inefficiencies is revealed when Italy's integration challenges over the past twenty years are examined. The Bossi-Fini law of 2002, which is the cornerstone of Italy's immigration framework, continues to influence it, despite the implementation of numerous policy changes. This law maintains a system in which asylum-seeking is the primary legal pathway to entry. This persistent dependence on outdated legal frameworks underscores the urgent necessity of a national integration strategy that is cohesive and can be adapted to the Italian context.

The outcome is a fragmented integration system characterised by discrepancies in the distribution of resources and delivery of services, which is especially noticeable in the uneven distribution of reception centres in regions with higher rates of unemployment, primarily located in the southern areas. Criticisms of the CAS system, which include demands for its reform or elimination, brings attention to wider concerns regarding the effectiveness and integrity of current reception practices. The distinction between CAS centres and SAI facilities highlights the significance of personalised, community-oriented methods of integration, which promote self-governance, involvement, and reciprocal comprehension between RAS and local populations.

The Central Service office in Rome acts as a crucial intermediary between SAI centres, municipal authorities, and the Ministry of the Interior. Its main responsibilities include managing the distribution of resources and coordinating the reception of RAS throughout Italy. Nevertheless, the functioning of operations at the local level frequently demonstrates intricate interplays among legal structures, administrative protocols, and the pragmatic challenges of accommodating and integrating RAS. The interviews conducted provided insights into the complexities of this process, uncovering discrepancies in resource distribution, delays in providing services, and the subtle decision-making involved in moving RAS from initial reception centres to SAI facilities. Although the Central Service office is important in coordinating these efforts and granting extensions to beneficiaries who need more time for integration tasks, the six-month timeframe for initial reception is widely considered inadequate for achieving significant autonomy and integration outcomes. Furthermore, the need for a more organised approach to reception and integration is emphasised by concerns regarding arbitrary allocation practices and the risk that marginalised individuals will fall through the cracks.

From 2018 to 2022, Italy experienced a pivotal moment in its asylum policy, with significant transformations and difficulties in the integration system. During Minister Salvini's tenure, the implementation of the Security Decree¹⁸⁸ resulted in significant changes, such as the removal of humanitarian protection and limitations on the housing of asylum seekers in integration centres. These modifications not only disrupted the reception and integration procedure but also intensified the lengthening of processing for asylum applications, thus adding to a state of uncertainty and lack of safety among individuals seeking asylum. Despite these policy shifts, the immediate impact on integration centres varied, with some facilities grappling with reduced funding and service quality while others navigated extensions and uncertainties surrounding their operations. The subsequent Migration Decree¹⁸⁹ in 2020, led by Minister Lamorgese, introduced additional modifications, such as the implementation of the SAI system, with the goal of improving the previous integration system while upholding limitations on asylum seeker access to those services. Hence, there was ongoing criticism regarding the unequal treatment of asylum seekers and

¹⁸⁸ See footnote no. 33.

¹⁸⁹ See footnote no. 35.

refugees within the SAI system, which emphasised the ongoing difficulties in promoting fairness and inclusivity. The existence of disparities in service provision, restrictions on access to training and employment opportunities, and bureaucratic obstacles highlight the necessity for a comprehensive and rights-oriented approach to integration. Furthermore, the reaction to the changing policy environment highlighted the ability of SAI centre operators to withstand and adjust to challenges. They actively pursued alternative funding options and worked together to find solutions that minimised the effects of policy changes on service provision.

The disbursement of funds from the Ministry of the Interior to municipalities, and subsequently to managing organisations, conforms with a systematic procedure that differs between CAS and SAI centres. A recurring concern among interviewees is the exclusive allocation of funds to support RAS, without taking into account integration initiatives with services also involving the local community and this represents a missed opportunity from the government for fostering greater social cohesion. Nevertheless, despite this constraint, managers of organisations have shown resourcefulness in coordinating various activities using regional or alternative funds provided by the EU. This has helped to promote community involvement and inclusiveness. The occurrence of delays in the distribution of funds from the municipalities, which are frequently caused by either political resistance or administrative obstacles, emphasises the necessity for proactive forecasting and management of financial resources by organisations. Engaging in partnerships with alternative funding sources, such as receiving donations or establishing ethical banking relationships, has become a feasible approach for ensuring the long-term viability of SAI centres in the face of funding uncertainties. Future studies could explore innovative financial management practices that could improve the resilience of these centres in the face of funding uncertainties.

CHAPTER 5. PATHWAYS TO INCLUSION: ASSESSING INTEGRATION OUTCOMES FOR REFUGEES IN ITALY

5.1 Introduction

This subsection presents the integration results in the SAI centres examined, specifically in the domains of housing, employment, and language acquisition. Subsection 5.2 analyses the systematic delays in the processing of asylum applications and tribunal reviews. The aim is to emphasise the effects of legislative changes, such as the Salvini Decree¹⁹⁰, on these delays. It explains how these extended waiting periods exacerbated vulnerabilities and impeded the integration process, impacting the mental health and overall welfare of asylum seekers. In 5.3, the discussion centres on the employment situation for RAS in Italy. It examines the obstacles they encounter in obtaining steady employment, such as language proficiency, recognition of qualifications, and societal attitudes. Moreover, it investigates efforts focused on enhancing employment results, such as partnerships between SAI centres and nearby businesses. Subsection 5.4 addresses the housing obstacles encountered by RAS, with a focus on the scarcity of affordable housing, societal biases, and administrative difficulties. It offers a comprehensive understanding of how these housing issues impact the integration and day-to-day experiences of RAS individuals in the locations studied. Subsection 5.5 examines the significant importance of language acquisition and education in facilitating the integration of RAS in Italy. It analyses the initial measures implemented by the SAI facilities to provide Italian language courses and investigates how operators utilise supplementary public services to improve educational prospects for newcomers. This subsection also discusses prevalent strategies employed to alleviate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on education and language acquisition in the SAI centres. The varied educational backgrounds and language proficiencies of RAS are taken into account, with a focus on customised instructional methods to address individual needs.

Subsection 5.6 explores the crucial significance of social inclusion and local interaction in the process of integrating RAS into host communities. Although the main

¹⁹⁰ See footnote no. 33.

focus of the research was on employment, housing, and language acquisition, the interviews conducted showed that social interactions have a significant effect on integration outcomes. This subsection examines the experiences and difficulties encountered by both RAS and local communities, which are influenced by political and media narratives, and the initiatives taken by local operators to promote social unity and correct misunderstandings. Finally, while the main objective of this study was not to assess the techniques employed for collecting data on the integration of RAS at various levels, it became apparent during the information search and interviews that there is a significant lack of data regarding asylum in Italy, particularly within the SAI system. Therefore, in 5.7, the research collected evidence of weaknesses and individual testimonials in order to understand the facts and determine the shortcomings in data collection and the consequences of these limitations on policymaking and integration efforts.

5.2 Delays in processing and consequences for integration into Italy's asylum system

The information collected from interviews with operators of the asylum system offers valuable insights into the time taken to process asylum applications and tribunal reviews in Italy. While there may be variations across different regions and time periods, it is possible to identify shared patterns and challenges from these accounts that are consistent with the existing literature (Bove, 2017, 2018, 2020; Bove & Romano, 2021; Della Puppa & Perocco, 2021, p. 10; Dimitriadis, 2023, p. 267; Giovannetti, 2021). The duration of asylum application processing and tribunal reviews in Italy has been a subject of concern over the years. The asylum system's effectiveness has been significantly hindered by fluctuations and challenges in the efficiency and timeliness of processing asylum claims and conducting tribunal reviews. The surge of arrivals, specifically during the European migration 'crisis' that commenced in approximately 2015-2016, exerted significant strain on Italy's asylum system, intensifying pre-existing difficulties and giving rise to further obstacles. Italy's asylum system was inundated with a large number of asylum applications, resulting in a backlog of cases awaiting processing. In Torre Pellice, the interviewees claimed that asylum seekers who arrived in those years had their interview with the Territorial Commission in 2017-18, that is, after two years, as the local Commission in Turin was

full and therefore asylum seekers were sent to be assessed by Commissions in other cities.¹⁹¹

The backlog was exacerbated by the scarcity of resources and bureaucratic inefficiencies in the asylum system, which posed challenges for authorities in meeting the demand. Modifications in asylum policies and legislation, such as alterations to the criteria for eligibility or procedural demands, frequently resulted in delays as authorities adapted to new regulations and procedures, further complicating an already burdened system. The involvement of tribunals in reviewing the cases of asylum seekers and dealing with appeals moreover contributed to the prolongation of processing times, particularly if cases were escalated to superior courts. Another participant in Torre Pellice reported that asylum seekers who had applied for asylum in 2017 were evaluated by the Territorial Commission in October 2018, prior to the implementation of the Salvini law. However, at that time, the Minister had already instructed the Commissions to cease granting humanitarian protection as an alternative. Consequently, their applications, like many others, were denied. Their appeal hearing was scheduled for September/October 2021, and a ruling was expected in January/February 2022. Consequently, the Tribunals were inundated with appeals, resulting in significant expenses for the entire system. The interviewee added that the applicants who are subject of these appeals will ultimately receive particular protection through the integration stream option created by the Lamorgese Decree¹⁹² in 2020, as they will undoubtedly have established strong connections with Italy after a waiting period of 5 years. Furthermore, the three Waldensian CAS centres in the Piedmont region, at the time of interview in September 2021, were accommodating approximately 200 asylum seekers, with around 150 individuals in the appeal stage, some of whom have a hearing scheduled for 2025. This processing time was significantly longer compared to the period before 2019, prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Previously, it took an average of 12-18 months for individuals to have their asylum claims assessed by the local Territorial Commission in Turin.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Interviewee no. 1.

¹⁹² See footnote no. 35.

¹⁹³ Interviewee no. 9.

In Benevento, interviewees report substantial delays, often enduring a wait of up to one year for their hearing. During this period, asylum seekers frequently only receive basic services in either CAS or SAI centres as they are not allowed to access training and employment orientation activities. As one of the interviewees put it: ‘they can’t start real life’.¹⁹⁴ In Bologna, instead, the process for requesting international protection is considered very efficient, with asylum applications being lodged at the Questura in under a month.¹⁹⁵ At the time of interview, in October 2021, the asylum seekers in Bologna were scheduled for an appointment with the Questura within a few days to begin the application process. They were then granted a stay permit within two to three weeks. After one or one and a half months, they were interviewed by the Territorial Commission. The entire procedure was completed within three months. Bologna consistently adhered to legal time limits, particularly after a reorganisation of the Commissions in 2021. This reorganisation involved hiring many experts in the field, resulting in improved quality and faster procedures. However, appellants were still experiencing significant delays, lasting several years, as a result of the long queue and COVID-related disruptions.¹⁹⁶ During that period, the SAI centres were hosting asylum seekers who had been there for three up to five years. Although the waiting period was utilised to enhance language and other skills, the state of uncertainty was highly exasperating for the asylum seekers.¹⁹⁷

These delays have had negative effects on the lives of asylum seekers, worsening their vulnerabilities, hindering their ability to integrate into society and rendered them susceptible to labour exploitation. Extended periods of waiting negatively impact the mental health and overall well-being of asylum seekers, leading to increased levels of anxiety and stress that jeopardise the integration process (UNHCR, 2007, p. 5). Interviewees pointed out that asylum seekers, when unsure of their legal status, exhibit a state of passivity, showing minimal dedication to learning. This observation is particularly noted by the teachers of the Italian language courses. The interviewees also observe a significant shift in the attitude of the beneficiaries once they receive their protection documents. At that time, the beneficiaries appear to be completely transformed individuals and regain their enthusiasm for engaging in activities.

¹⁹⁴ Interviewee no. 5.

¹⁹⁵ Interviewee no. 4.

¹⁹⁶ Interviewee no. 14.

¹⁹⁷ Interviewee no. 18.

Overall, the participants in all selected locations concur that the impact of legislative changes, such as the 2018 Salvini Decree¹⁹⁸, specifically the abolition of humanitarian protection, worsened the situation. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the pre-existing delays, as closures and disruptions to operations impeded the advancement of asylum applications and tribunal reviews. Ultimately, all participants acknowledge the persistently inefficient state of the Italian bureaucratic system, affirming that 'it is what it is'.¹⁹⁹

5.3 Challenges and initiatives in the employment integration of RAS in Italy

The SAI integration system in Italy is vital for facilitating the integration of RAS into Italian society. Nevertheless, the availability of jobs and training programmes for SAI beneficiaries frequently poses considerable difficulties, which are indicative of larger problems within the Italian labour market and societal attitudes towards migrants.

5.3.1 The role of contextual influences

A common topic discussed in interviews with SAI operators in all the locations is the widespread use of temporary and unstable employment agreements for both Italian citizens and RAS. A significant number of RAS are limited to fixed-term contracts, without any assurance of long-term employment, which is indicative of a wider pattern in the Italian labour market. For instance, in Bologna, a SAI operator in charge of the employment sector reported that out of 500 RAS, 250 were successful in securing an employment contract in 2020. Collectively, they possessed approximately 1,000 contracts, resulting in an average of five contracts per person in a year.²⁰⁰ Another testimony is that of an interviewee in the southern region of Italy who mentioned the presence of family-owned businesses in her town, where it is not unusual for the children to move to the northern region of Italy in search of better opportunities.²⁰¹ Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, specifically impacting sectors such as tourism, hospitality, small-scale manufacturing, and small traders and craftspeople. This led to disruptions and a further decline in job opportunities, even in Torre Pellice, which, in comparison to Benevento and Bologna,

¹⁹⁸ See footnote no. 33.

¹⁹⁹ Interviewee no. 30.

²⁰⁰ Interviewee no. 13.

²⁰¹ Interviewee no. 42.

during the interviews exhibited more positive outcomes regarding RAS employment.²⁰²

During the pandemic, the usual in-person employment orientation workshops in the SAI centres had to be transitioned to an online format. The beneficiaries were provided with computers; however, they encountered difficulties in utilising them, despite the fact that all of them possessed smartphones.²⁰³ The pandemic also halted training placements in the impacted sectors: based on the interviews, certain businesses did not resume operations following the pandemic. However, the hospitality industry managed to recover and experienced a resurgence, while the logistics sector thrived even amidst the pandemic, particularly in Bologna.²⁰⁴ However, there is a variation in the employment situation even within the same localities. For instance, in the metropolitan and valley area of Bologna, there are generally more job opportunities compared to the surrounding mountainous Apennines municipalities. This is why RAS located in the hills, where operators find accommodation more easily available, face the disadvantage of having to commute daily for work.²⁰⁵ I will provide a more detailed explanation of this issue in the next section on housing.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, initiatives are currently being implemented to tackle obstacles to employment. Collaborations between SAI centres, churches, voluntary associations, and local businesses have helped create training and job opportunities. Voluntary work in Bologna has facilitated the establishment of networks and has positively altered the narrative surrounding RAS. As an example, the Bologna ASP coordinated a project focused on the maintenance of public assets, which ultimately resulted in two beneficiaries being offered employment.²⁰⁶ Similarly, when it comes to female RAS who have children, the operators organise events that involve local people through the children. The purpose of these events is to establish connections that could potentially lead to job opportunities.²⁰⁷ The typical progression of a pathway to work for RAS following arrival at the SAI centre involves an initial interview of the beneficiary with the social assistant and coordinator. During this

²⁰² Interviewee no. 3.

²⁰³ Interviewee no. 13.

²⁰⁴ Interviewees no. 7, 13 and 40.

²⁰⁵ Interviewee no. 13.

²⁰⁶ Interviewee no. 13.

²⁰⁷ Interviewee no. 18.

interview, a profile is created to assess the individual's employment options and aspirations. Refugees are first registered in the public Employment Centre, and then they participate in an orientation course that teaches them resume writing, job interview simulation, and job search and application techniques. All the participants in the study reported a range of behaviours in terms of the responses received from the beneficiaries. Several individuals possess work experience in their home country but are unwilling to pursue the same occupation. Others are uncertain about their career aspirations. Moreover, there are those who desire to continue their own trade or profession but are hindered by bureaucratic restrictions. Nevertheless, all of them are eager to secure employment expeditiously in order to send money back to their families in their country of origin: in fact remittances play a significant role in the migration objectives of RAS and migrants in general (Fitzgerald & Arar, 2018, p. 399). Unfortunately, RAS often have unrealistic expectations when it comes to employment, expecting to find a job quickly, secure a permanent contract, or receive a high salary. However, these expectations do not align with the actual circumstances, leading to frequent disappointment. Securing employment necessitates a significant investment of time, the acquisition of necessary documentation, and an adequate command of the Italian language. Moreover, certain job opportunities in some locations are limited to specific seasons, which can lead to heightened levels of frustration during the waiting period. One participant in Benevento cited the example of Bangladeshi beneficiaries who were able to secure employment only after a period of 10 months upon entering the SAI centre, which they found difficult to accept.

