Coping with Migrants and Refugees

Multilevel Governance across the EU

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5 The variance in multilevel governance of asylum seekers' reception in Italy

The key roles of policy legacy, politics and civil society

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Irene Ponzo, Leila Giannetto and Emanuela Roman[1]

Introduction

It is common knowledge that asylum seekers' reception in Italy has been and still is a contentious matter. Under the pressure generated by the rapid succession of the "migration crisis" of 2011, triggered by the collapse of the Tunisian and Libyan regimes, and the "refugee crisis" of 2015, following the Syrian war, the Italian reception system has undergone profound changes. By using multilevel governance (MLG) as an analytical concept, this chapter analyses the Italian reception system focusing on the relationship between the national and local levels of government, and on the interactions among public and non-public actors involved in policy implementation in the 2011–2018 period. The chapter compares and contrasts two local case studies in northern Italy—Torino in the Piedmont region and Treviso in the Veneto region—characterised by different political backgrounds and socio-political legacies.

The purpose of this chapter is, first, to analyse the specific configuration of MLG in the field of asylum seekers' reception in Italy and the factors that account for it, and second, to explore whether and how it relates to policy convergence dynamics as defined in the Introduction to the volume. In doing so, we assess the level of homogeneity or heterogeneity in the reception system, which may result respectively in policy convergence or divergence. In addition, we investigate the main factors influencing homogeneity or heterogeneity and determining converging or diverging trends in the reception policy field. Based on empirical findings from the local case studies, we consider in particular the role of the following factors: socio-political legacies in the local community; the level of involvement of local institutions in the coordination of reception; the level of organisation of civil society; the relationships among local institutions and between local institutions and civil society organisations (CSOs); and politics (in terms of governing parties at the regional and municipal levels).

The research is based on qualitative fieldwork. A total of twenty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of actors directly involved in the Italian reception system, either at a national or local level.

These include governmental actors, public administrators and officers, non-profit actors and CSOs, and international organisations. Fieldwork at the national level was carried out between July and December 2018; fieldwork at the local level took place between September and December 2018.

Fieldwork at the national level was affected by the political change in the national government that occurred in May 2018. Changes in the Ministry of the Interior's officers made it difficult to schedule interviews in the following months. In spite of that, we managed to carry out seven interviews with national-level stakeholders. Fieldwork carried out in the Piedmont region and the province of Torino consisted of eight interviews, while fieldwork in the Veneto region and the province of Treviso consisted of six interviews. In Veneto, a total of fourteen stakeholders were actually contacted, but cooperation, especially from institutional actors, was limited[2]. This part of the fieldwork demonstrated that there is a widespread reticence among key stakeholders in Veneto and Treviso to talk about asylum and migration-related issues. This may be linked to two factors. First, the increasing sensitivity and politicisation of the issue in the public discourse, especially following the 2018 national elections. Second, the position of the League (traditionally the main ruling party in the Veneto region, in the city of Treviso and in a majority of municipalities in the province) which has apparently decided not to get involved in policy-making processes regarding reception at the local level.

The chapter is organised into six sections. The following section provides background information and figures on the inflow of asylum seekers to Italy over the last decade. Section 3 describes the governance of the Italian reception system, focusing on responsibilities in policy implementation; specific attention is paid to the changes brought about by the 2018 law reform. Section 4 analyses the actual functioning of the reception system based on the empirical findings gathered from the local case studies. Section 5 analyses policy outcomes with particular regard to trends of convergence and divergence in the implementation of reception policies at the national and local levels. Moving from this reflection, in the final section we draw some concluding remarks on the main features of MLG arrangements in the field of reception in Italy and the ways they work in practice across the country.