One of the managers in Benevento reports that RAS commonly hold the belief that technology has supplanted manual labour and agriculture in western countries, leading to a lack of motivation to engage in manual jobs, regardless of their level of education. All male RAS share the 'dream of the professional football player and aspire to represent the French national team'. During football training sessions in town, they consistently arrive punctually. However, when it comes to working in agriculture, they often provide excuses or display signs of fatigue. The manager confirms that Italians have also lost faith in agriculture, and migrants perceive it as a form of exploitation, even when they have legal agreements and receive fair compensation. There is no desire to pursue a career as an agricultural entrepreneur, even if there are potential opportunities in that field. RAS who choose to work in that

specific sector do so out of necessity to send remittances to their country of origin, and it is regarded as a temporary occupation.²⁰⁸ This indicates the prevailing societal attitudes towards physical work, where both Italians and migrants perceive it as less appealing, resulting in a scarcity of labour in specific sectors. It can also be contended that, in 2022, 74.1% of municipalities with a SAI centre were situated in 'rural areas,' defined as regions where the economy relies on non-intensive agriculture, consequently providing a restricted range of employment opportunities, even if RAS were disinclined to participate in that sector.²⁰⁹

An interviewee in Torre Pellice states:

*'...there is some of them who maybe have more professional qualifications, actually a lot of experience rather than qualifications, but maybe they hope in Italy to do another job, generally, at least from what I came across, that is: there is hardly anyone who says I was a carpenter, I want to be a carpenter here. I want to do any job, I need a job, or maybe a better job than a carpenter, or a job that is considered better than a carpenter...'*²¹⁰

In addition to agriculture, male RAS often find employment or are offered training opportunities in the hospitality and construction sectors. Female RAS are engaged in various sectors such as hospitality, hairdressing, cleaning, and personal care. In addition, women encounter greater challenges in securing employment when they have the responsibility of caring for their children. At one of the SAI centres in the Benevento area, operators established a babysitting service to enable these women to attend training placements. If the service was unavailable on a specific day, the operators would take care of the children.²¹¹ The Consortium in Benevento also benefits from the opportunity to secure employment through their own entrepreneurial ventures, such as their pastry shop, bistro, social farm, and socially inclusive hotel, frequently following the completion of training programs. Nevertheless, the task of

²⁰⁸ Interviewee no. 24.

²⁰⁹ Sistema accoglienza e integrazione. (2022). Rapporto annuale SAI. [Reception and integration system. (2022). 2022 SAI annual report]. <https://www.retesai.it/rapporto-annuale-sai-atlante-sai-2022/>. Accessed on 12 November 2024.

²¹⁰ Interviewee no. 7: [...c'è qualcuno che magari ha delle qualifiche più a livello professionale, però, qualifiche in realtà tanta esperienza più che qualifiche, però magari sperano insomma in Italia di fare un altro lavoro generalmente, almeno per quello che mi è capitato, cioè difficilmente c'è qualcuno che dice ho fatto il falegname, voglio fare il falegname qui, io voglio fare qualsiasi lavoro, mi serve un lavoro, o magari un lavoro migliore del falegname, quello che viene considerato migliore del falegname...]

²¹¹ Interviewee no. 40.

obtaining and sustaining employment continues to be a formidable obstacle. RAS face obstacles in securing stable employment due to language barriers, unfamiliarity with Italian workplace culture, and a lack of recognition for their foreign qualifications, as widely described in literature. A UNHCR interviewee acknowledges the existence of offer homogeneity (that is, the same type of job being offered to all, regardless of qualifications or experience) when, for instance, a beneficiary from his country who arrives at a SAI centre in a small town in Italy possessing specialised skills is rarely presented with a job offer that is distinct in comparison to the offers made to other beneficiaries.²¹²

5.3.2 Factors influencing integration into the workforce

Participants highlight that insufficient language proficiency poses a significant barrier to securing employment, often resulting in low-skilled job opportunities (Ghizzi Gola, 2015; Mogli & Papadopoulou, 2018; Morrice et al., 2021, p. 687; Tollefson, 1985, p. 756; Wolffhardt et al., 2020, p. 101). In addition, they confirm that even if RAS possess highly specialised skills, they are unable to pursue their professions in Italy due to either the language obstacle or the lack of recognition of their qualifications (Ambrosini, 2014, pp. 246-247; Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021, p. 110; Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2006). One example provided by the operators is the case of a Pakistani lawyer who successfully obtained a certificate from an Italian secondary middle school, but is unable to practice law in Italy. In another case, an Afghan teacher was unable to fulfil the role of a cultural mediator due to the prerequisite of completing an Italian secondary school education in order to qualify for the necessary training course.²¹³ In a third case, a beneficiary, who had previously worked as an electrician, was unable to find employment due to the stringent regulations governing this trade in Italy.²¹⁴

One interviewee in Turin, described a Cameroonian woman who expressed feeling diminished due to the treatment she received as an illiterate. The woman, who was a journalist and had received higher education in her home country, informed the officers at the Questura that she had studied for approximately 20 years. However, the officers regarded her statement as foolish. Later, when she was included in an

²¹² Interviewee no. 46.

²¹³ Interviewee no. 27.

²¹⁴ Interviewee no. 37.

integration centre, the operators could only offer her positions as a cleaner, kitchenhand, or carer for the elderly. Recognising it as the sole alternative, she assumed the role of a carer for a period of time, until she acquired proficiency in Italian, which could allow her to become an English teacher. She believed that her past life was disregarded and erased by others.²¹⁵

The interviews substantiated the various obstacles and results that encompass the struggles RAS face in obtaining satisfactory employment, as extensively documented in the literature (Bloch, 2008, pp. 21 - 35; Lee et al., 2020, p. 200). This includes the reluctance of certain employers to hire Africans, as expressed by one of the interviewees who stated that employers provide justifications or openly express their aversion towards Africans.²¹⁶ Furthermore, it is still common for employers to make attempts to provide payment in cash, and some of them even explicitly mention this while communicating with operators. This situation arises specifically when companies are unwilling to deal with administrative procedures for work periods that are extremely brief, such as a few days or a few weeks. However, certain RAS may also be inclined to take employment in exchange for cash, especially if they come from CAS centres. One of the operators observed that it is very challenging to persuade RAS to decline informal employment and request a regular contract instead. The interviewee stated that the prevailing attitude among these RAS stems from the lack of job orientation assistance inside the CAS system, which prevents them from acquiring knowledge about the labour system and its regulations.²¹⁷ However, this situation could also be attributed to the stringent regulations imposed by the 2018 Salvini Decree²¹⁸. As a result of these regulations, a larger number of asylum seekers may have been compelled to seek informal employment in order to quickly obtain money, given the uncertainty surrounding their legal status (Dimitriadis, 2023, p. 271). In addition, the interviewee believes that changing the mindset of employers is a challenging task,²¹⁹ however, operators make a considerable effort to provide employers with information.²²⁰ Another participant holds the perspective that informing employers about unlawful employment is futile since they are unlikely to

²¹⁵ Interviewee no. 49.

²¹⁶ Interviewee no. 41.

²¹⁷ Interviewee no. 35.

²¹⁸ See footnote no. 33.

²¹⁹ Interviewee no. 35.

²²⁰ Interviewee no. 40.

cease such practices. However, SAI operators may still provide RAS with information on their rights.²²¹ Fortunately, there are also sometimes more positive outcomes. At one location in the Benevento area, an operator observed that prior to the establishment of the SAI centre, migrant workers who picked tomatoes were paid €20 for 8-10 hours of work. However, since the centre's establishment, these workers now receive €40 for eight hours of work, equivalent to what Italian workers are paid, and employers are now actively calling the SAI centre in order to look for workers.²²²

As the literature described (Dallara & Lacchei, 2021, pp. 85-86; Tuckett, 2020, p. 51), the interviews confirm that employers are hesitant to provide work due to their difficulty in comprehending the functioning of work permits; this also extends to the accountants or employment consultants with whom the operators must interact. Employers frequently fail to acknowledge the validity of the work permit renewal receipt, since they mistakenly believe that the permit has expired, when in fact it remains valid. In other cases, they hesitate to hire asylum seekers with provisional stay permits, preferring to wait until they obtain a more definitive permit. Moreover, human resource departments have difficulty in submitting the provisional permit number into the government employment portal and choose not to continue.²²³ One participant stated, however, that they have never encountered any difficulties with employers when it comes to negotiating contracts for individuals whose stay permits have expired but have a receipt for renewal. This is because they have effectively communicated and educated both the employers and their accountants about the process and have also provided information from the Questura policies to support their explanation.²²⁴ The UNHCR acknowledges these challenges and arranges seminars for businesses, in addition to offering formal guidance to job consultants. One of the interviewees at UNHCR acknowledged that employers struggle to comprehend the distinctions among various categories of migrants.²²⁵

SAI operators offer training programmes and orientation courses to equip recipients with crucial skills for the labour market. Training placements, frequently financed by the SAI system or other government initiatives, such as regional

²²¹ Interviewee no. 9.

²²² Interviewee no. 34.

²²³ Interviewee no. 14.

²²⁴ Interviewee no. 34.

²²⁵ Interviewee no. 46.

government courses, offer hands-on experience and opportunities for employment. Nevertheless, the efficacy of these programmes varies, as still some recipients still encounter difficulties in obtaining employment upon finishing their training, even though operators seek for training places based on the industries accessible in the local economy. The duration of a training placement is limited to a maximum of six months. During the initial three months, the SAI centres cover the expenses using their own funds. However, beyond this period, it becomes the responsibility of the employer to finance the remaining months of the placement. At this point, the employer has the option to either hire the refugees or terminate their employment. A common scenario involves businesses taking advantage of the system by only admitting trainees for the initial three months, as they are not required to provide payment during this period, therefore avoiding long-term contracts (Ghizzi Gola, 2015), and this is also widely seen in the locations studied.

One of the operators in Torre Pellice stated they had a positive experience with a wide range of training placements, including mechatronics, tool making, catering, and health operator courses.²²⁶ When the SAI was first established, it was initially challenging to persuade employers to provide traineeships, but now employers contact them for potential candidates, particularly from those industries where Italian residents and citizens are reportedly no longer inclined to work, such as a local steel factory.²²⁷ Bologna offers a wide range of training courses, particularly via the regional government, that are both free and accessible to Italian citizens and migrants. This regional service became highly beneficial to asylum seekers following the implementation of the Salvini Decree²²⁸ in 2018, as they were officially excluded from SAI-funded courses, and continued to be excluded following the Lamorgese Decree²²⁹. However, due to Bologna's larger size compared to the other locations studied, it is more spread out and has fewer close relationships. One of the operators wondered whether the skills acquired by RAS during those courses would be integrated into the local economy and if there would be suitable employment opportunities for them in the future.²³⁰ Operators in the Benevento area establish

²²⁶ Interviewee no. 3.

²²⁷ Interviewee no. 1.

²²⁸ See footnote no. 33.

²²⁹ See footnote no. 35.

²³⁰ Interviewee no. 12.

connections with several enterprises in the region and leverage their own commercial activities to facilitate the arrangement of training internships. For instance, a recipient who wished to establish his own supermarket received training at the Consortium grocery store.²³¹ In a neighbouring town, many training placements were established in the tomato products business, which is the sole industry in the area.²³² When the asylum seekers were prevented by law from participating in the training, the Consortium established an external cooperative for agri-food production, which specifically included the asylum seekers.²³³

Although the employment of RAS has been extensively studied, there is an absence of data about the termination of their employment. RAS sometimes face challenges when it comes to adapting to Italian working norms, such as following timetables or communicating properly with employers. All RAS usually express a desire for employment, but once they have a job, they often struggle to maintain it due to their unfamiliarity with concepts such as adhering to a set schedule or notifying employers of planned absences. One of the interviewees mentioned cases in which the operators are required to clarify concepts that are taken for granted, such as the expectation that if a job begins at 8am, they must be at work at 8am every morning, or that they cannot choose to skip work without requesting a day off or alerting their employer. Another persistent problem arises from the frequent alteration of RAS identifying and contact information. Many RAS often change their phone numbers frequently, resulting in unavailability when employers or SAI operators attempt to contact them. In addition, they may alter their identities, dates of birth, and tax codes, or inexplicably often lose their documents. Accountants and employment agencies are unwilling to handle these anomalies, and SAI operators face difficulties in persuading them to hire RAS. For instance, a refugee altered his date of birth in order to be eligible to participate in the town's sports team. As a result of these problems, those who have proven to be the most reliable are typically the ones whom operators recommend to future employers.²³⁴

Ultimately, the potential for employment is influenced by various factors, and the SAI system can only serve as a tool to help RAS enhance their chances of success.

²³¹ Interviewee no. 33.

²³² Interviewee no. 37.

²³³ Interviewee no. 34.

²³⁴ Interviewee no. 8.

The UNHCR advises that SAI operators should not take over the responsibility of job hunting on behalf of RAS. Instead, the UNHCR encourages RAS to actively participate in their own search for employment. The UNHCR interviewee explains that UNHCR is active within various projects to improve employability, however these are still limited in numbers; for example the Power Coders initiative aims to dispel misconceptions about RAS as low skilled workers, by providing IT coding training to beneficiaries. Moreover, the UNHCR promotes recognition programmes that reward businesses for their contributions to RAS integration. The Piedmont region has the largest number of enterprises that are candidates for the prize, but the fact that the region is controlled by a right-wing League governor means that they are not being given public visibility. In Veneto, instead, the number of candidates is very low, due to employers' lack of interest in this type of exposure, since the area is predominantly influenced by right-wing ideas, despite some industries in Veneto employ a large number of migrants.

The UNHCR has further developed an Employability Tool that assesses the skills of RAS and presents them to potential employers in a more suitable manner. The Central Service will eventually distribute and endorse this tool to all SAI centres. During the interview in August 2021, the tool was still in the testing stage.

5.4 Addressing housing barriers for RAS in Italy

The provision of housing for RAS in Italy is a multifaceted issue that is affected by factors such as the limited supply of housing, societal attitudes, financial obstacles, and administrative obstacles. The interviews conducted in the researched sites offer a comprehensive and detailed understanding of these challenges, emphasising the varied character of the housing problems. In general, the interviews appear to reflect the existing literature (Andersen et al., 2013, p. 22; Bolzoni et al., 2015, p. 403; Dotsey & Lumley-Sapanski, 2021; Fozdar, 2009). Another factor contributing to the shortage of apartments is that in tourist towns, they are mostly reserved for visitors during the summer season and left unoccupied during the winter months, since the owners find this arrangement more convenient. Securing property in Bologna, which has seen a surge in tourism, is particularly challenging for this reason, as well as because of the

depopulation, resulting in a scarcity of rental properties. This further exacerbates the problem, since most available properties are either abandoned or for sale rather than for rent. However, an additional benefit of small towns is that interpersonal connections play a vital role in overcoming early reluctance to rent to RAS. Initially, the townspeople in Torre Pellice were hesitant to rent to RAS, but their concerns were resolved as it became evident that RAS consistently paid their rent. Nevertheless, there were significant obstacles to overcome, such as local residents providing inadequate housing at exorbitant rental prices. One interviewee drew a parallel between this situation and the migration of Southern Italians to Turin in the 1960s to work in the Fiat car industry, where they experienced exploitation and high rental costs. Gradually, broadened perceptions have resulted in improved living situations and now locals call SAI operators when they have vacancies.²⁴³ In the neighbouring towns of the Benevento region, rental prices are significantly lower compared to the other research sites: operators report that an apartment may be leased for €200 per month.²⁴⁴ However, in the case of abandoned or antiquated properties, even if they were accessible, they might not meet the criteria outlined in the SAI legislation.²⁴⁵ Operators acknowledge that the ability to establish strong connections with local residents has positively impacted the situation. However, once the projects are completed and RAS seek housing outside of the SAI system, they encounter difficulties again. This is despite the fact that the SAI funds cover the initial rent payments for the first few months. The main issue is that the RAS lack sufficient income or other guarantees to secure accommodation. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in rural areas or neighbouring towns, where there is a higher level of distrust compared to the town where the SAI centre is located and where everyone is familiar with their presence.²⁴⁶

5.5 Enhancing refugee integration through language and education in Italy

Language acquisition and education are crucial factors in the integration of RAS in Italy. The SAI facilities offer Italian language courses as a starting point, and the

²⁴³ Interviewee no. 6.

²⁴⁴ Interviewees no. 34 and 35.

²⁴⁵ Interviewee no. 40.

²⁴⁶ Interviewee no. 39.

operators make efforts to explore additional public services that might assist newcomers in enhancing their education. The interviews demonstrated the application of common approaches centred around language learning, educational possibilities, and coping skills to alleviate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. SAI centres are authorised to offer 15 hours of classes per week. Moreover, RAS individuals have the option to attend Italian classes at the local Provincial Centre for Adult Education [Centro Provinciale per l'Istruzione degli Adulti – CPIA]. These classes are publicly funded, free of charge, and open to both Italians and migrants. SAI centres have the ability to provide attendance certificates, whereas the CPIA has the additional capability to offer qualification certificates, including secondary school credentials for both middle and high school. These certifications may be utilised for regional courses or university enrolment purposes. The CPIA offers high school courses that encompass technical subjects featured in the secondary school curriculum and which can be useful for future employment. The research findings revealed significant diversity in the educational backgrounds of the recipients, ranging from persons with several years of schooling in their home countries to those who have limited or no reading abilities. Some RAS are fluent in English or French, depending on their country of origin, while others are proficient solely in their native language or another secondary language. In addition, it is common for RAS to arrive at the SAI facility with varying levels of proficiency in Italian, depending on how long they have been in Italy, with some of them already holding a middle school certificate. This tendency has become more noticeable because of the extended period it takes to process asylum applications, while between 2014 and 2018 when there was a significant increase in the number of asylum seekers arriving, there was also a bigger influx of new course attendants.²⁴⁷ However, it is still possible that refugees who have been in Italy for several years may not have learned Italian during that time, particularly if they have not been in a CAS facility, as they had not received any guidance or were motivated to study. On the other hand, those who have arrived under a structured humanitarian programme (so-called 'corridoi umanitari') may still have some knowledge of the Italian language.