Problem pressure. Inflows of asylum seekers and refugees in the last decade

Over the past ten years, the Italian reception system has been repeatedly under stress. One of the major stresses has been the need to cope with swiftly changing numbers of asylum applications and the overall number of asylum seekers and refugees who could not support themselves and thus are in need of reception services. Figure 5.1 clearly shows a first peak in asylum requests in 2011, coinciding with the chaotic departure from North Africa of tens
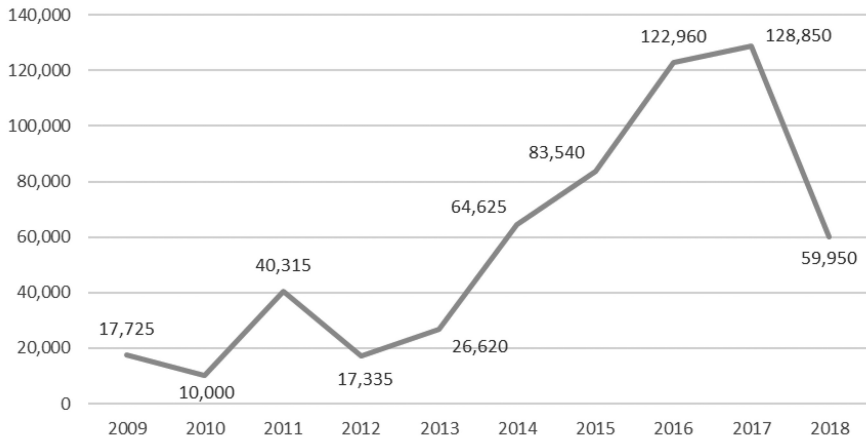
Figure 5.1 First asylum applications in Italy (2009–2018)

Source: Eurostat, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tps00191

of thousands of asylum seekers following the so-called Arab Spring; and a second peak, more prolonged over time and significantly more relevant in terms of numbers, in the years between 2014 and 2017. The period 2014–2017 coincides with what has been often referred to as the "refugee crisis" which brought almost 400,000 people to apply for asylum in Italy (see Figure 5.1). According to interviewees, it is the rapid increase of asylum seekers' inflows since 2011 that caused the expansion of the reception system until 2016.

Since 2017, the Italian Ministry of the Interior and its Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration has released (every fifteen days to every month) an overview of the numbers (i.e., *cruscotto statistico*) of people arriving on the Italian shores without a valid visa[3], the number of asylum seekers and protection holders hosted in reception centres, and the distribution of the latter throughout the Italian territory (see Figure 5.2). It is interesting to note that not all of the people who arrive on Italian shores are then hosted by the Italian reception system. This is because, although *de facto* in Italy there is no alternative to requesting asylum in order to enter the country legally (i.e., without previously obtaining a valid visa)[4], third-country nationals can still choose not to ask for asylum at disembarkation (or when crossing land or air borders)[5]. Moreover, some asylum applications might go through an accelerated procedure and be rejected (e.g., if the applicant has been apprehended for eluding or trying to elude border controls or if there are criminal proceedings against the applicant, see further in the chapter), which can lead to immediate expulsion or administrative detention, as foreseen by the Returns Directive (2008/115/CE, article 15). Moreover, reception numbers depend, on the one hand, on whether asylum seekers arriving in Italy can provide for themselves and, on the other hand, on the ability of the Italian state to prevent asylum seekers from moving to
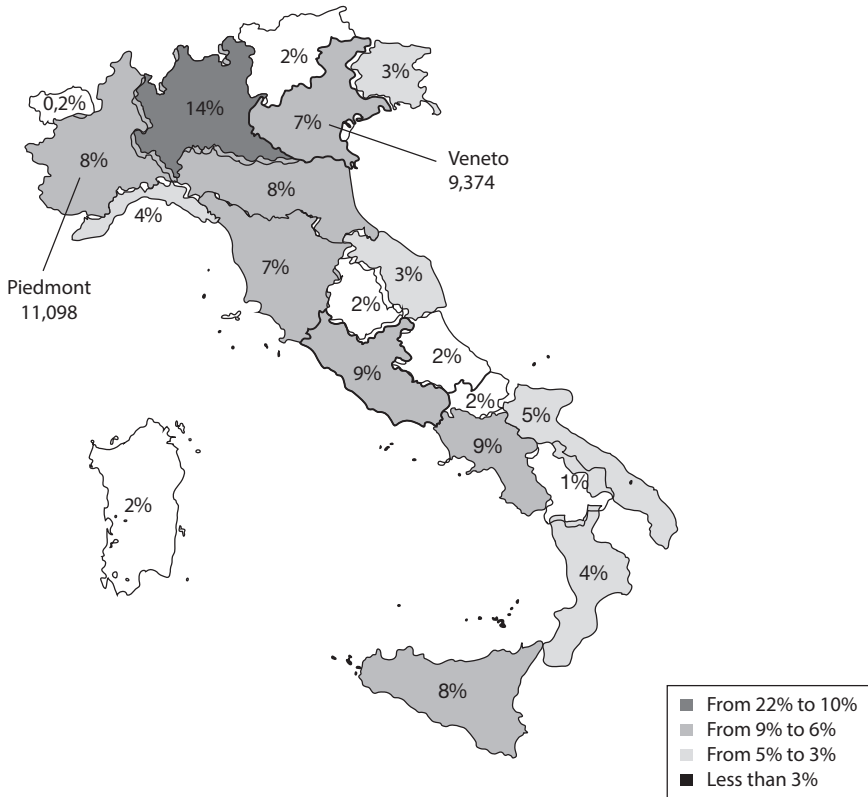
2%

3%

0,2%

14%

7%

8%

Veneto
9,374

8%

4%

7%

3%

2%

Piedmont
11,098

2%

9%

2%

2%

5%

9%

1%

2%

4%

8%

■	From 22% to 10%
■	From 9% to 6%
■	From 5% to 3%
■	Less than 3%

Figure 5.2 Percentage of asylum seekers and protection holders in reception centres
per region and total number of asylum seekers and protection holders in
reception centres in Piedmont and Veneto (December 31, 2018)

Source: Ministry of the Interior, Cruscotto statistico al dicembre 31, 2018, available at http://
www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/cruscotto-
statistico-giornaliero

other European Union (EU) countries, since asylum seekers might not be
willing to wait for the conclusion of the long asylum procedure[6].

A significant decrease in asylum requests started in 2017 (see Figure 5.1),
following a Memorandum of Understanding between Italy and Libya signed
on February 2, 2017 by the then Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni
(leader of a centre-left government coalition) and the head of the Libyan
National Reconciliation Government Fayez al-Serraj[7]. This change in asylum
requests, coupled with the entry into force of the Security and Immigration
Decree of October 4, 2018 (Legislative Decree 113/2018) (see further in the
chapter) reduced the number of people hosted in reception centres: from
more than 180,000 people in 2017[8] to 135,858 at the end of 2018[9]. At the end
of 2018, 41,113 asylum seekers and protection holders in need of reception
services in Italy were hosted in the SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum

Seekers and Refugees)/SIPROIMI (Protection System for Beneficiaries of International Protection and Unaccompanied Minors) system[10] while the other 70% were hosted in governmental centres, also known as extraordinary reception centres (*Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria*—CAS) (see further in the chapter).

The reception system. Decisional processes and implementation

The key feature of the Italian reception system is its two-pronged structure (Semprebon and Pelacani 2019), split between an ordinary system, on the one hand, originating from the memorandum of understanding signed by the Ministry of the Interior, UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) and ANCI (National Association of Italian Municipalities) in 2000 to establish the first National Asylum Programme, and an emergency system directly managed by the central government, on the other hand.

The ordinary system SPRAR/SIPROIMI[11] is based on the voluntary participation of municipalities, which are responsible for the reception facilities. Yet, in cases where no place is available in a SPRAR/SIPROIMI centre, according to Legislative Decree 140/2005 which transposed the EU Reception Directive (2003/9/CE), accommodation should be provided in one of the centres directly managed by the Ministry of the Interior, only for the time necessary to find a suitable accommodation in a SPRAR/ SIPROIMI centre. If no place is available in either the SPRAR/SIPROIMI or in the governmental centres, the prefecture, i.e., the local branches of the Ministry of the Interior, has to provide an allowance to the asylum seeker. Clearly, the national law transposing the EU Reception Directive has allowed for important exceptions to the SPRAR/SIPROIMI system, establishing a *de facto* two-pronged approach to reception. This became evident when the number of governmental reception centres multiplied in response to the increase in arrivals that occurred since the Arab Spring in order to compensate for the lack of available places in the ordinary system (see Figure 5.3).