Prior research has indicated that this particular type of learning necessitates the implementation of tailored instructional approaches that address the distinct needs

²⁴⁷ Interviewee no. 7.

and proficiency levels of each learner in order to achieve desired outcomes (Damiani, 2021, p. 47; Morrice et al., 2021, p. 690). However, in the locations examined, it has been observed that due to financial constraints and subsequent limitations on class hours and teaching personnel, all recipients are placed in a single classroom. The SAI teachers implemented strategies to address the disparity in Italian language proficiency levels by providing tailored and appropriate instructions to students either individually or in small groups inside the classroom. Operators believe that the courses provided just in the classroom could be overwhelming for the participants. Therefore, they incorporate outside visits as they provide a diverse approach to teaching and allow for a better understanding of the environment. Prior research has established that it is necessary to employ a diverse range of teaching methods in order to accommodate those who are not accustomed to a conventional classroom setting (Abou-Khalil et al., 2019, p. 13; Shergold et al., 2019, p. 7). Teachers also strive to integrate practical lessons into the curriculum to address the language learning needs related to work and this is corroborated by a substantial body of research (Abou-Khalil et al., 2019, p. 14; Morrice et al., 2021, p. 689; Shergold et al., 2019, p. 7; Tollefson, 1985, p. 3). For instance, they may organise a class on the specific use of Italian in the health sector or provide instruction on computer skills and job application techniques. If beneficiaries are required to possess a certain degree of language proficiency in order to participate in a training course, the teachers may moreover assist them in acquiring specialised terminology.

Individuals with a solid foundation in the Italian language opt to join in CPIA courses rather than attending SAI centre lessons, since they are motivated to achieve certificates. Not all CPIA centres are conveniently situated in the same town as the SAI centre or in a location that is easily accessible. In certain instances, RAS may have to travel for one hour by bus, while in other circumstances, the bus journeys are limited and have inconvenient timetables.

The CPIA typically offers 600 hours of classroom time, spread across three sessions per week. However, it lacks the everyday interaction and socialisation seen in traditional schools, making it more restricted in nature.

Certain beneficiaries, who arrive in February or March, are unable to be enrolled in the CPIA due to the school year being almost halfway over. Consequently, they must wait until the subsequent academic year to be registered. Some RAS also enrol

in high school courses provided by CPIA, typically held in the evenings. These courses are also available to Italian students. Although the secondary school is publicly funded and classified as a public school, the transportation expenses can be covered by SAI, not just for refugees but also for asylum seekers. Nevertheless, the SAI system is unable to provide financial support for example for a pizza making course specifically for asylum seekers, as a result of the legal distinction made between refugees and asylum seekers since 2018. A teacher emphasised the importance for beneficiaries to recognise the need to save money and invest in their education, rather than solely focusing on sending money back home. It is crucial for beneficiaries to understand that they cannot take for granted that everything will be provided for them. Moreover, operators should not passively accept unfavourable policy changes without taking action and exploring alternative solutions. For example, two of the beneficiaries independently covered the cost of their driver's licence course, amounting to €700.

Amidst the Covid-19 outbreak, CPIA centres were shut down. However, SAI centres sought permission to conduct online courses, and in certain cases, this virtual format persisted even after the pandemic. Consequently, recipients were able to attend sessions without the need for arduous daily commutes. The SAI centres distributed tablets to RAS, allocating one device per residence, enabling them to participate in their lessons too. SAI operators saw a higher attendance rate in online sessions compared to in-person classes, perhaps because some individuals had fewer limitations in accessing the facility due to the absence of physical mobility constraints. As predominantly youthful attendants, they possessed a high level of proficiency in information and telecommunication (IT) skills such as WhatsApp (which they utilised for communicating with their families) and social networks, which is consistent with previous findings (Abou-Khalil et al., 2019, p. 2). However, they lacked proficiency in using IT for more professional purposes, such as sending emails or applying for employment.²⁴⁸ One of the teachers stated that where RAS are more inclined to look for some manual jobs, as they can hardly find a job otherwise, IT skills are not really seen useful by them. The teacher explained to them that a certain level of Italian is also required to work in manual jobs. Some RAS preferred to use employment as a means to enhance their language skills. Nevertheless, prior

²⁴⁸ Interviewee no. 31.

research indicates that this approach is not particularly effective, as there is no significant correlation between job and improved language proficiency, but the contrary is true, as increased class hours typically lead to improved language proficiency, hence enhancing the chances of securing job (Tollefson, 1985, p. 756). Indeed, as stated by additional operators, individuals who were proficient in the language and employed full-time frequently lacked the availability to attend the classes. Teachers attempt to persuade RAS that learning the language is an absolute necessity, but they observe that RAS' primary concern is obtaining employment or completing training.

Ultimately, however, despite the fact that numerous variables can influence language acquisition, there is significantly more subjectivity regarding the willingness to learn, as confirmed by the majority of interviews. One operator observed that Nigerian women with children were reluctant to learn, whereas their children were highly adept at learning.²⁴⁹ Another operator in a different location noted that during the month of July (which marks the end of the academic year in Italy), there is typically a decrease in class attendance. Despite the classes still being open, most students who have attended throughout the year choose to rest. However, some beneficiaries prefer to attend during this period because they receive more individual attention and have more time to learn due to the smaller number of attendees.²⁵⁰ Some attendees persist even after the SAI project has concluded,²⁵¹ while most operators believe that individuals who are considering secretly fleeing Italy for another EU member country are often unwilling to study. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, work was not feasible, prompting the operators to encourage the beneficiaries to engage in studying as a means of utilising this time productively. While some beneficiaries achieved favourable outcomes, others showed less commitment.

At the Bologna SAI facility, in addition to offering language lessons, operators also provide training for cultural mediators who come from different countries of origin. Cultural mediation is offered in all SAI centres but not in CAS centres. Due to the Salvini Decree²⁵², asylum seekers were unable to access this service when they were prevented from being hosted in SAI centres. Cultural mediation is not just an

²⁴⁹ Interviewee no. 39.

²⁵⁰ Interviewee no. 31.

²⁵¹ Interviewee no. 7.

²⁵² See footnote no. 33.

interpretation service, but it is provided by specialised operators who possess knowledge of RAS' culture. Specific training is essential to become a cultural mediator, while mere fluency in a foreign language is insufficient. Some of the mediators are individuals who have migrated or are second or third generation descendants of migrants. However, it is uncommon for them to be past beneficiaries of the SAI programme.²⁵³ An operator of the Benevento area stated that cultural mediators occasionally cause complications due to erroneous translations, personal interpretations, or the addition of incorrect information; alternatively, they may provide a response to the beneficiary without consulting the operator. When former refugees serve as mediators, they become overly entangled and lack awareness of the most recent legislation.²⁵⁴ Locating local cultural mediators, especially those fluent in Persian, is a challenging task, even for the Questura. As stated by an operator in Bologna, Afghans typically seek jobs in the northern regions of Italy or other EU nations, therefore they do not remain in the local area.²⁵⁵

One of the interviewees from the UNHCR mentioned that the possibility of attending a university is seldom taken into account for RAS.²⁵⁶ Since 2017, the UNHCR has run a specialised office in Rome to deal with the process of integrating RAS, with a particular emphasis on facilitating their access to higher education institutions. During the period of increased asylum seekers in 2015-16, the focus had not been on providing access to universities. However, the arrival of Syrian asylum seekers brought attention to the possibility of some of them being able to attend university. While there are no available statistics specifically for Italy, the interviewee states that EU data indicates that 20-30% of asylum seekers have successfully finished secondary education, suggesting a possibility for their admission to universities. The UNHCR partners with universities to address obstacles such as the non-recognition of qualifications, absence of documentation, limited language competence, and gaps in education by providing scholarships based on income; housing; access to dining facilities; and monthly allowances. Notwithstanding these possibilities, integration operators are often not aware of these options. The UNHCR suggests universities should establish specific webpages for RAS and offer tailored

²⁵³ Interviewee no. 20.

²⁵⁴ Interviewee no. 36.

²⁵⁵ Interviewee no. 20.

²⁵⁶ Interviewee no. 47.

assistance for paperwork and enrolment, as well as establishing programmes aimed at enhancing Italian language proficiency. Moreover, universities typically do not admit asylum seekers as official students. They may allow them to participate in courses, but only grant official enrolment once they have received their protection documents. There is currently no legal prohibition against officially enrolling asylum seekers, but only a minority of universities have recognised this.

5.6 Bridging communities: RAS integration through local interaction

This research project primarily focused on examining integration in terms of employment, housing, and language learning. However, the interviews confirmed other research findings that social inclusion and interaction with the local population were significant issues, which not only aligned with existing literature (Blangiardo et al., 2022, p. 69; Dražanová et al., 2020, p. 31) which had a direct impact on improving outcomes in other areas of integration. The integration process can be either facilitated or hindered by the expectations and actions of RAS, as well as the attitudes of the local people towards them, depending on their interactions.

The influx of a substantial number of RAS in communities such as Torre Pellice initially presented considerable difficulties. The sudden arrival of 80 asylum seekers at one time was extremely burdensome for the small population of only 4,600. Local people were intimidated by the gathering of large groups of asylum seekers in public locations, leading operators to intervene and urge them to avoid congregating in large numbers. This reaction emphasises the intricate equilibrium necessary in overseeing the needs of RAS and the apprehensions of local inhabitants.

An interviewee in Torre Pellice reported that the historical interactions with other migrant groups, such as Albanians in the 1990s and Romanians in the 2000s in that area, had been markedly different, since their physical features assimilated more harmoniously with the local population, besides the valley had always been welcoming foreigners due to its historical Waldensian traditions. Conversely, African migrants were physically distinct and frequently faced unfavourable myths and biases.²⁵⁷ Efforts to control these impressions were comprehensive and tailored to

²⁵⁷ Interviewee no. 6.

each individual; although a protracted process, they showed that surmounting scepticism and fear was an attainable goal. In fact, people had become accustomed to the presence of RAS.²⁵⁸ Roughly 50 RAS made the decision to remain in the valley and effectively integrated into the community. While some of them maintained contact with the SAI centre, the operators ceased actively monitoring them. Nevertheless, there is a dedicated desk, which is not part of the SAI system, in the nearby municipality that attends to their needs. The present circumstances diverge from the past, whereby all RAS would congregate in a single location. While this project was being completed, the local people were unable to distinguish RAS from recently arriving individuals. As a result, it seemed as if their numbers had grown, but this was merely due to the fact that a portion of them had chosen to remain on the territory. Fortunately, there had been a general decrease in the number of asylum seekers arriving in Italy, which means that Torre Pellice was no longer under pressure to accommodate further new RAS.²⁵⁹

One of the operators explained that the valley was developed to be inclusive, with long-standing facilities for those with disabilities and mental health conditions, fostering an environment that is used to diversity. The Waldensians had a significant impact by fostering open-mindedness and organising numerous multicultural activities, such as artistic gatherings. This led to increased trade and attraction of interest from foreigners across European nations. Due to the liveliness of the area, many RAS who first leave often return, partly because of the affordable rentals and the absence of ghettoisation in areas, unlike in the nearby big city of Turin. Africans are distinguishable by the pigmentation of their skin, yet the valley had consistently hosted individuals from other countries such as Germans, South Americans, Swiss, Japanese, and others. Currently if a local resident has a negative stance towards immigration, they may be reluctant to openly express it due to a sense of shame.²⁶⁰

One of the interviewees in Bologna believed that the impression of an asylum seeker 'crisis' had markedly diminished, both in terms of political attention and media coverage, compared to 2016 and 2017> During that period, over 80 formal queries were raised by the Emilia Romagna regional councillors on the subject issue, while

²⁵⁸ Interviewee no. 8.

²⁵⁹ Interviewee no. 1 and 2.

²⁶⁰ Interviewee no. 2.

none have been raised in more recent years. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the atmosphere was calm as RAS actively volunteered in the local community. Their actions included distributing masks, collecting clothing from those who passed away from Covid, and organising fundraisers to help nurses. There was no hostile or confrontational climate towards immigrants or RAS depicted as carriers of the illness.²⁶¹ Another interviewee noted a significant level of interest in RAS but while throughout Minister of the Interior Salvini's tenure, the narratives around RAS were very political, by the time of the interview (September 2021), the focus had shifted more towards the grounds for seeking refuge.²⁶²

RAS acknowledge the significance of relationship with SAI operators, particularly the female RAS they accommodate in Bologna SAI centres. When asylum seekers who are located in CAS facilities, which the same operators also oversee, are transferred to SAI centres, they exhibit a preference to remain with their current organisation. This is due to their reluctance to rebuild trust with unfamiliar operators and re-establish again a mutual understanding. At Bologna SAI, there are no stringent rules in effect, other than the prohibition of drugs and violence. In contrast to other SAI facilities, there are no penalties such as pocket money confiscation or limitations on the use of mobile devices. The operators stress cultivating connections over enforcing authoritarianism. Most RAS remain in Bologna after the conclusion of the project, and they usually keep consistent connection with the operators in the months immediately after the project is over. The SAI operators avoid initiating contact to prevent taking on a mother role, but they are happy to offer support if requested. Operators and RAS often develop close interpersonal connections. An operator recounted the story of a refugee who went to reside with an Italian girlfriend and, each year, dresses up as Santa Claus to visit the SAI facility and provide gifts to the children.²⁶³

In the Benevento area, some operators likewise stated that initially a segment of the local population did not consent to the establishment of a SAI facility. Certain locations already had sizable CAS centres that were unwelcome. As in Torre Pellice, even in Benevento the presence of a substantial number of 'big black Africans' (a

²⁶¹ Interviewee no. 10.

²⁶² Interviewee no. 15.

²⁶³ Interviewee no. 18.

description frequently used by operators in all the areas studied to characterise the anxieties of the local population) in the main square, which was typically deserted, raised concerns among the residents. One of the towns is used to religious tourism, which means that it was used to hosting foreigners. However, it had not been exposed to migrants until the facility opened. Nevertheless, mayors and operators made significant efforts to enhance the dissemination of information to the local population, with some mayors organising public assemblies or conducting individual visits to households. Over time, the population underwent a shift in their attitudes and started actively engaging and altering their way of thinking, leading to increased interactions within the community. Some locals did not even notice the presence of the RAS in town, after the closure of the CAS centres that occurred due to the establishment of the SAI facility. The public responded positively to the unique management strategy of the SAI centre, as it offered a greater degree of oversight compared to the several CAS centres, which accommodated up to 100 persons in a single facility. According to one of the operators, the media depiction of migrants significantly influenced the perspectives of local individuals about the topic, making it challenging to establish connections. Nevertheless, once locals became acquainted with RAS, their attitudes underwent a transformation. The issue at hand was prejudice, since some individuals claimed that people of a certain race and ethnicity were indolent and exhibit poor etiquette, however after a few years dedicated to this task, the operators were then able to observe tangible outcomes.²⁶⁴ The community generally welcomed the presence of the SAI facility, not the least because the operators were well known to the local population. Moreover, when there are children with RAS, individuals tend to display more friendliness. Local residents exhibit less fear when encountering families compared to African males, leading several towns to prioritise the presence of families, and tend to form connections more frequently with neighbours and associations. In one instance, two beneficiaries were getting married and the entire community mobilised to assist them and furnish them with wedding preparations.²⁶⁵ In another small town, the primary school faced the possibility of being shut down due to low enrolment. They achieved a first-year class with a total of 11 children, with five of them being foreign nationals.²⁶⁶ Unfortunately though, the majority of RAS who

²⁶⁴ Interviewee no. 41.

²⁶⁵ Interviewee no. 40.

²⁶⁶ Interviewee no. 25.

finish the programmes in the smaller towns leave, since they secure accommodation and jobs elsewhere via their personal connections. Even those who would otherwise be inclined to remain in town, however, leave due to the lack of job opportunities. Nevertheless, a significant number of individuals choose to reside in the largest towns and rent houses located in the historical districts, typically unoccupied by the local residents.

Operators in all the locations studied observed that the willingness of RAS to socialise varies according on countries of origin. Nigerians seem to exhibit a tendency to remain inside their own social or ethnic circles. Individuals who speak French have a tendency to form social groups, regardless of their country of origin. Pakistanis exhibit a higher level of formal politeness compared to Nigerians; this attribute contributes to their greater acceptance by older individuals, whereas younger local individuals tend to limit their interactions to the planned activities without forming deeper connections.²⁶⁷ Nigerians pose a greater challenge in terms of engagement, since, according to operators, they exhibit lower commitment towards attending activities and their deeply held convictions might be difficult to overcome. Nigerian women tend to be introverted and often prefer to remain in their rooms, even with the windows shut.²⁶⁸ Tunisians typically exhibit a high degree of autonomy.²⁶⁹ The SAI centres also arrange civic education classes, aided by a cultural mediator and a legal assistant, to promote social integration. The discussion covers several subjects, such as practical matters, interpersonal dynamics, gender-related concerns, and difficulties pertaining to the mother-child bond. The beneficiaries are aware that this is a component of the project and they are informed from the beginning. The integration of RAS into local communities is also a subjective matter that varies based on the individual's character. Certain RAS have a strong inclination for privacy, while others possess a natural aptitude for establishing relationships. Many RAS engage in social interactions with their co-workers, form friendships on bus rides, or bond over playing football. Others instead choose to maintain their connections within their own groups. Conversely, operators coordinate activities, such as the refugee festival or an ethnic

²⁶⁷ Interviewee no. 7.

²⁶⁸ Interviewees no. 27, 36 and 38.

²⁶⁹ Interviewee no. 34.

festival, a drawing lab for children, or a football competition to engage the local community.

Initially, RAS are primarily concerned with their legal status and the process of acquiring the necessary papers, which leaves little room for socialising. Upon their arrival, beneficiaries thus typically have a same set of immediate interests, which include securing international protection, seeking employment to remit money to their families in their country, and reuniting with family members. RAS are motivated to financially assist their relatives in their home countries. The arrival of a beneficiary is seen as a significant event, as it represents the arrival of the entire family who made the decision to invest in that individual. RAS have exceedingly high expectations upon their arrival, but they lack a comprehensive understanding of the Italian environment, including employment, pay, and rights, despite the fact that Italians face similar job challenges. The level of commitment varies greatly among individuals when it comes to changing their personal circumstances. While some are highly dedicated, others are not taking any action. An instance of integration mentioned by an operator was a Somali woman who successfully obtained a middle school certification, a driver's licence, and completed a course as a health operator. She subsequently relocated to Turin, where she found employment at a nursing home.²⁷⁰

Many RAS, though, expect that the SAI operators will promptly obtain employment for them. Moreover, they believe that a mere couple of words said in Italian may resolve the issue of unemployment. However, those who rely on this approach are typically limited to working in the agricultural sector, where are likely to remain confined. RAS experience frustration due to delays of the procedures, and moreover asylum seekers also struggle to accept the limitation of available services due, first, to the 2018 Salvini Decree²⁷¹ and then to the 2020 Lamorgese Decree²⁷² after. The operators attempt to describe the functioning of Italy to them, but disinformation proliferates among migrants, particularly on social media platforms. Operators consistently conduct interviews with RAS upon their arrival at the SAI centre. This is necessary since people at other CAS sites may have misled them by stating that they would obtain employment, housing, and other services at the SAI facility; as a

²⁷⁰ Interviewee no. 39.

²⁷¹ See footnote no. 33.

²⁷² See footnote no. 35.

consequence, operators clarify to RAS that they offer aid but do not perform tasks on their behalf.

Interviewees find that RAS who left their country of origin with the aspiration of a more promising future usually show a greater potential for successful integration. Those who were compelled to leave for various reasons or who originally intended to settle in another EU member country, often exhibit lower levels of integration, as they maintain strong ties to their home country or have a reluctance to remain in Italy. Operators can identify when RAS intend to depart from Italy due to their discontinuation of attendance at the language school and their cessation of communication in Italian with the operators. Operators observe that several RAS do not initially want to leave Italy, but eventually choose to relocate, maybe to France, after searching unsuccessfully for employment or encountering other difficulties, in order to start over. On many occasions, asylum applicants have vanished from the SAI facilities without any prior notification, particularly those who arrived shortly after the sea landing, while other individuals depart because they desire to reunite with their relatives in different locations, in particular Bengalis who have a distinct social network of family and friends. SAI operators are responsible for monitoring the presence of beneficiaries in the facilities. Beneficiaries are permitted to be absent from the SAI centre for a limited number of days, but they are required to notify the operators, who in turn must contact the Questura. One of the mayors interviewed, who had a strong commitment to the Syrian cause and requested to assist asylum seekers from that country, was left somewhat disillusioned when they managed to escape to Germany overnight, as it appears that Germany was the favoured destination for the majority of asylum applicants from Syria.²⁷³ The operators agree that the departure of many individuals from Italy should not be perceived as decreasing the efforts and resources invested in the SAI system. This is because the time spent in Italy allows for familiarisation with European culture and the acquisition of valuable skills.

Typically, RAS do not initially reveal the reasons for leaving their home country, and psychologists must do extensive assessments before this information is disclosed. According to one psychologist interviewed at an SAI facility, beneficiaries exhibit

²⁷³ Interviewee no. 25.

resistance and mistrust towards the profession, and they are highly unwilling to open up. The psychologist favours conducting group sessions over solo ones in order to establish stronger connection. However, the extent of this influence heavily relies on the RAS' country of origin and the associated cultural background. For instance, Tunisians tend to be more receptive and accepting, but other Africans may view the psychologist as a mystical and magical figure.²⁷⁴ RAS, particularly those with less education, are often reluctant to share their personal narratives. Often, they will recount a pre-determined story that they have prepared for the Territorial Commission assessment in order to secure international protection, unaware that their actual personal account may be much more compelling. Bengalis, in particular, tend to be more reserved and consistently provide the same narrative due to their apprehension that authorities may use the information. They are well aware of their very high rate of rejection. Operators agree that there is no differentiation between accepting economic migrants and asylum seekers. They have no objection to economic migrants, as they believe that economic migrants also need help.

5.7 Challenges and deficiencies in data collection for RAS integration

Although the original purpose of this study was not to evaluate the methods used to gather data on RAS integration at different levels, it became evident during the process of information search and interviews that there is a significant deficiency of data about asylum in Italy, in particular in the SAI system. Hence, I gathered information and testimonials about flaws in the system in order to comprehend the facts and ascertain the deficiencies. Gathering data on the integration of RAS is essential for developing well-informed, efficient and adaptable integration programmes. It facilitates the distribution of resources, the monitoring and assessment of progress, the establishment of responsibility, and the resolution of the difficulties encountered by RAS. Hence, it is imperative to have reliable data gathering procedures in place to ensure the seamless integration of RAS into their respective host communities as well as to facilitate academic research. The interviewee from the EU Commission believes that although the European Union gathers statistics on integration through Eurostat, there is a need to strengthen the scholarly perspective.

²⁷⁴ Interviewee no. 35.

The metrics used do not align with a high level of academic analysis. However, the European Union does not have the authority to dictate how member states should handle these indicators, since doing so would just add to their bureaucratic workload.²⁷⁵

According to one of the interviewees at the UNHCR, data collecting in Italy is a significant problem, making it hard to accurately determine the number of RAS in the country.²⁷⁶ The Ministry of the Interior provides public information on the number of individuals who enter the country and submit applications for asylum, together with statistics on the results of these asylum claims. Nevertheless, there is a significant focus on maritime landings (which do not include asylum seekers who arrive undetected), while land entries are difficult to trace. Due to the fluctuation in policies and types of protections, it is not possible to make a meaningful comparison of protection grant outcomes across time. After the implementation of the Salvini Decree²⁷⁷ in 2018, the category of humanitarian protection was replaced by special protection: these two forms of protection have distinct requirements and cannot be compared. Furthermore, in 2020, the Lamorgese Decree²⁷⁸ also brought about alterations in the criteria for special protection. Due to the dynamic nature of the asylum environment and its shifting patterns, it is expected that policies would also alter in response. However, this makes it difficult to compare statistics. Furthermore, there are instances where the political landscape may undergo a shift in the trend of approving or rejecting protection applications, even if the regulations themselves remain same. For example, during Salvini's Ministry, the legal professionals interviewed stated that the Territorial Commissions began rejecting a significant number of humanitarian protection cases even before the statute to abolish them was passed. Moreover, according to the participants, a considerable proportion of RAS in Italy choose to leave shortly after their arrival, before fully completing the integration process or soon after the conclusion of their project, without necessarily removing themselves from the civil register. As a result, they continue to be officially recorded as being in Italy.

²⁷⁵ Interviewee no. 33.

²⁷⁶ Interviewee no. 47.

²⁷⁷ See footnote no. 33.

²⁷⁸ See footnote no. 35.

Italy's integrated governance encompasses many tiers of administration, including national, regional, and municipal administrations. The absence of a centralised integration law and the differing levels of participation from civil society in different areas add to the inconsistency in data gathering and integration endeavours. Data fragmentation occurs due to its management at several layers. Regions, for example, can formulate and execute autonomous policies. The Emilia Romagna Region actively collects statistics on its initiatives, as does the Bologna municipality with its SAI centres, and both entities issue annual reports. Nevertheless, this technique is not used at a national scale. The interviewee from the Emilia Romagna region believes that it is essential to gather data on the RAS' history in the territory. This is because it is illogical to initiate an integration programme from the beginning for someone who has already lived in Italy for several years. Another challenge is in gathering data from other sectors, such as the healthcare sector, where it is difficult to differentiate between RAS and other foreign nationals when determining the number of RAS using the emergency department. Gathering such data would pose a significant challenge for healthcare staff.²⁷⁹ In the education sector, universities have the potential to estimate the number of RAS by comparing their enrolment record with their fiscal codes. However, this practice is prohibited by privacy legislation. The exact number of RAS enrolling at Italian universities is unknown due to the fact that institutions do not record the specific type of stay permit, but rather just keep track of the total number of foreign students.²⁸⁰

There is, further, a lack of official statistics about RAS who are not accommodated in SAI or CAS centres, or other reception centres. Therefore, it is not feasible to determine the exact number of RAS who are outside the receiving system. Moreover, it is impossible to determine the exact number of persons transferred from CAS centres to SAI centres, as project start and conclusion times vary among individuals. Data may only be obtained on a specific day.²⁸¹ The Central Office mandates that all SAI centres in Italy submit data via an annual questionnaire, which will be used to generate an annual report on the SAI system. Subsequently, these reports are made available on a website and serve as the sole official data of the system. The report

²⁷⁹ Interviewee no. 10.

²⁸⁰ Interviewee no. 47.

²⁸¹ Interviewee no. 46.

presents statistical data on the quantity of SAI facilities in Italy and the corresponding distribution of beneficiaries within these facilities. It also provides information on the demographic and legal characteristics of the beneficiaries, as well as the number and roles of the employed operators.

The report also outlines the results of integration services, including housing, training, language acquisition, and employment. While the EU has recently broadened its scope to encompass other important areas like housing, education, and health as a result of integration, I have specifically examined the employment data in this research section. Employment is commonly regarded as a crucial factor, as shown by research (Fozdar, 2009; Ghizzi Gola, 2015; Shergold et al., 2019, p. 6; Valtonen, 2004, p. 76), but also by RAS themselves (Cheung & Phillimore, 2013, p. 37) and according to information obtained from interviews with operators. The 2022 SAI report states that 9,622 beneficiaries have been placed in jobs. These constitute 83% of the 11,542 of those who successfully finished the integration programme and left the SAI project. Job placement does not have a specific definition, although the SAI report distinguishes between employment placements and internships or training placements, implying that they are distinct entities. The interviews verified that the majority of operators, although not all of them, see the term 'job placement' as meaning remunerated work carried out by RAS. All the interviewees of the SAI centres reported that they were not provided with a clear definition of job placement while completing the yearly survey.

The responses to the question about the type of employment that would be included when counting RAS for the questionnaire were quite diverse. Some suggested a paid three-month internship, but specifically excluded those who had only worked for one day.²⁸² Others mentioned that any type of employment, ranging from one day to a permanent job, should be considered.²⁸³ Some emphasised that anyone with an employment contract should be included, even if it was for as little as one month.²⁸⁴ There were also suggestions that only individuals with at least a six-month contract should be counted, and that occasional work should be excluded.²⁸⁵

²⁸² Interviewee no. 1.

²⁸³ Interviewee no. 3.

²⁸⁴ Interviewees no. 12 and 13.

²⁸⁵ Interviewee no. 4.

Some interviewees stated that only permanent jobs should be included,²⁸⁶ while others specified that only contracts should be counted, and not vouchers²⁸⁷ or day-to-day work.²⁸⁸ It is clear that the data obtained cannot be used to combine a range of non-comparable data. In two instances, operators offered divergent responses within the same SAI centre. This suggests, first, that the data are not aligned with a definition that is in any case not provided by the Central Service, and second, that the data acquired probably reflect individual viewpoints and not an assumed predetermined definition by each SAI centre. Nevertheless, the operators concur that completing the questionnaire, independently of other factors, serves as a valuable tool for pausing and reflecting on the results achieved over the year.

Moreover, there are no available statistics regarding the number of RAS who have lost their employment. Despite the fact that the challenges and trends of the Italian market also affect Italian citizens, as previously mentioned, RAS occasionally lose their employment for reasons related to adjusting to Italian work standards and if these challenges were better understood, they might be more effectively addressed. A participant from the UNHCR drew attention to the absence of a nationwide data collection system concerning the skills possessed by RAS in order to promote mobility. The majority of beneficiaries are received by SAI centres in the South of Italy, where local unemployment is generally higher, despite the fact that a small number of excellent SAI centres have created jobs locally. Therefore, if operators are contacted by businesses in the North seeking workers, they attempt to transfer beneficiaries from the South. However, this is not at all simple, as no one collects data on the skills of the beneficiaries in a systematic manner: everything is based on anecdotal evidence. While the UNHCR experiment has achieved success, its benefits have been limited in scope. In addition, the SAI system lacks flexibility, and the law

²⁸⁶ Interviewee no. 5.

²⁸⁷ Job vouchers serve as a payment mechanism through which employers may compensate ancillary work services, which are defined as those performed intermittently and outside the scope of a regular employment contract. The compensation is not subject to taxation for the provider and does not impact their unemployment status. In addition, it is recognised for pension purposes and, in accordance with current legislation, can be combined with pension payments. The client is able to avail themselves of services in a completely lawful manner, protected by workers' compensation insurance in the event of workplace incidents, and without the need to enter into any contractual agreement. See: Voucher: il sistema dei buoni lavoro. Istituto Nazionale per la Previdenza Sociale (INPS) [Vouchers: the system of the job vouchers. National Institute for Social Security] https://servizi2.inps.it/docallegati/Mig/Doc/Informazione/UfficioStampa/Comefareper/Vademecum_voucher_06_13.pdf. Accessed on 1 June 2024.

²⁸⁸ Interviewee no. 40.

has changed frequently in recent years. Consequently, the Central Service rarely grants authorisation for the transfer of beneficiaries (who, moreover, are unable to determine their own destination) to a different SAI location.²⁸⁹ There are no records indicating what refugees do once they leave the SAI system. Recording precise employment data following the SAI project's conclusion would pose a significant challenge, particularly given the precarious and volatile nature of the Italian labour market, which impacts all citizens and residents of the country. Refugees who are unemployed are entitled to the same welfare benefits as other Italian citizens; nevertheless, the provision of social assistance in Italy is comparatively constrained.

5.8 Conclusion

The insights gathered from the locations studied highlight a consistent narrative of significant delays and challenges within the country's asylum system. Legislative shifts, notably the 2018 Salvini Decree²⁹⁰, have compounded existing issues, while the Covid-19 pandemic further intensified delays due to operational disruptions. Throughout the study, interviewees universally acknowledge the persistent inefficiencies within the Italian bureaucratic framework, a sentiment captured succinctly by the phrase, 'it is what it is'. These delays have tangible consequences, exacerbating vulnerabilities among asylum seekers, impeding their integration into society, and leaving them susceptible to exploitation. The prolonged uncertainty adversely affects mental wellbeing and stifles proactive engagement in learning and community involvement. However, amidst these challenges, there remains a glimmer of hope as beneficiaries exhibit a transformative shift in attitude upon receiving protection documents, indicating the potential for resilience and renewed enthusiasm once stability is achieved. Subsequent investigations might delve into enhancing assistance for asylum seekers during their periods of waiting, with a specific emphasis on treatments targeting mental well-being and strategies to sustain involvement in educational and communal endeavours.

Societal views, regulatory impediments, and an economy dependent on temporary and seasonal employment impede the integration of RAS into the Italian workforce. The Covid-19 epidemic exacerbated the challenges in the employment market,

²⁸⁹ Interviewee no. 46.

²⁹⁰ See footnote no. 33.

impacting both job prospects and training chances. The efforts made by SAI centres and local groups to link RAS with job prospects are praiseworthy, but they encounter different degrees of success due to structural obstacles such as language problems, recognition of foreign qualifications, and societal prejudices. Additional study is required to assess the long-term efficacy of these employment programmes and to investigate novel approaches for overcoming the stated obstacles, such as educating employers and establishing paths for recognising foreign credentials.

The issue of housing is a significant obstacle for RAS in Italy, exacerbated by the scarcity of options, societal prejudices, financial limitations, and administrative obstacles. The fiercely competitive housing market, especially in urban areas like Bologna, poses challenges for RAS in obtaining inexpensive and stable accommodation. On the other hand, smaller communities, although more economical, sometimes suffer from insufficient infrastructure and a shortage of rental units. Subsequent studies should examine legislation and community-based strategies that help mitigate these difficulties, such as providing incentives to landlords, extending housing support services, and researching alternative housing types.