A further, though temporary derogation to the ordinary reception system was introduced in 2011, following the fall of the Tunisian and Libyan regimes, when Roberto Maroni, the Minister of the Interior of the then centre-right Berlusconi government, declared a "state of emergency"—the so-called "North Africa Emergency" (ENA, Order of the Prime Minister, February 12, 2011, OPCM 3933/2011). This gave considerable powers initially to the Prefects and then to the Civil Protection Service (*Protezione Civile Nazionale*), which had coordinating tasks to set up emergency reception centres outside the SPRAR/SIPROIMI system and without any involvement of local authorities. The ENA lasted until March 2013; when the government ended it, people were abruptly expelled from the reception centres, despite the fact that the large majority of them were homeless and jobless.
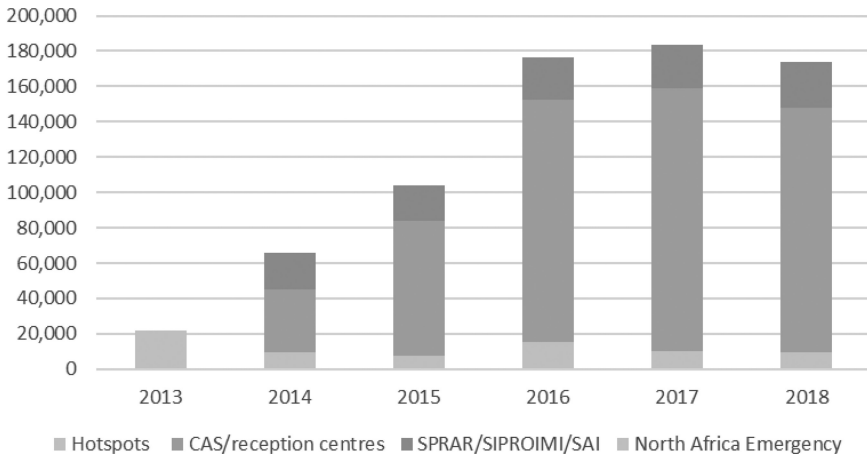
Figure 5.3 Asylum seekers and protection beneficiaries present in Italian reception centres

Source: author's own elaboration of data retrieved from https://www.openpolis.it/parole/che-cosa-sono-i-cas-lo-sprar-e-gli-hotspot/

Finally, the Italian reception system was reformed in late 2018 under the coalition government made up of the Five Star Movement and the League (May 2018–August 2019), further reinforcing its two-pronged structure: the reform widened the gap between SPRAR/SIPROMI and governmental reception facilities by preventing asylum seekers from accessing the first and suppressing integration services in the latter.

This section is organised into two main sub-sections. The first provides an overview of the governance of reception in Italy. The second illustrates how the reception system actually works.

The governance of the Italian reception system

SPRAR/SIPROIMI and governmental facilities have different decision-making structures. The first one represents a clear instance of MLG. Although it is under the authority of the Ministry of the Interior, local authorities play a key role. The National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) is responsible for managing the Central Service for Information, Promotion, Consultancy, Monitoring and Technical Support (from now on, Central Service), which is responsible for policy implementation. More specifically, the Central Service is in charge of coordinating the system and the redistribution of beneficiaries among the available places, promoting the setting up of new facilities, providing training and technical support to the municipalities, monitoring the reception activities and issuing periodic reports. SPRAR/SIPROIMI facilities are set up by municipalities on a

voluntary basis by applying to the periodic calls for projects issued by the Ministry of the Interior that covers the 80% (raised to 95% in August 2016) of the costs. The actual management of these reception facilities is seldom kept in the hands of local authorities, whereas the most common solution is the delegation of this function to local CSOs selected through public bids issued by the municipalities.

The decision-making structure of the governmental reception system, under the sole responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior, is much more centralised and, because of its recent origin and loose regulation, it shows a higher degree of heterogeneity in terms of the quality of services delivered compared to SPRAR/SIPROIMI. Under the so-called "refugee crisis," its bulk has been made up of CAS (Extraordinary Reception Centres) (see Figure 5.3). CAS are placed under the responsibility of the prefectures, which are in charge of identifying suitable locations (including abandoned military compounds, former schools, etc.) with no obligation to consult local authorities, and are responsible for overseeing those centres whose management is contracted out to public entities, non-profit or for-profit organisations through public bids.

Yet, consultation with local authorities has increased since 2016, initially as a result of single prefectures' autonomous initiatives and then as a consequence of the Ministry of the Interior's request. Indeed, in December 2016 the Ministry of the Interior and ANCI signed the so-called "Bari Agreement" to fix a ratio of asylum seekers and refugees per municipality[12] and simultaneously introduced a "safeguard clause" establishing that the municipalities whose SPRAR/SIPROIMI reception places met the above ratio would be exempted from the setting up of any new CAS (*Circolare* of the Ministry of the Interior, October 1, 2016; Directive of the Minister of the Interior, October 11, 2016). Following the Bari Agreement, the Ministry of the Interior asked prefectures to improve the dialogue with local authorities in order to agree upon the number of asylum seekers to be hosted in each municipality and the modes of reception. This has in fact become a rather usual practice in a large part of the country (ANCI et al. 2017).

Moreover, the centralisation of the governmental reception system is partially counterbalanced by the involvement of consultative working groups, i.e., the National and the Regional Coordinating Groups on Asylum, which have been primarily conceived as venues for discussion and exchange on the main issues concerning reception, and for achieving political compromises among key stakeholders. Their functioning is regulated by the Agreement on the implementation of the National Plan to address the extraordinary inflow of third-country nationals, adults, families and unaccompanied minors, signed by the Unified Conference State-Regions-Local Authorities on July 10, 2014.

The National Coordinating Group on Asylum is headed by the Ministry of the Interior (Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration) and includes representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, regional and

local authorities (the Conference of the Regions, ANCI, the Union of Italian Provinces—UPI) and CSOs. The latterare Caritas and ARCI: they participate as representatives of the National Asylum Roundtable of CSOs[13] but they actually have a voice because they manage a large share of reception facilities in Italy and are respectively the largest Catholic and centre-left organisations active in reception and social policies in general. UNHCR and the Ministry of Equal Opportunities are involved as invited members. Formally, the National Coordinating Group has always remained a consultative body without the power to make binding decisions. It is tasked with coordination between European and national asylum policies with particular regard to the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and with identification of the main weaknesses of and possible solutions to improve the reception system. In addition, it is responsible for drafting an annual National Operational Plan on Asylum aimed at estimating the need for reception places and their redistribution across the Italian regions[14].

The National Coordinating Group has played a crucial role in shaping the reception system and narrowing the gaps between its ordinary and extraordinary prongs. According to interviewees, the civil society members, namely Caritas and ARCI, through their participation in the Group have not only enhanced the horizontal dimension of the governance of reception, but have also contributed to reinforcing its vertical dimension since they operate in several localities across the country. They have been able to bring to the attention of the National Group "what works and what does not work" in the implementation of reception, "highlighting the discrepancy between CAS and SPRAR/SIPROIMI in terms of quality of services, size of centres, degree of involvement of municipalities" (interview with the Director of the Central Service for Information, Promotion, Consultancy, Monitoring and Technical Support of SPRAR, Torino, July 17, 2018). In fact, the National Coordinating Group has been the only venue where the ordinary and extraordinary systems have been dealt with together. Because of that it has played a crucial role, especially between 2014 and 2016, in reducing the differences between the two systems by further regulating CAS and in promoting the ordinary one, although it has never managed to keep pace with the rapid expansion of CAS (see Figure 5.3). For instance, in 2014 the Ministry of the Interior asked the Prefects to follow some of the key principles of SPRAR/SIPROIMI, including its Guidelines for service delivery, when setting up CAS centres (*Circolare* 104, January 8, 2014; *Circolare* 14100/27/I, May 2, 2014; *Circolare* 0005484, June 27, 2014, *Circolare* 14906, December 27, 2014).

However, the National Coordinating Group, as well as informal consultations between its members, have lost relevance since 2017, when Marco Minniti was appointed Minister of the Interior of the centre-left government led by Paolo Gentiloni. During his mandate, the National Coordinating Group on Asylum met only a couple of times, for mere information purposes and with no involvement in decision-making over the implementation

of reception policies. According to governmental officers, this was because of the approaching political elections: in that period, the search for political consensus prevailed over more technical concerns. Other national-level interviewees declared instead that this was the result of Minister Minniti's more centralised approach to asylum in general, and reception specifically. The centralisation of the decision-making process on reception and the personalisation of decisions were further enhanced by Matteo Salvini, who took over as Minister of the Interior of the Five Star Movement-League coalition government in May 2018. The room for consultation and involvement of different actors in decision-making on asylum and reception shut down completely. From the time, the new government came to power in May 2018 until the end of fieldwork in December 2018, the National Coordinating Group on Asylum met only once to ratify a new bid scheme for governmental reception centres adopted in November 2018, and none of the key stakeholders, including institutional ones, were consulted. As a consequence, the MLG of reception has significantly declined, and SPRAR/SIPROIMI and CAS started to be managed somewhat separately because of the lack of a venue to discuss the reception system as a whole.