Language learning and education play a crucial role in integration efforts, and SAI facilities offer Italian language classes and additional public educational services. Nevertheless, the capacity to customise education according to individual requirements is impeded by budgetary limitations and practical obstacles, such as transportation difficulties and restricted availability of public courses. The transition to online learning during the pandemic was advantageous for many individuals, but there is a need for more language education alternatives that are both accessible and adaptable. The research should prioritise the development of language learning programmes that can be easily adjusted to meet various requirements, as well as the assessment of the lasting effects of online compared to face-to-face teaching.

The incorporation of RAS into local communities is a delicate and diverse process. Employment, housing, and language acquisition are crucial aspects of effective integration. However, social inclusion and community participation are as vital. The diverse reactions to RAS in different places underscore the significance of meeting the requirements of RAS as well as the apprehensions of the local people. Subsequent investigations may explore the impact of community-led activities on

promoting inclusion, along with tactics for mitigating prejudices and cultivating constructive interactions between RAS and local inhabitants.

The study also found notable deficiencies in data collection concerning the integration of RAS, especially within the SAI system. The presence of inconsistent and incomplete data at different administrative levels poses obstacles to the assessment and enhancement of integration programmes. In addition, the fluctuating nature of policies and the absence of a single integration statute further intensify these difficulties. In order to tackle this issue, the next research should prioritise the establishment of uniform data-gathering methods across different areas, enhancing the precision and consistency of data, and investigating the potential of technology to simplify data administration. Furthermore, it is crucial to implement a thorough monitoring system for RAS skills and post-SAI results in order to gain a deeper understanding of the sustained effectiveness of integration initiatives and to guide policymaking.

CHAPTER 6. DISCRIMINATION AND ILLEGAL ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

6.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis of the integration policies in Italy and their discriminatory dynamics in the areas researched, clarifying the difficulties encountered by RAS as they strive for integration. Section 5.2 examines the discriminatory elements of Italy's integration policies, which result from various modalities: policies that directly discriminate, policies that indirectly discriminate, the consequences of policies unrelated to integration, and Italy's fragmented anti-discrimination legislation. Section 5.3 examines the bureaucratic inefficiencies and discriminatory practices that are widespread from the Questura and have a significant impact on the management of the asylum procedure. It also examines the various encounters of RAS with the Questura, highlighting the difference in treatment depending on the location. Moreover, it addresses the legal obstacles encountered by RAS and the tactics utilised by lawyers and operators to negotiate the complex administrative framework. Section 5.4 investigates the obstacles that hinder RAS' ability to obtain essential services including healthcare, banking, and education, based on interviews from SAI centre operators. The section emphasises the difficulties that RAS had in the areas under study when it came to registering and verifying their presence. The section also examines the legal and practical challenges associated with obtaining healthcare, the consequences of the Salvini Decree²⁹¹, and the financial exclusion that arouse from strict administrative prerequisites.

Section 5.6 examines the divergent reception of Afghan and Ukrainian asylum seekers in Italy. By gathering comprehensive testimonies from SAI operators and other sources, this investigation examines the disparities between institutional and popular perspectives on these groups. It also examines how media representation, political motives, and cultural biases influenced these varying reactions.

²⁹¹ See footnote no. 33.

6.2 Discriminative dynamics in Italy's integration policies: direct, indirect, and policy gaps

The assessment of institutional discrimination in integration policies can be approached from various perspectives, as suggested by the findings in this study. Three types of modalities have been identified: directly discriminatory policies, indirectly discriminatory policies, and the absence of anti-discrimination policies. Italy lacks a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, instead relying on fragmented provisions scattered across various laws, which renders effective enforcement difficult. The National Anti-Racial Discrimination Office [Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali – UNAR] is a national organisation established in 2003²⁹² to promote equal treatment and eliminate racial or ethnic discrimination.²⁹³ Its creation was mandated by an EU Directive, which stipulates that each member state must establish a dedicated body to combat various forms of discrimination.²⁹⁴ Furthermore, Italian local governments have the authority to enact additional policies or initiatives aimed at combating discrimination at the local level. A participant, in charge of the program for equal opportunities for the local government of the province of Turin, explicitly stated that the sector is severely lacking in financial resources. The interviewee is expected to coordinate anti-discrimination campaigns without any financial resources, and is also expected to secure the necessary funding, all while receiving only a symbolic compensation for her work. According to this perspective, if the government wishes to avoid dealing with a particular issue, it can simply withhold funding for it.²⁹⁵

Another example of indirectly discriminative policy pertains to the economy sector, even if it is not strictly connected to the issue of asylum. As seen in the literature, the context in which the integration is being carried out, including the economic conditions of the area, must be taken into account (Hynie, 2018; Peisker & Tilbury, 2003;

²⁹² Decreto legislativo 9 luglio 2003, n. 215: Attuazione della direttiva 2000/43/CE per la parità di trattamento tra le persone indipendentemente dalla razza e dall'origine etnica [Legislative decree 9 July 2003, n. 215: Implementation of Directive 2000/43/EC for equal treatment between people regardless of racial and ethnic origin].

See <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2003/08/12/003G0239/sq>. Accessed on 4 June 2024.

²⁹³ See www.unar.it. Accessed on 4 January 2024.

²⁹⁴ Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin. See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32000L0043>. Accessed on 4 June 2024.

²⁹⁵ Interviewee no. 48.

Szkudlarek et al., 2021). The findings of this study indicate that most RAS do not remain in the geographical area where they first received integration services, primarily due to limited employment prospects and opportunities. This phenomenon is most marked in sparsely populated areas, specifically in the southern region of Italy, even if the south still holds the largest number of SAI centres, with the aim of increasing the population and generating employment through funding from the SAI system. One of the mayors interviewed in the south of Italy expressed dissatisfaction with the allocation of funds from the central government to the south. He complained that all the investments had been directed 'towards Milan': historically politics had always favoured development in the north of Italy.²⁹⁶ The north-south divide is widely recognised as the most prominent and enduring feature of the economic geography of Italy from the early 1900s onwards. During the 1950s, the disparity in economic growth between the two regions had grown to almost 50% of the centre-north's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. Since then, it has varied between 55% and 60%. The primary socio-economic disparities between southern Italy and the rest of the country lie in the areas of production, productivity, and employment. Entrepreneurs' perspectives on the north-south divide align with Italy's economic geography, but tend to overstate the degree of disparity. That is, the disparity in perception is greater than the disparity in reality, resulting in an inconsistency. Businesses thus perceive the south as an unappealing investment destination due to inadequate infrastructure, public services, and human resources (Musolino, 2018). From 2002 to 2021, over 2.5 million people migrated from the south region, with 81% of them moving to the centre-north region. The south had a net decrease of 1.1 million residents, not including those who moved in. Among this decrease, there was a significant loss of 808,000 individuals under the age of 35, of which 263,000 were university graduates (Associazione per lo sviluppo dell'industria nel Mezzogiorno, 2023). This situation vividly portrays a bleak outlook, not only for RAS and migrants in general, but also for Italian citizens. It is thus challenging to envision a future where there will be an equitable distribution of refugees who choose to stay in the area and pursue their integration. Although Torre Pellice and Bologna do not fully acknowledge this issue, the regional area of Benevento continues to face significant challenges. The Consortium's praiseworthy endeavour to incorporate RAS and other vulnerable

²⁹⁶ Interviewee no. 25.

individuals into their operations is regrettably limited to the metropolitan area of Benevento, where their facilities are situated. Consequently, the SAI centres managed by them in the other smaller towns and villages continue to suffer.

A form of direct discrimination that arises in asylum policies, which may have effect on integration outcomes, is the concept of 'safe country' and the manner in which asylum seekers' applications are assessed. A third country can be deemed a safe third country if it can be demonstrated, based on its legal system, the consistent application of the law within a democratic framework, and the overall political situation, that there are no instances of persecution, torture, or other forms of inhumane or degrading punishment or treatment, nor any risk arising from indiscriminate violence in situations of internal or international armed conflict.²⁹⁷ The Salvini Decree²⁹⁸ adopted this approach by requiring that asylum applications from these countries be declared clearly baseless and handled quickly. This approach did not substantially change with the subsequent governments, indeed the number of countries on the list increased over time. During the assessment of applications for international protection, the specific circumstances of the applicant are analysed in relation to the information provided about their country of origin. The outcome of this policy has been that most asylum seekers from those countries have their asylum applications denied. Furthermore, the concept of a safe country is primarily based on evaluating political factors, while neglecting legal and social aspects. This approach may result in a country being deemed safe for a particular minority group, despite ongoing persecution within that country (Del Guercio, 2019, p. 104).

The significant rate of rejections and the rapidity of their issuance implies that asylum applications are not evaluated on an individual basis, but rather subjected to a prejudiced system that discriminates against applicants solely based on their

²⁹⁷ The law originates from the EU directive 2013/32/EU (Recast Asylum Procedures Directive) that grants all member states the opportunity to compile a list of secure nations. Several EU member states hold their own lists, which may not always correspond with one another. See https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/safe-country-origin_en - :~:text=According to Art.,examining applications for international protection . Accessed on 2 June 2024. According to the law implemented in Italy on 22 October 2019, the countries deemed to be safe were Albania, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Morocco, Montenegro, Senegal, Serbia, Tunisia and Ukraine. Ukraine was placed on suspension from the list on 11 March 2022. Starting on 7 May 2024, the existing list comprises the following countries: Albania, Algeria, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cape Verde, Colombia, Egypt, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Morocco, Montenegro, Nigeria, Peru, Senegal, Serbia, Sri Lanka and Tunisia.

²⁹⁸ See footnote no. 33.

country of origin. In the event that all avenues of appeal are unsuccessful, the asylum seeker is issued an expulsion order. Nevertheless, statistical data suggests that repatriations are not the solution and they were ineffective even in 2019, which was characterised by the most stringent migration restrictions (Bove, 2020, p. 154). One repercussion of this discriminatory policy is that this particular cohort of individuals seeking asylum, fully aware of their limited prospects, may choose to flee and become undocumented, greatly increasing their vulnerability to exploitation, without even attempting to proceed with their asylum request and relinquishing even their meagre likelihood of achieving a favourable outcome. One example involves Bengalis, with operators noting that many of them vanish after entering the SAI centre, as they are solely focused on employment and are aware of their high rejection rate.²⁹⁹ These individuals were Bengalis who sought asylum and were accommodated in a reception centre already. At the time of their interviews, in September 2021, Bangladesh was not yet considered a safe country. Recently, in May 2024, Bangladesh has been included in the list, and it can be argued that the likelihood of these nationals not even seeking asylum from now onwards may be significantly greater.

The primary form of direct discrimination mentioned by all interviewees was the distinction in integration services provided to RAS, which was initially implemented through the Salvini Decree³⁰⁰ and subsequently continued with the Lamorgese Decree³⁰¹, albeit with minor modifications. Starting in 2018, asylum seekers were no longer permitted to stay in SAI centres. Instead, they were required to stay in CAS centres until they received international protection. As a result, they were no longer eligible for integration services and could only receive basic services while going through the process (Bolzoni et al., 2022, p. 237; Pannarale et al., 2017, p. 40). In 2020, the Minister of the Interior, Lamorgese, permitted them to be accommodated in SAI centres once more. However, they were excluded from receiving employment orientation and training services (Dennison & Geddes, 2022, p. 451; Pannarale et al., 2017, p. 159). Despite the challenges, SAI operators challenged the adverse policy and were able to mitigate the disparities by employing alternative tactics and securing additional funding for the tasks, as seen in literature (Marchetti, 2021, pp. 56-62;

²⁹⁹ Interviewees no. 36 and 37.

³⁰⁰ See footnote no. 33.

³⁰¹ See footnote no. 35.

Pannarale et al., 2017, p. 166). However, this effort placed an additional workload on operators who were already overwhelmed.

6.3 Police illegitimate administrative practices

The institutional response to RAS in Italy is characterised by bureaucratic inefficiencies and discriminatory practices, particularly within the Questura. Third sector organisations and other entities, including the Association for Legal Studies on Immigration [Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione – ASGI], have extensively reported on this matter (ASGI, 2023). The interviews substantiate the existence of systemic issues, although certain operators have devised strategies to mitigate these problems. However, these strategies may not be universally applicable or yield consistent positive results across all contexts.

The Questura has a pivotal role in the management of asylum in Italy. It is the primary authority responsible for managing the bureaucratic aspects of the initial asylum application, such as issuing and renewing different types of stay permits. Upon arrival in Italy, asylum seekers are required to visit the Questura, which serves as their initial point of contact. It is at the Questura that they formally submit their application for international protection. Subsequently, the application is forwarded to the Territorial Commission, which is responsible for assessing the asylum request and handing down a decision. The Questura is also responsible for issuing and renewing temporary stay permits to RAS, which necessitates that applicants provide documentation attesting to their ongoing eligibility. Consequently, the presence of the Questura in the life of an asylum seeker or refugee can have a long-lasting impact, depending on their individual experience with it. In addition to granting asylum, the Questura has the authority to provide other forms of protection, such as special protection. The Questura assesses these requests and takes a decision to either approve or refuse these alternative forms of protection, which are extended to individuals who may not meet the criteria for refugee status but still require protection on humanitarian grounds. The Territorial Commissions for asylum assessment also evaluate these alternative forms of protection. These commissions consist of representatives from the Prefettura, the Minister of the Interior and the UNHCR, and one from the local territorial government. One of the lawyers interviewed suggested that applying for alternative protections at the Questura may be faster. However, the

interviewee believed that there is a higher likelihood of obtaining protection from the Territorial Commission, because the Commission's orientation is of a 'certain kind', whereas the Questura is staffed entirely by policemen, and, moreover, it is highly improbable that anyone affiliated with the League Party would aspire to become an assessor for the Territorial Commission.³⁰²

In Torre Pellice, the operators encountered varying experiences with the Questura of Turin and reported different behaviours depending on the situation. One operator cites an instance where the asylum application formalisation process at the Questura was inadequately carried out during the 2015 migrant 'invasion'. The police officers neglected to collect the fingerprints and mug shots of asylum seekers in order to comply with the Dublin regulation. This was because by not having an official record of their fingerprints, as a result, asylum seekers could not be identified by other EU state members as having already applied for asylum in Italy, therefore facilitating their departure towards other EU countries.³⁰³ Generally speaking, operators argued that it would be disadvantageous to involve themselves in disputes with the Questura, as they also oversee other humanitarian programmes that necessitate interactions with authorities. Therefore, they opt to engage in daily negotiations. The primary concern regarding the Questura in Turin is the lack of a designated spokesperson, which leads to their being treated no differently from regular individuals. The waiting periods for appointments at the Questura are excessively long, sometimes lasting several months of waiting. Unfortunately, the police officers consistently demand the presence of a representative from the SAI to accompany the beneficiary, or they promptly dismiss the RAS. They do not grant any exceptional benefits, even if the matter is uncomplicated and it would be sufficient for only the beneficiary to be present. In essence, a considerable amount of time is wasted, and not all SAI operators have it; it also represents a cost for operators who are not based in Turin and have to travel to the city each time. Establishing communication with the Questura in Turin poses challenges. The police ascribe this situation, as well as the delays, to inadequate staffing.

Interviewees voiced concerns that this inefficiency is actually indicative of discriminatory behaviour. A lawyer recounted a case in which stay permits were not

³⁰² Interviewee no. 9.

³⁰³ Interviewee no. 3.

granted due to the police claiming that the permit processing machine was not working. However, the lawyer found it highly unlikely that a machine would remain dysfunctional for a duration of two years.³⁰⁴ Another lawyer argued that the Questura has consistently displayed an inhospitable and uncooperative attitude, even predating the tenure of Minister of the Interior Salvini.³⁰⁵ A third lawyer expressed her preference to abstain from visiting the police office:

*'...I don't go to the Questura anymore. I went there when I first started dealing with this matter, when I was young. I went once and said to myself: never here again! I don't have anyone to talk to, because I can't talk to the official. Why should I let these four idiots treat me like that? I don't go, I don't accompany anyone to the Questura. If I have to talk to the Questura I write, so that it's something institutional, so that someone with the authority to do it can answer me and that eventually I can go to the judge if I don't like the answer. Why go and argue with the police officers there? Then there are some more combative colleagues who do it, to me it seems useless frankly, it just seems like a way to waste my time, ruin my mood and anyway I don't solve anything because I don't come out of there with a provision; therefore, everything ends at that moment.'*³⁰⁶

Therefore, the above lawyer opted to act on behalf of asylum seekers through an electronically certified email, with the intention of obtaining official documentation. She acknowledged that she did not anticipate receiving a response, however this strategy enabled asylum seekers to demonstrate their intention to apply and avoid detention in case they were caught without the application receipt, as it was taking a long time to secure an appointment with the police. She also mentioned that, in 2022, the Questura in Turin was embroiled in a scandal involving a long-standing criminal organisation comprising police officers and foreign intermediaries. This organisation was soliciting bribes from RAS and migrants in exchange for expediting their asylum

³⁰⁴ Interviewee no. 9.

³⁰⁵ Interviewee no. 48.