The Regional Working Groups on Asylum are set up in each region with the purpose of coordinating and monitoring reception at the regional level. Each of them is headed by the Prefect of each region's capital city and gathers together all of the prefectures of the region, and representatives of the region's government and of ANCI's regional branch. CSOs are not involved in Regional Groups, despite the crucial role they play in the reception system. However, informal consultations with CSOs often occur, although the situation varies substantially across the country (see further in the chapter). Whereas SPRAR/SIPROIMI has always represented a marginal or non-existent issue in discussions within Regional Groups, the latter should play a crucial role in redistributing asylum seekers within each region and in deciding the location of governmental centres.

Yet, the Regional Coordinating Groups have worked in rather heterogeneous ways, as highlighted in the final report of the Parliamentary Commission (Commissione Parlamentare di inchiesta sul sistema di accoglienza, di identificazione ed espulsione, nonché sulle condizioni di trattenimento dei migranti e sulle risorse pubbliche impegnate, 2017), established to investigate the functioning of the reception system. Their functioning has largely depended on the willingness of the prefectures and the regions to cooperate and has thus been significantly affected by both political positions and inter-institutional cooperation's path dependency, as better explained later on. As a consequence, when the fieldwork ended in December 2018 some Regional Groups had assembled only once and the distribution of asylum seekers within each region (one of the main tasks of the Regional Groups) was not always balanced. To make up for this situation, at the end of 2016 ANCI and the Ministry of the Interior signed the above-mentioned "Bari Agreement," which established a specific quota of asylum seekers

and refugees per municipality. This is generally regarded as an attempt to bypass the Regional Coordinating Groups, which did not work properly everywhere. In fact, as a consequence of this Agreement and of decreased inflows, the role of the Regional Groups has significantly declined.

In sum, on the one hand, the national government's consultation with non-public actors and lower levels of government is not binding, so the Ministry of the Interior can decide to what extent the positions of other key actors should be considered. On the other hand, the central government's decisions have in turn been hampered by the prefectures, which do not always stick to them when it comes to the management of the Regional Coordinating Groups and the implementation of internal administrative regulations (*Circolari*) of the Ministry of the Interior. This is because of the high level of discretionary power held by the Italian prefectures, but also their lack of human resources to implement the central government's decisions: while their workload in terms of coordinating and monitoring reception facilities has increased substantially over time, their staff has not been expanded or trained to properly manage these new tasks.

To conclude, whereas on paper the openness and the MLG of reception policies appears to be high in Italy, being dependent on the contingent willingness of the actors involved to cooperate, it can in fact be much more limited.

The functioning of the reception system and the 2018 reform

Under the coalition government led by the Five Star Movement and the League, which came into power in May 2018, the Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini promoted a reform of the reception system. The so-called Decree on Security and Migration (Legislative Decree 113/2018 adopted on October 5, 2018 and converted into Law 132/2018) narrowed down the conditions for obtaining a residence permit based on humanitarian grounds (so-called "humanitarian protection"[15]) and excluded its holders from reception services with a consequent increase of irregular migrants. In fact, the rate of recognition of any form of protection by the Territorial Commissions dropped from 39% in January–June 2018 to 19% in January–June 2019. Moreover, the Salvini Decree neatly distinguished reception services for asylum seekers and for beneficiaries of international protection: the first have to be accommodated in CAS and the second in former SPRAR centres, renamed SIPROIMI by the Decree. Therefore, the Decree put an end to the longstanding attempt to reduce the differences between SPRAR and CAS, and reinforced the two-pronged nature of the Italian reception system.

In addition, the public bid scheme for governmental centres, including CAS, was revised in November 2018 (Decree of the Ministry of the Interior, November 21, 2018). The new regulation suppressed integration services provided in governmental centres and drastically reduced the per capita

daily expenditure limit from 35 euros to 19–26 euros, thus *de facto* incentivising large reception centres, which are more capable of economies of scale compared to small-size facilities.

The overall outcome of the above-mentioned measures is that beneficiaries of humanitarian protection have lost their entitlement to reception services, asylum seekers stay in governmental centres where they do not benefit from integration services, and only beneficiaries of international protection are able to enter SPRAR/SIPROIMI and enjoy integration services.

Considering the changes introduced by Legislative Decree 113/2018 and the main law governing reception in Italy, namely Legislative Decree 142/2015 (which transposed the EU recast Reception Directive 2013/33/EU), the Italian reception system is organised as follows. The provision of first assistance to migrants takes place, first of all, at ports of disembarkation—which encompass hotspots[16] (Lampedusa, Trapani, Pozzallo, Taranto, Messina)—by employing the so-called "hotspot approach." This is based on tight cooperation between Italian police forces, EU agencies (i.e., Frontex, EASO and EUROPOL) and international organisations (i.e., IOM—International Organization for Migration—and UNHCR). Migrants who should be returned to their countries of origin are immediately transferred to the Pre-removal Immigration Detention Centres (CPR), while migrants who want to file an asylum application are transferred to governmental First Reception Centres (CDA and CARA) where they stay until a decision on their application is taken (*Circolare* of the Ministry of the Interior, December 18, 2018). In case of unavailability of places in First Reception Centres, asylum seekers should be hosted in CAS. According to the public bid scheme for governmental centres adopted in November 2018, First Reception Centres and CAS have to provide the following services: intercultural mediation, legal information, health assistance, sociopsychological assistance and pocket money (besides board and lodging); conversely, integration services are not granted. In CARA language learning is also provided. That said in reality CDA, CARA and CAS are extremely heterogeneous in terms of both their size and the quality of services provided.

People who are recognised for international protection or "special permits"[17] should be transferred to SPRAR/SIPROIMI. People can stay there for six months; this initial period may be extended for a further six months under certain circumstances, to be assessed on a case-by-case basis (Ministerial Decree, July 30, 2013). SPRAR/SIPROIMI is generally articulated in small facilities or shared apartments in order to foster beneficiaries' self-reliance and integration into the local communities. Services provided are: intercultural mediation, socio-psychological assistance, legal support, support for accessing public services including health care, vocational training and support for job-seeking and housing-seeking.

According to Legislative Decree 142/2015, specific reception services are to be delivered to vulnerable people and unaccompanied minors. Specific

support has to be granted to vulnerable people in both governmental and SPRAR/SIPROIMI centres in collaboration with local Healthcare Units.

Reception is funded through the National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services, set up by Law 189/2002, where national and EU financial resources devoted to reception are combined. However, the share of expenses covered by EU funds has always been rather small: it was 3.6% in 2015 and 2.7% in 2016 (Corte dei Conti 2018).

As for integration, in order to foster asylum seekers' inclusion in the labour market, in 2015 the time span during which asylum seekers are prevented from working was reduced from six months to sixty days from the formal registration of the asylum application (Legislative Decree 142/2015). In practice, almost no one finds a job in such a short time span given that learning the language and getting familiar with the Italian labour market takes more than a couple of months. Nevertheless, the possibility of registering at Public Recruitment Centres allows asylum seekers to access employability services, such as training on the functioning of the Italian labour market, Curriculum Vitae drafting, etc.

That said, integration services provided in reception facilities have always been conceived as a sort of parallel welfare system since they are not integrated within the general welfare and integration policies. The related economic resources are given to the organisations managing reception facilities, which may provide integration services directly or in cooperation with local public entities. Thus, synergies with general policies depend on the willingness and capacity to cooperate of both the organisations managing reception centres and the public entities responsible for the delivery of welfare services. The latter are mainly the regions for vocational training and employment, and the Centres for Adult Education (CPIA) depending on the Provinces for language learning, whereas cooperation on housing is almost non-existent because of the underdevelopment of public housing services in Italy. Furthermore, Legislative Decree 113/2018 prevents asylum seekers from registering at the municipality where they live and obtaining a "residence card" (or identity card) issued by municipalities (only beneficiaries of international protection can). Although on paper this should not impede access to welfare services, in practice it makes it extremely cumbersome. However, this provision was challenged by several Italian courts, while some municipalities refused to implement it, until in July 2020 the Constitutional Court ruled that this provision was unconstitutional[18].

Finally, in September 2017 the Italian government approved the National Integration Plan for beneficiaries of international protection, as foreseen by Legislative Decree 18/2014, which transposed the EU recast Qualification Directive (Directive 2011/95/EU). However, the Plan does not seem very effective. First, the regions were