³⁰⁶ Interviewee no. 49: [...io stessa in questura non ci vado più. C'ero andata all'inizio che mi occupavo di questa materia, da giovane. Sono andata una volta e ho detto: ma io qui mai più! Tanto io lì non ho un interlocutore, perché non posso parlare col funzionario. Perché mi devo far trattare a pesci in faccia da questi quattro cretini? Non ci vado, io non accompagno nessuno in questura. Se devo parlare con la questura scrivo, in modo che sia qualcosa di istituzionale, che mi risponda qualcuno che ha le competenze per farlo e che eventualmente io posso andare dal giudice se la risposta non mi piace. Perché andare a discutere coi questurini lì davanti: praticamente no. Poi ci sono dei colleghi più battaglieri che lo fanno, io... tanto mi sembra inutile francamente, mi sembra solo un modo per perdere del tempo, rovinarmi l'umore e tanto non risolvo niente perché io poi non esco di lì con un provvedimento; quindi, tutto poi si conclude in quel momento.]

applications and stay permits.³⁰⁷ The news was also reported by the media.³⁰⁸ Another lawyer contended that the task of renewing stay permits should not be entrusted to the management of the Questura, but rather assigned to local municipalities, which would effectively resolve all of these issues.³⁰⁹ Lawyers often use tribunals to expedite appointments with the police in cases of urgent circumstances. Nevertheless, the tribunals eventually began refusing these requests, possibly due to being inundated, and clarified that urgency is only applicable in cases involving executive expulsion. However, a lawyer argued that it was important to prioritise the asylum seekers' right to housing in order to prevent homelessness, provide medical assistance, grant work permits, and issue residence certificates once their asylum applications had been submitted, given all asylum seekers were entitled to these things and it was the real emergency.³¹⁰

The relationship between the SAI centre and the Questura in Bologna is markedly different and significantly more advantageous. While one interviewee attributed this positive outcome to the city's historical political and cultural traditions,³¹¹ a coordinator emphasised that it was also a result of the operators and municipality's diligent and sustained efforts over the years.³¹²

The municipality's public office, responsible for overseeing the SAI centre and the third sector organisations that manage the services, maintains a strong relationship with the Questura, specifically with the asylum office. This relationship is characterised by regular communication and dedicated appointment slots. In order to expedite collaboration, the operators ensure that all documents are prepared with efficiency and promptly respond to the needs of the police, thereby reducing the officers' workload.³¹³ This correlation is most apparent when undocumented migrants arrive at the Bologna public office to seek legal aid. The individuals are escorted by the operators to the Questura in order to officially submit their asylum requests. They

³⁰⁷ Interviewee no. 49.

³⁰⁸ See: Martinenghi, S. (2022, 22 June 2022). Sesso in cambio dei permessi di soggiorno, l'inchiesta di Torino sui favori si allarga. [Sex in exchange for residence permits, the Turin investigation into favours expands]. La Repubblica.
https://torino.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/06/22/news/torino_sesso_in_cambio_dei_permessi_linchiesta_sui_favori_si_allarga-354923867/

³⁰⁹ Interviewee no. 52.

³¹⁰ Interviewee no. 49.

³¹¹ Interviewee no. 4.

³¹² Interviewee no. 14.

³¹³ Interviewee no. 14.

are then taken to complete the C3 form, which is a required step in the process of finalising their asylum application. Occasionally, they themselves refer asylum seekers to the municipal public office for legal aid.³¹⁴

The asylum application procedures in Bologna have undergone substantial enhancements in terms of timeframes. Asylum seekers are given scheduled appointments at the Questura shortly after their arrival. The police promptly issue an initial paper receipt for the asylum request, and the asylum seekers receive their stay permits within two to three weeks. In general, the Questura in Bologna consistently operates within the permissible legal time limits.³¹⁵ Challenges persist though when asylum seekers visit the Questura on their own. They frequently encounter difficulties due to their lack of essential documents or information, which leads to them being sent away without an appointment. Furthermore, the absence of SAI legal operators leads to a clear and significant disparity in treatment.³¹⁶ For example, the issuance of stay permit renewals or other forms of protection is delayed, as one of the operators explains that they originate from the Questura in Rome.³¹⁷ In such instances, the receipt renewal remains in effect for an extended period of time and has an impact on employment, as employers fail to comprehend the purpose of that document or other administrative processes. One of the operators cited a specific instance where a beneficiary successfully completed a driver's licence test. However, due to complications with their stay permit, which they were not aware of until several days later, the test was invalidated.³¹⁸ The operators acknowledge that they occasionally have disagreements with the police regarding the interpretation and implementation of administrative law. As an illustration, the police occasionally ask asylum applicants for proof of residence, which is unnecessary and particularly unjustified given the low probability of them having a place to live. Certain officers may lack comprehensive knowledge of the appropriate protocols, especially in cases of frequent alterations to the law. For instance, in cases where RAS require a modification of their name or date of birth on their stay permit, it has been observed that officers occasionally mistakenly

³¹⁴ Interviewee no. 4.

³¹⁵ Interviewee no. 14.

³¹⁶ Interviewees no. 16 and 17.

³¹⁷ Interviewee no. 14.

³¹⁸ Interviewee no. 16.

seize the existing permit instead of providing a new receipt while permitting them to retain the old permit.³¹⁹

In general, Bologna has an effective system in place for handling asylum requests, with a strong partnership between local agencies and the Questura. However, there are still significant challenges due to delays and bureaucratic obstacles, although they are relatively minor in nature.

The relevant Questura for the towns and villages in the SAI centres, overseen by the Consortium in southern Italy, is represented by the two police stations located in the provinces of Benevento and Avellino. The operators reported that the police initially displayed efficiency in their processing methods. However, a change in their approach led to substantial delays and additional requirements. For instance, individuals had to wait for up to six months to secure an appointment.³²⁰ Beneficiaries were required to be accompanied by operators, even for simple tasks, regardless of their proficiency in Italian.³²¹ This new policy not only required operators to dedicate their time and be physically present, but it also diminished the independence of the recipients. Even beneficiaries who successfully completed their SAI integration period frequently continued to depend on operators for accompaniment, which impeded their ability to achieve true independence.³²² The operators were not aware of a clear explanation for the reasons behind this policy change. Nevertheless, like the other two sites in Bologna and Turin for Torre Pellice, all operators concur that the conduct of the police is more favourable when beneficiaries are accompanied.³²³ Despite having a contact at the Questura of Benevento, one of the operators acknowledges that these issues are connected to the overall dysfunction of the Italian bureaucracy, which also impacts Italian citizens. However, it appears that the beneficiaries fail to grasp this concept until they personally experience it by visiting the offices themselves. The operator explicitly cautions RAS that relocating to larger cities will only exacerbate the situation.³²⁴ Nevertheless, it becomes evident that the size of a place does not necessarily correlate with the intensity of bureaucratic conflicts, as

³¹⁹ Interviewee no. 17.

³²⁰ Interviewee no. 29.

³²¹ Interviewees no. 5 and 34.

³²² Interviewee no. 5.

³²³ Interviewees no. 37 and 42.

³²⁴ Interviewee no. 29.

demonstrated by the province of Bologna, which is four times larger the province of Benevento.³²⁵ Rather, the findings suggest that both human factors (the efforts of the SAI operators and the response of the police) and local government managerial policies (the municipality and the managerial direction of the police) can influence the relationship between authorities and the Questura. These factors can also affect the response of the Questura and contribute to bureaucratic processes.

The UNHCR interviewee also stated that they gathered testimony from both operators and RAS, which indicate that the procedures and durations for documentation vary significantly depending on the Questura. This inevitably impacts employability, as employers who notice the paper receipt may question its validity and spend no time in contacting the Questura for verification. Consequently, employers may quickly go on to consider alternative candidates, as businesses often have an urgent need to hire people. First of all, contacting the Questura is a challenging task. Second, the police are unable to disclose confidential information. Therefore, the employer typically relies on the SAI operator as the primary point of contact. However, if the beneficiary has completed the SAI project and is no longer in the SAI centre or has never been included in an integration project, this presents another obstacle.³²⁶

6.4 Prejudice and bureaucracy: accessing essential services

The presence of institutional prejudice in the distribution of social and administrative services for RAS in Italy is a significant problem, as demonstrated by interviews conducted with operators of all SAI centres. These interviews uncovered many obstacles that impede the ability to reach necessary services and lead to the exclusion of RAS. The issues are worsened by burdensome administrative tasks and inefficient bureaucratic processes. Public agencies frequently demonstrate a lack of knowledge regarding processes, which requires frequent involvement by SAI centre operators to aid beneficiaries.

A key concern revolved around the difficulties associated with registration and documentation. RAS often faced challenges at registry offices because of the

³²⁵ In 2021, the province of Bologna had a population of 1,015,608 compared to the province of Benevento with 266,716. Data from Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT) [National Institute of Statistics]. <https://demo.istat.it/app/?l=it&a=2021&i=POS>. Accessed on 6 June 2024.

³²⁶ Interviewee no. 46.

absence of reference numbers or misconceptions regarding the nature of their stay permits. This frequently led to their incapacity to obtain healthcare, establish bank accounts, or register in school programmes. For instance, RAS could be registered in a school, but despite their enrolment, they were unable to obtain the final certificate due to the absence of a reference number.³²⁷ A further level of difficulty arose due to the requirement of a stay permit, passport, and either a rental contract or a declaration of hospitality. The confusion among several officials concerning the necessity of these papers contributed to the complexity. One of the operators reported that a prevalent misconception is that a stay permit also functions as a form of identification, whereas it does not. This misinterpretation can occasionally benefit RAS, creating a temporary advantage, but presents substantial challenges when the authorisation expires, resulting in the revocation of registration status and eventual removal from the registry. When stay permits reach their expiry date or residency documentation is misplaced, the entire procedure must be initiated again, resulting in an ongoing circle of administrative obstacles. Besides, in order to renew the stay permit, it is necessary to have a place of domicile. If RAS do not have housing, they are unable to renew their permit. In addition, if RAS move their residence, even if it is within the same city, they are required to go through the process of re-registering, which adds an additional level of bureaucratic inconvenience. The repeated need to re-register not only causes personal inconvenience and stress but also has an impact on municipal statistics, which are used to allocate financing based on demographic figures.³²⁸

Despite being legally allowed, accessing healthcare also presented practical obstacles. RAS are legally exempt from healthcare expenses and have access to general practitioners. Nevertheless, abovementioned concerns related to the absence of residence result in substantial difficulties.³²⁹ Although the Italian laws³³⁰ guarantee emergency and continuous health support independent of the residency status, the alterations implemented by the Salvini Decree³³¹, which affected enrolment in the civil register, created difficulties in accessing services until the regulation was

³²⁷ Interviewee no. 3.

³²⁸ Interviewee no. 9.

³²⁹ Interviewee no. 2.

³³⁰ Articolo n.32 della Costituzione Italiana, articolo n.35 del Testo Unico sull'Immigrazione [Article no.32 of the Italian Consitution, article no. 35 of the Consolidated Law on Immigration].

³³¹ See footnote no. 33.

overturned by the Constitutional Court.³³² The ongoing legal dispute resulted in a lack of clarity and unpredictability when it came to obtaining healthcare services.³³³

Financial services, namely in the banking sector, posed another substantial obstacle. The process of opening a bank account was challenging because of the residency criteria, which were made more difficult by the provision by the 2018 Salvini law. As a result, some asylum seekers turned to illicit employment as they were unable to accept lawful money via bank accounts.³³⁴ Moreover, there have been recorded challenges at the post office when it came to handling payment paperwork, since personnel sometimes lacked experience with the required documentation for RAS.³³⁵ Finally, employers and accountants were often hesitant to recruit RAS because of the intricate nature of stay permits and the expiry dates associated with them, which in turn restricted job prospects.³³⁶ Given these obstacles, it is regrettable that these administrative entities, such as the post office and local health office require beneficiaries to be accompanied by an operator, even for simple tasks that could have been performed independently.³³⁷ According to one operator, the prevailing issue is not just prejudice, but rather a significant lack of knowledge regarding procedures. Dealing with bureaucratic processes at various governmental agencies is a constant struggle.³³⁸ The operators consistently emphasised that the results of their interactions with the public administrative agencies were a direct result of the actions of the individuals employed by these entities. This view is exacerbated by the perception that Italian bureaucracy is extremely poor, characterised by excessive and unnecessary laws, which public officials themselves lack the resources to address. A study by Tomo (2019) on Italian bureaucracy reveals that some bureaucrats derive considerable satisfaction from carrying out monotonous and standardised jobs. These individuals strongly adhere to sustaining the current status quo, despite the predominant research indicating that employees who perform repetitive activities tend to experience attrition, alienation, and poor motivation. Tomo argues that, on the

³³² Italian Constitutional Court ruling no. 186/2020.
https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/actionSchedaPronuncia.do?param_ecli=ECLI:IT:COST:2020:186.
Accessed on 29 March 2024.

³³³ Interviewee no. 52.

³³⁴ Interviewee no. 8.

³³⁵ Interviewee no. 2.

³³⁶ Interviewee no. 13.

³³⁷ Interviewee no. 34.

³³⁸ Interviewee no. 35.

contrary, many bureaucrats get satisfaction from their work and are unwilling to make any changes to their established routines. In the Italian setting, employees demonstrate a significant level of motivation, as they actively protect the current status quo that allows them to achieve more with no exertion (Tomo, 2019, p. 493). This reflects the operators' impression when they visit public agencies and perceive that office personnel are unwilling to take on additional tasks related to RAS.

The topics discussed in these interviews correspond with the conclusions drawn from existing literature on the difficulties encountered by RAS in terms of accessing public services, in particular after the Salvini Decree³³⁹ (Ambrosini, 2014, p. 242; Della Puppa & Sanò, 2021, p. 16; Spada, 2021, pp. 121-122). The presence of bureaucratic obstacles and stringent paperwork criteria greatly hinder the ability to obtain crucial services. Although there are laws in place to protect healthcare rights, there are often practical obstacles that hinder people from effectively accessing these services (Bove, 2018, p. 148). The phenomenon of financial exclusion resulting from administrative prerequisites for bank accounts has been well documented and reliance on cash transactions worsens vulnerability to illegal employment (Giovannetti & Olivieri, 2021). The widespread bureaucratic obstacles and a deficiency of understanding and training among public office personnel worsen these problems (ASGI, 2019a, p. 166; Giovannetti & Olivieri, 2021, p. 123; Maculan, 2022, p. 438; Spada, 2021, p. 17).

6.5 Divergent empathy and institutional disparities: the reception of asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Ukraine.

The handling of Afghan and Ukrainian refugees in Italy after their respective crises has exposed significant discrepancies in how they are received, impacted by both institutional and public attitudes. The interviews conducted with the SAI operators of the integration centres and other participants in Italy provided a comprehensive examination of these disparities and served as a foundation for comparing them to the existing body of literature on the reception and discrimination of asylum seekers. More favourable treatment of Ukrainians in relation to asylum seekers from Sub-Saharan Africa is also discussed in this section.

³³⁹ See footnote no. 33.

The Afghan refugees, predominantly arriving amidst the tumultuous military withdrawal of 2021, encountered a perplexing and somewhat bleak reception procedure. Operators in Torre Pellice expressed concerns about confusion around the protocols and funding available for housing Afghans, which exposed a broader lack of preparedness. The Prefettura in Turin inquired with each SAI facility concerning their availability to accommodate Afghan individuals. At the time of the interview (September 2021), the SAI facility in Torre Pellice was anticipating the arrival of 25 individuals. It was unclear if they would have come under the regulations of the CAS or SAI system, particularly the specific funds that would have been utilised. An incident involving hosting of individuals at Torre Pellice who were initially believed to be Afghans but were subsequently identified as Pakistanis was also mentioned. Given the current Afghan emergency, the operator stated that the interviews with the asylum seekers would have likely prioritised determining the authenticity of the individuals' Afghan identity. This would have involved assessing the dialects they speak, asking questions about their daily life, and inquiring about specific details regarding their local area of origin, for example the day the market is held in their city. The focus would have been less on the person's personal history.³⁴⁰ One lawyer in Turin stated that discrimination in the treatment of asylum seekers is partially attributable to ignorance. This is because, for instance, while Afghanistan was frequently covered in the media and the public was aware of its circumstances, other refugee groups were not.³⁴¹

The scepticism towards Afghan refugees was in stark contrast to the more direct acceptance of Ukrainians. As observed in Bologna and other places, Ukrainians were given priority and their processing was accelerated, frequently skipping the lengthy and challenging asylum processes that are usually required for other nationalities. Another lawyer in Turin provided a detailed account of how institutional prejudice was clearly observed in the unequal treatment from the Questura. Ukrainians were received warmly, 'you are a special guest', but African asylum seekers encountered animosity and indifference, 'you sit over there and wait'. The lawyer affirmed that the police were generally antagonistic to migrants in general, unless they were Ukrainians. The interviewee also refuted the League party leader Salvini's assertion that Ukrainians were supported because they were 'escaping the war', as if the other

³⁴⁰ Interviewee no. 9.

³⁴¹ Interviewee no. 48.

asylum seekers were travelling to Italy for a holiday. The lawyer stated that a few days prior, there had been an A Series football match between Juventus and Inter Milan. The public was appalled by the racist slogans chanted by the fans in the stadium towards the black players of the opposing teams, which is in stark contrast to the general sentiment towards black asylum seekers. The interviewee was of the firm conviction that integration is impossible if we differentiate and wish to select whom we approve.³⁴²

This conduct is consistent with the overall pattern of selective empathy influenced by media attention and political discourse (Ambrosini et al., 2022, p. 253; Armillei, 2017; Avallone, 2021, pp. 44-45; Chiaromonte & Federico, 2021, p. 195; Colombo, 2018, pp. 146-147; Zetter, 2009). The mayor of Torre Pellice and other interviewees emphasised the influence of media in affecting public opinions, particularly via the use of striking images from Kabul airport during the evacuation that generated some level of compassion for Afghans. However, this sympathy was still less pronounced compared to the empathy shown for Ukrainians, whose situation received more comprehensive coverage and was depicted in a more sympathetic manner.³⁴³ The disparities encompassed structural arrangement and allocation of resources. The reception for Ukrainians was strong and well organised, including direct involvement with third-sector groups and the fast construction of support networks. For instance, one operator in a village located in the Benevento region said that they welcomed Ukrainians to their SAI centre based on the recommendation of a Ukrainian woman who was already residing in the area. Her daughters arrived accompanied by an additional pair of individuals. These Ukrainians had no intention of permanently settling in Italy, thus they did not participate in any integration efforts. They planned to return to Ukraine in the near future.³⁴⁴ In contrast, Afghans were sometimes hosted in old, abandoned CAS facilities that were closed under the Salvini Decree,³⁴⁵ which demonstrated the hurried and less coordinated approach to their arrival.³⁴⁶

The processing of Afghans' asylum applications was expedited in comparison to those of other nationalities, however the operators were uncertain about whether

³⁴² Interviewee no. 49.

³⁴³ Interviewee no. 6.

³⁴⁴ Interviewee no.27.

³⁴⁵ See footnote no. 33.

³⁴⁶ Interviewee no.22.

Afghans were required to attend the hearing with the Territorial Commission. If they were really required to attend, it would have been a mere formality.³⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the EU Temporary Protection Directive resulted in preferential treatment for Ukrainian refugees, who could enter Italy without a visa and in unlimited numbers, while neglecting to extend equivalent protections to Afghans and individuals of other nationalities, such as Syrians. An operator in the Benevento region stated that starting from March 2022, they had only been instructed to accept Ukrainians into their local SAI integration system. The interviewee claimed that Africans and other refugee groups are disregarded, with politicians only mentioning them during elections in a negative manner.³⁴⁸ This discrepancy highlights a larger pattern of selective empathy.

Local citizen sentiments also reflected these institutional prejudices. One of the operators in the Benevento area mentioned that there were varying levels of empathy among the population. There was a noticeable sense of solidarity towards Ukrainians, less towards Afghans, and almost none towards Nigerians, 'as if there were first-, second- and third-class asylum seekers:

*'...many follow what they say in the media, with the Ukrainian emergency there was a lot of solidarity, with the Nigerian emergency, that we have been experiencing since 2012, there is not the same solidarity, we have to tell the truth. Many are understanding to the issues of hospitality, perhaps because they also experience it through us, but when you talk to people far from our integration centre it is very difficult. Already with Afghanistan there was a different openness, then with the outbreak of the war in Ukraine there was really class A solidarity, they are seen differently, yes, class A, B and C, unfortunately it is like that.'*³⁴⁹

Although the SAI operators made attempts to distribute information to the local population, there was still persistent resistance. The persons with the least understanding of social issues had the highest levels of bias.³⁵⁰ This reflects a hierarchy of perceived deservingness that is impacted by ethnic and cultural closeness (Bazurli & Campomori, 2022, p. 1094; Borrelli, 2022, pp. 1093-1116;

³⁴⁷ Interviewee no.22.

³⁴⁸ Interviewee no.22.

³⁴⁹ Interviewee no.39: [...molti seguono quello che dicono nei media, con l'emergenza Ucraina c'è stata tanta solidarietà, ecco, con l'emergenza nigeriana che viviamo dal 2012 non c'è la stessa solidarietà, ci dobbiamo dire la verità. Molti sono sensibili ai temi dell'accoglienza, forse perché la vivono anche attraverso di noi, però quando parli con persone lontane si ha tanta difficoltà. Già con l'Afghanistan c'è stata un'apertura diversa, poi con lo scoppio della guerra dell'Ucraina c'è stata proprio la solidarietà di serie A, sono visti diversamente, sì, serie A, B e C, purtroppo è così.]

³⁵⁰ Interviewee no.39.

Casati, 2018, p. 794; Dimitriadis & Ambrosini, 2023b, p. 14; Hynie, 2018, pp. 269-270; Marchetti, 2020, pp. 236-252; Sales, 2002, pp. 456-478). Attempts to integrate Afghan RAS were also hindered in some cases by the RAS' own hesitations regarding remaining in Italy. Many of them aspired to relocate to nations that were believed to have superior prospects, such as Germany or the USA.³⁵¹ In fact, the integration efforts highlighted the wider problems of economic inequality and lack of opportunities in Italy. Initially, the Afghans hosted were those evacuated by the Italian military army, some of them had acquired some proficiency in Italian or at least were able to communicate in English, making their integration process easier. However, many of them already had the intention to relocate elsewhere, even before completing the six-month integration programme.³⁵²

A similar response from the local community was observed in Torre Pellice. The mayor stated that, in regard to the Ukraine situation, residents expressed dissatisfaction due to the municipality's failure to accommodate any individuals from Ukraine after a period of three weeks from the news of the Russian invasion. Several residents were offering their accommodation free of charge. Some took it upon themselves to collect Ukrainians from different Italian towns and house them in their own properties. However, over time, these same locals began to express dissatisfaction as they were unwilling to keep bearing the cost of providing food for the Ukrainians continuously. They thus appealed to the mayor, requesting relocation to an SAI facility or assistance with various administrative matters, such as obtaining the Covid vaccine. The mayor expressed profound disappointment with this conduct, as he was also accused of harbouring a preference just for Africans (despite the fact that they welcomed individuals from many nations, including Afghans and Syrians). The mayor lamented the inadequate organisation of this reception, which was supposed to be facilitated via the SAI system they had in place. The mayor also stated that the availability of the locals to help Afghans fell in between their low willingness to help Africans and high willingness to help Ukrainians.³⁵³

In Bologna, an increase in the capacity of the SAI facilities in 2021 allowed for the accommodation of Afghan asylum seekers. Subsequently, the locations that were

³⁵¹ Interviewee no. 22.

³⁵² Interviewees no. 27 and 29.

³⁵³ Interviewee no. 6.

expanded to accommodate Afghans were also utilised to house Ukrainians, who were hosted via several other methods as well.³⁵⁴ Some were in CAS facilities, where they were subject to fewer restrictions than other RAS. For example, if they were absent from the CAS facility for a period of three days, they would not have been deemed to have abandoned the CAS centre, unlike other RAS. CAS centres received payment based on the number of days they are occupied. Therefore, if Ukrainians left, even if only temporarily, it would have been inconvenient for the CAS owner since the location would have been unoccupied and they would not have received payment.³⁵⁵ Only a handful of hotels accommodated Ukrainian guests. The interviewee from the Emilia Romagna region office mentioned that in Rimini, a town within the region, several hotel proprietors organised to accommodate around 500 Ukrainians together, with the intention of engaging in financially speculative activities. However, the authorities intervened and diverted all of them to CAS facilities. There were rumours circulating that the government was providing hotels with a payment of €60 per person per day, however this information was false. The actual amount paid was €33 per person per day, with 7% allocated for integration services.³⁵⁶ This sum was nevertheless more than the €19-26 provided to CAS facilities for asylum seekers of different nationalities (Giannetto et al., 2019, p. 20; Ministero dell'Interno, 2019, p. 10).

In the Emilia Romagna region, a total of 25,000 Ukrainians were accommodated, with 90% of them being hosted by families through informal hospitality arrangements. The Civil Protection Corps oversaw the national procurement to provide 15,000 spots for the extension of the reception system throughout Italy. The objective was to invite third-sector entities to participate. In this initiative based in the Emilia Romagna region, six groups participated, with around 1,000 Ukrainians granted spots. These locations were operational only when both CAS and SAI locations were at maximum capacity. The tender was held in April 2022, followed by the announcement of the winner in May and the commencement of contract signings in June. There were a significant number of bureaucratic procedures, for example it was required to provide the precise addresses of all the locations the organisations intended to utilise. By

³⁵⁴ Interviewee no. 10.

³⁵⁵ Interviewee no. 18.

³⁵⁶ Interviewee no. 10.

August 2022, the Civil Protection Corps had already received sufficient funding from the Italian government to support an additional 15,000 positions. However, they had not initiated another tender process at the time of the interviews (August 2022). Ukrainians who filed for EU temporary protection were considered eligible. Municipalities were not directly involved, but they sought to evaluate the cases in order to determine whether the Ukrainians would be accommodated within their jurisdictions. The interviewee of the Emilia Romagna region thought that it was absurd to have three system rules for three different entities or populations: the municipalities for the SAI system, the Prefettura for the CAS system, and the Civil Protection Corps for Ukrainians.³⁵⁷

The families in Bologna shown an unusual response to the Ukrainian and Afghan crises, surpassing that given to other RAS. An interviewee in Bologna believed that the media portrayal had a significant impact. In addition, the Bologna municipality conducted further promotion for these specific events.³⁵⁸ Ukrainians hosted were mainly women with children and many of them also had an established network in Italy. An organisational hub was formed, and the Bologna municipality set up an information point and offices for Ukrainians to use. At the onset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, around 50 individuals were arriving on a daily basis. However, as of the interview conducted in August 2022, the number of daily arrivals had significantly reduced to only one or two individuals. The Questura implemented a prioritised processing system for Ukrainians due to their intention to leave Italy. It was deemed inconvenient for them to leave with an incomplete asylum application. Consequently, Ukrainians could get a stay permit within a maximum of three months and they promptly obtained the paper receipt, which they were able to use it to access employment and all available services. The Ukrainians who left the SAI program before the end of the six-month completion, did so because they opted to return to Ukraine. However, the majority moved to other EU nations. It was somewhat anticipated that they would all go, but without knowledge of how the conflict would progress, the SAI operators nevertheless aimed to start integration activities.³⁵⁹ The influx of Ukrainians to the region was unregulated and primarily spontaneous, with

³⁵⁷ Interviewee no. 10.

³⁵⁸ Interviewee no. 19.

³⁵⁹ Interviewee no. 19.

volunteers and third sector groups taking responsibility for transportation and assistance. At some stage, the Bologna municipality was concerned about losing control over the situation due to the implementation of this new system. Fortunately, even after several months, the families were still accommodating the Ukrainians and had not yet withdrawn their support.³⁶⁰

Ultimately, the way Afghan and Ukrainian asylum applicants were received in Italy exposes significant discrepancies influenced by media manipulation, political agendas, and deep-rooted cultural prejudices. The differential treatment of Ukrainians in comparison to Afghans and other asylum seekers underscores a discerning humanitarian response that grants preferential treatment to specific groups based on racial, cultural, and geopolitical considerations.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter included a comprehensive examination of the structural obstacles and biased practices encountered by RAS in Italy. By conducting in-depth interviews with operators of SAI centres, the study revealed the various obstacles that prevented RAS from obtaining crucial services. The study uncovered that institutional bias and complex administrative procedures greatly hinder the ability of RAS to obtain essential services such as healthcare, banking, and education. The issues associated with establishing and confirming resident status sometimes led to individuals being excluded from crucial services. The issues were worsened by the misunderstandings and lack of knowledge of public authorities, which required regular interventions by SAI operators. Many RAS had difficulties at registration offices because they lacked reference numbers or had misunderstandings about their stay permits. The implementation of the Salvini Decree³⁶¹ added complexity to the legal framework, making it more difficult for individuals to obtain healthcare and financial services. Consequently, this resulted in financial exclusion and heightened vulnerability among affected individuals, impacting employment opportunities. SAI operators were important in successfully negotiating the bureaucratic obstacles and offering assistance to RAS. Their endeavours encompassed tasks such as aiding with administrative documentation and escorting RAS to government agencies to

³⁶⁰ Interviewee no. 10.

³⁶¹ See footnote no. 33.

guarantee their access to entitled services. Although the operators were very committed, they frequently faced opposition and a lack of collaboration from governmental authorities. Future study is needed to investigate methods to improve the training of public officials in order to enhance their understanding of the requirements of RAS and simplify bureaucratic procedures, hence minimising delays and obstacles in receiving vital services.

This chapter has also shed light on the significant discrepancies in the treatment of different refugee groups. It emphasises the disparities in the reception of Afghan and Ukrainian refugee applicants. During the chaotic military withdrawal in 2021, Afghan asylum applications faced confusion and minimal support, however they were nonetheless regarded more favourably than asylum seekers from other countries. Conversely, Ukrainian individuals seeking refuge were given faster and more favourable treatment than Afghans, which included quicker processing and more efficiently arranged support systems. The uneven treatment highlighted the impact of media representation, political motives, and ingrained cultural biases. The differential empathy exhibited towards Ukrainian asylum seekers, in contrast to Afghans and other cohorts, exemplified a more extensive trend in humanitarian reaction shaped by racial, cultural, and geopolitical factors. The local citizens' views likewise mirrored similar institutional biases, displaying different degrees of empathy throughout the community, with evident unity towards Ukrainians, less towards Afghans, and virtually none against Africans. This highlights the necessity for a fairer approach to accepting and integrating RAS, one that is not influenced by cultural or ethnic prejudices. Subsequent studies should explore the fundamental elements that contribute to these biases, such as the influence of media, public opinion, and geopolitical events. In addition, research into the appropriate methods to ensure uniform and fair treatment among various RAS populations might provide valuable insights for policy suggestions and enhance the overall efficiency and impartiality of the asylum procedure in Italy.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Summary of findings

This thesis has explored the complex and variable elements of asylum application and processing procedures and the integration of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy. The analysis targeted the time period from 2018 to 2022, since this was a period of significant changes in Italy's asylum policy. This research has shed light on the substantial difficulties faced by RAS, and the effects of existing policies and policy changes on RAS, by conducting a thorough examination of the present asylum situation, the integration debate, and the many systems and approaches in use.

Italy is a crucial entry point for asylum seekers, who often view the country as either a transit route or their final destination in Europe. Italy's reception system is distinguished by two main structures: the system of the Extraordinary Reception Centres [Centri di Accoglienza Straordinari – CAS] and the System of Reception and Integration [Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione – SAI] centres. CAS centres offer prompt yet temporary housing, frequently criticised for their substandard living conditions and absence of integration assistance. SAI centres provide a wider range of support services, such as legal aid, language classes, training and employment assistance. This study confirms that occurrence of delays in the asylum application procedure frequently results in extended periods of time spent in CAS centres prior to being transferred to SAI facilities.

Integration is influenced by several elements, such as legal status, social policy, and public opinions. The thesis emphasised that integration encompasses more than just achieving economic independence, but also includes social inclusion, access to rights, and psychological well-being. In this study, integration results were evaluated by examining work, housing, and language acquisition. These areas were chosen because they are the focus of the SAI integration programmes in the Italian system. The selection of the SAI centres examined, in Torre Pellice, Bologna, and the Benevento area, was based on their geographical variety and diverse capacities, in order to offer a comprehensive view of integration experiences throughout Italy. The method involved qualitative interviews with operators and other participants, which allowed for a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and difficulties. This qualitative methodology enabled a thorough comprehension of the day-to-day

challenges encountered by individuals engaged in the asylum process, encompassing both administrative obstacles and personal hardships and achievements.

Each of the locations studied highlighted different approaches of integrating asylum seekers and refugees, influenced by their individual historical, cultural, and socio-political circumstances. Torre Pellice utilises its religious background and the strong organisational capabilities of the Waldensian Deaconry; Bologna makes use of its extensive history of social activity and collaborative frameworks; and the Benevento area utilises an entrepreneurial approach through the Consortium Sale della Terra. From a financial and organisational perspective, the unique attributes of these SAI centres enabled them to pursue alternative avenues and secure funds from their other activities or projects. This was done to ensure the provision of services to all beneficiaries, including asylum seekers, even when they were legally excluded. In addition, the organisations overseeing both SAI and CAS centres, that also had the option to use the same operators for both facilities, allowed them to maximise the benefits for asylum seekers in CAS facilities who were not permitted to participate in integration facilities. Furthermore, it provided a direct pathway from CAS to SAI system for asylum seekers who had been recognised as refugees. This enabled them to remain in the same territory to complete their integration programme, which had numerous benefits such as prior familiarity with the location and a pre-existing network.

Operators in the SAI centres faced significant obstacles, such as navigating governmental inefficiencies and adjusting to frequent regulatory modifications. Their approaches entailed championing the rights of asylum seekers and refugees, and skilfully negotiating unfavourable administrative procedures to obtain essential services. The research emphasised the crucial role played by these operators in promoting integration, but also the emotional burden associated with their profession. Operators often faced systematic barriers and had to utilise innovative strategies to overcome the restrictions imposed by regulatory modifications and limits in resources.

My research demonstrates that asylum and integration programmes were significantly affected by government policy changes from 2018 to 2022. In addition to the policy changes, they were also impacted by the Covid-19 outbreak and efforts to accommodate Afghan and Ukrainian asylum seekers fleeing their respective nations.

The implementation of more stringent immigration regulations along with a decrease in financial support for integration programmes impeded the advancement of asylum seekers overall during this period. The implementation of the Security Decree in 2018 by the Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini, leader of the far-right wing League party, sought to limit asylum seekers' access to the country and decrease social support for their cause, intensifying the marginalisation of those who were already in the country. These changes in policy led to decreased government assistance for integration programmes, thus augmenting the challenges faced by asylum seekers in accessing vital services and attaining stability.

The Covid-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, exacerbated the challenges faced by the Italian asylum system. The use of lockdowns and health precautions had a disruptive impact on the functioning of SAI centres, resulting in further delays to asylum proceedings and restricted access to vital services. This in turn heightened the isolation and anxiety among asylum applicants about their future. In order to mitigate the transmission of the virus, extensions of periods were granted to all the occupants of the SAI facilities, enabling them to prolong their stay at the facilities. In 2020, the Migration Decree issued by the new Minister of the Interior, Luciana Lamorgese, granted again asylum seekers the right to be housed in SAI facilities. However, they were not given the opportunity to access job and training programmes. In general, the expansion of the programme in response to the pandemic and the partial reversal of the legislation through the Lamorgese Decree resulted in a notable decrease in the influence of the Salvini law on the integration of asylum seekers within the examined locations.

In terms of integration outcomes, the problem of housing remains pressing, as numerous asylum seekers were confronted with substandard living circumstances in CAS facilities in Italy. The situation of overcrowded and inadequate CAS buildings greatly hindered the overall integration process, as it had a substantial impact on asylum seekers' motivation. The Consortium in Benevento, for instance, declined to apply for CAS centre management and opted just to oversee SAI centres. When it comes to searching for houses for SAI centres or post-SAI programmes, there are significant variables such as a scarcity of available homes, societal views, financial barriers, and administrative challenges. RAS already face substantial obstacles due to financial volatility and constrained economic resources. The rental expenses and

the absence of job security or guarantees for many RAS intensify the challenges of obtaining accommodation. For instance, in Bologna, the highly competitive market for student accommodation and the increase in tourism have resulted in higher rental prices throughout the city. As a result, property owners find it more advantageous to choose university students or tourists over other tenants. The problem is further complicated by societal attitudes and discriminatory actions. Property owners frequently decline to rent to individuals from racial and ethnic minority groups, since they are typically affected by prevalent unfavourable preconceptions and media portrayals. Although operators strive to increase public knowledge, they nonetheless face a substantial obstacle in the form of cultural opposition.

This study confirms the existence of administrative and bureaucratic obstacles to the acquisition of housing and stay permits. The housing availability and quality for RAS are also greatly influenced by the local setting. In less populated areas, establishing personal relationships is essential for overcoming initial hesitancy to rent to RAS. For example, in Torre Pellice, the initial reluctance of the locals was overcome when refugees routinely fulfilled their rental obligations, resulting in changed attitudes towards RAS and a greater readiness to rent to them.

Language acquisition programmes were found to be crucial for the process of integration, not just for basic survival but also for wider social engagement, obtaining housing, securing employment, accessing healthcare, and receiving education. Moreover, gender discrepancies exacerbate this matter, as women faced greater obstacles to language acquisition owing to childcare obligations that restricted their involvement in language courses. Research findings highlight the importance of customised educational methods to meet the varied requirements of RAS. Utilising teaching approaches that are contextual and relevant to the life experiences of RAS, considering their diverse educational backgrounds and linguistic proficiencies, has been found to be more advantageous. Some limitations remain, such as financial restrictions, logistical difficulties and uncomfortable class venues and timetables, especially for beneficiaries located in small towns and villages. The Covid-19 pandemic prompted inventive responses, for example, the transition to online learning, which enabled RAS to continue their education despite lockdowns, as SAI facilities provided tablets to encourage participation in virtual classrooms. This adaption enabled not only the uninterrupted continuation of instruction, but also

emphasised the significance of using technology for language acquisition. Although significant efforts have been made, gaps still persist, especially when it comes to accessing higher education. The UNHCR has implemented programmes to streamline the process of university enrolment for RAS, specifically targeting obstacles such as the lack of recognition of their degrees from their country of origin and language proficiency disparities. However, there is still a lack of understanding and utilisation of these options, indicating the necessity for more specific assistance and widespread transmission of information.

The integration of RAS into the workforce poses significant global challenges in terms of employment outcomes. This is particularly the case in a country like Italy, where social attitudes, bureaucratic barriers, and economic disparities intersect to create multiple obstacles – not just for foreigners, but also for its own citizens. The research findings acknowledge the role of the SAI system in facilitating the employment of RAS through training programmes, orientation courses, and collaborations with local businesses. However, research findings also highlight the persistent challenges faced by RAS such as the complexities of bureaucratic procedures and employers' misinterpretations of stay permits, and the impact of external factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic and frequent changes in asylum regulations. Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of acknowledging the skills and experience of RAS, as well as offering them avenues for professional growth. The necessity of cooperation between various entities, including SAI centres, local enterprises, and non-profit organisations, in order to generate substantial employment prospects for RAS, is crucial. Despite the efforts made, the findings emphasise the persistent challenges faced by RAS in maintaining employment, including difficulties in adjusting to Italian work norms.

In terms of social inclusion, this study specifically examined the analysis of small-scale interactions and experiences among nearby communities. Both the existing scholarly literature and this research highlight the importance of narratives, as conveyed by media and politics, in shaping attitudes towards RAS, whether via personal interactions or institutional communications. This study analysed the influence of previous interactions with different migrant groups on locals' views, emphasising that certain groups, such as Africans, face more challenges due to their distinctive physical characteristics or cultural differences. However, the employment

of targeted tactics such as community engagement and tailored initiatives which and fostering inclusiveness can lead to positive outcomes in integration, albeit necessitating a long-term perspective.

The findings highlighted the existence of prejudice, whether through explicit or implicit discriminatory policies and behaviours. Institutional discrimination, in addition to individual prejudice, greatly impeded RAS' access to services and integration into Italian society. Moreover, the study highlighted the absence of comprehensive legislation against discrimination. The Salvini Decree displayed direct discrimination through its enactment of laws that limited integration support for asylum seekers, thereby denying them access to crucial services and legal rights. One of the rights that was refused was the residence enrolment into the civil registry, which is necessary for access to essential services such as healthcare and employment opportunities, thus exacerbating asylum seekers' vulnerability. Importantly, however, this study highlighted cases in which SAI operators took measures to mitigate inequities and obtain alternative funding for integration services, serving as instances of resistance against discriminatory legislation.

The discriminatory techniques and procedural barriers encountered by immigrants at the Questura were especially significant. This study presented a harsh reality in which RAS encountered systemic problems such as delays, requests for needless paperwork, and unfair treatment by police personnel. The reports of abuse and discrimination, as recorded by non-governmental organisations and legal groups, demonstrated the widespread occurrence of these issues in various regions throughout Italy and were confirmed during this study interviews. The inconsistency in treatment and processes among various Questure mirrors the larger structural problems within the Italian asylum system. Whereas in Bologna the Questura demonstrated more effectiveness and cooperation with the integration centre operators, in Turin and Benevento, the Questure shown inefficiency and discriminatory actions. Moreover, bureaucratic constraints not only caused procedural delays but also restricted RAS ability to access vital services, impeded their employment opportunities, and perpetuated their reliance on aid from other organisations which eroded their basic rights and dignity. RAS encountered similar challenges in accessing essential services and social benefits, particularly in the fields

of healthcare, banking, and employment. These circumstances frequently necessitated the involvement of SAI operators.

Finally, this study explored the complex processes related to the ‘special’ reception and treatment of asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Ukraine. It was apparent that the EU reaction to the crises in Ukraine and Afghanistan showed significant disparities. In reaction to the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU promptly implemented the Temporary Protection Directive No. 55 of 2001, which facilitated the reception and assistance of millions of displaced Ukrainians. This directive facilitated Ukrainians’ access to vital services such as healthcare, education, and work. It also simplified their asylum procedures and offered financial and operational support to member states hosting them. In contrast, the Afghan crisis did not elicit a comparable instruction, leading to a fragmented and less synchronised response across Italy.

The research findings corroborate these views by presenting firsthand testimonies of the different treatment encountered by Afghan and Ukrainian asylum seekers in Italy. Ukrainians had special privileges, including faster processing, friendly greetings at the Questura, and comprehensive support systems. By contrast, Afghans had almost none of these privileges and faced doubt and confusion over their asylum applications. These differences highlighted the bias that existed within the institutional frameworks of Italy and the EU, which was compounded by negative media portrayals and political rhetoric about issues of asylum. Moreover, the reception and integration experiences of asylum seekers were greatly influenced by public sentiments. Ukrainians experienced solidarity and support from the local population, but Afghans encountered varying degrees of empathy. The media's depiction of the crises, together with political objectives, strengthened these prejudices, sustaining a ranking system of perceived deservingness among various groups of asylum seekers, with Africans being placed at the bottom.

7.2 Discussion

This section assesses the research questions in relation to the study's findings, ascertaining if the questions have been sufficiently answered and offering insights into the larger implications of the results.

The first study question enquired: "Were changes in asylum legislation and administrative policies during the years 2018 to 2022 impactful on the integration of refugees and asylum seekers (RAS) in Italy?". Legislative changes, notably the enactment of the 2018 Security Decree, instituted more stringent immigration laws, curtailed financial assistance for integration initiatives, and marginalised numerous asylum seekers from vital services within the integration framework. These alterations substantially impeded integration initiatives, exacerbating the marginalisation of RAS. The research findings indicate that these policy changes would have significantly impacted overall; however, this influence was diminished by the extensions granted to asylum seekers allowing them to remain at the integration facility because to the Covid-19 outbreak. Furthermore, the 2020 Migration Decree alleviated some adverse impacts by reversing some policies; yet, the analysis indicates that the disruptions resulting from the exclusion of asylum seekers from the integration system generated enduring issues. This evidence clearly addresses the study question by illustrating the significant and diverse impacts of policy changes on integration results.

The second study question enquired: "Has institutional discrimination, including arbitrary decision-making and systemic biases, hindered the integration process for refugees and asylum seekers in Italy?". The study's results unequivocally support this assertion. The investigation uncovered systemic problems inside Italian administrative institutions, especially at the Questura, where RAS often encountered delays, superfluous bureaucratic obstacles, and discriminatory approaches. This was especially evident when contrasting Ukrainian and Afghan RAS with other nationalities, the latter experiencing incidents of maltreatment, variable handling across locations, and inefficiency substantiated by interviews and external complaints. The findings underscored both implicit and explicit forms of discrimination, including societal bias, political and media-induced stereotypes, and discriminatory legislative measures.

Despite the efforts of SAI local operators to alleviate these obstacles via new strategies and alternate finance, their attempts highlighted the enduring institutional prejudices that obstructed fair access to services and opportunities for RAS. Although the SAI centres in the examined locations possessed the capacity to alleviate challenges due to their access to additional funds and services via their

administrative model, it can be suggested that other SAI centres with a more rudimentary model and fewer activities were significantly more affected.

The study successfully answered both research goals, illustrating the substantial influence of legislative modifications and institutional prejudice on RAS integration in Italy. It offered a detailed comprehension of the diverse problems and adaptation techniques in the Italian setting. Although the questions received encouraging responses, the findings underscored the necessity of continuous changes to tackle structural difficulties and foster inclusive integration procedures for RAS. The combination of these research questions with the results highlights the pivotal influence of policy frameworks, administrative procedures, and societal views on refugee integration outcomes.

7.3 Other findings

Although the intended purpose of this study did not specifically involve assessing data gathering methods on RAS, the impact of this lack of data became evident via information retrieval and interviews. Precise information on RAS integration is essential for the formulation of knowledgeable and efficient integration initiatives. This data serves several purposes, including assisting in the allocation of resources and enabling the monitoring, assessment, and adjustment of integration initiatives. Nevertheless, the existing method of data collection in Italy poses significant obstacles, such as fragmentation, inconsistency, and inadequate coverage. The key concerns include the difficulty of comparing outcomes of protection grants over the years as a result of government policy shifts; the complexity of reliably quantifying the number of asylum seekers that move from the CAS to the SAI system; and the challenge of tracking individuals who exit the SAI system. The lack of centralised integration regulations in Italy and differing degrees of civil society involvement further complicate efforts to collect data, resulting in fragmented data across several levels, which exacerbates existing issues. The challenges also apply to areas other than asylum reception, such as healthcare and education. It is difficult to differentiate RAS from other foreign nationals in these sectors due to privacy regulations and institutional procedures in Italy. This study also reveals the constraints of current data gathering techniques, specifically in relation to employment statistics in the SAI reports. The existence of different understandings of employment terms among

operators and the absence of a uniform definition of job placement highlighted the importance of clear and consistent data gathering standards in the SAI system.

7.4 Research contribution and future research opportunities

This study offers a comprehensive, meticulously researched, and coherent analysis of the Italian asylum applicant reception system. It effectively documents the intricate dynamics at play by offering a nuanced exploration of the system's complexities, contradictions, and limitations. The comparative scope of asylum studies is thereby expanded by the in-depth comprehension of the Italian context that readers, particularly those from outside Italy, can acquire. The study's analytical depth is enhanced by the integration of qualitative insights and quantitative data, which also facilitates a multifaceted interpretation of the Italian asylum reception system. The study provides readers with a valuable framework to evaluate and contrast Italy's policies and practices with those of other national systems by presenting robust evidence and a thoughtful critique. The study's efficacy as a reference point in international research on asylum and migration is further enhanced by this comparative perspective, which establishes it as a significant and original contribution to the global discourse. Furthermore, the study's coherence and clarity render it accessible to both academic and policy-oriented audiences, guaranteeing that its insights are pertinent to scholars, policymakers, and practitioners. This research is not only informative but also instrumental in the advancement of a comparative comprehension of asylum systems worldwide, rendering it a critical resource for ongoing discussions on humanitarian practices and migration policy.

Obtaining work is a crucial result of integrating RAS, and research is concentrated on examining the problems encountered by RAS in this regard. Due to the absence of any available data on the number of RAS individuals who become unemployed, there exists a substantial knowledge vacuum on the complete extent of their integration difficulties. While all workers in the Italian labour market, including Italian citizens, face challenges, RAS encounter idiosyncratic barriers like the need to adapt to cultural and language differences, unfamiliarity with workplace customs, and the possibility of prejudices or discrimination. These characteristics might have a

disproportionate influence on their capacity to maintain work. Policymakers and integration programme designers could potentially identify barriers to work retention by methodically gathering and assessing data on employment loss among RAS. These findings would allow the creation of focused interventions, including customised job training, workplace integration programmes, and continuous support services, to assist RAS in overcoming these problems and attaining long-term employment stability.

The SAI system, moreover, has high staff turnover rates. And SAI operators frequently exceed their agreed-upon working hours, occasionally without remuneration, in order to handle the many demands of RAS (which include both urgent circumstances and minor enquiries). While operators are largely dedicated to their work, which some even consider their 'mission' to improve society, they regularly encounter obstacles such as burnout, emotional stress, and the everyday difficulties of dealing with bureaucratic processes. There is currently a lack of quantitative study on SAI operators. Valuable insights into employee retention could be achieved through investigation of the reasons for high staff turnover rates, especially among individuals involved in advanced academic pursuits or those who leave due to the demanding nature of the work. Likewise, an examination of the financial limitations faced by operators, could provide valuable insights into how to retain employees. Additional research might also take into account the individual burden on operators by investigating methods to reduce burnout and emotional tiredness, and assessing the existing support systems accessible to them. It is essential that a sustainable and supportive work environment for SAI operators be established in order to build a resilient and efficient staff base capable of meeting the complex requirements of RAS. Further research may help the development of policies and practices that strengthen the capability of SAI operators, eventually leading to improved integration results for RAS in Italy.

Although it would be advantageous to establish a model that required the implementation of a SAI system in all Italian municipalities, scaled according to their population, thereby facilitating a more equitable distribution of RAS across Italy's regions and minimising disruption to local communities, it is evident that the political will of those in authority would ultimately dictate decisions, and no research is likely to alter their reluctance to embrace RAS. Further research could investigate an

economic model for a hypothetical system that, following the allocation of the current initial government funds, would integrate entrepreneurial activities and services operating on a self-sustaining basis. This model could serve as a foundation that, if successful, would incentivise civic society to advocate for its implementation by local municipalities, thereby creating employment opportunities for both regional residents and RAS.

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GLOSSARY

AIDA Asylum Information Database

AMF Asylum and Migration Fund

ASGI Associazione Studi Giuridici Immigrazione

ASP azienda pubblica di servizi alla persona

CENSIS Centro Studi Investimenti Sociali

ECRE European Council on Refugees and Exiles

EU European Union

IOM International Organisation for Migration

ISTAT Istituto Nazionale di Statistica

NGO Non Governmental Organisation

NIEM National Integration Evaluation Mechanism

OECD Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

RAS Refugees and Asylum Seekers

SAI Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione

SAR Search And Rescue

SIPROIMI Sistema di protezione per titolari di Protezione Internazionale e per Minori stranieri non accompagnati

SPRAR Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati

SSN Servizio Sanitario Nazionale

UK United Kingdom

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees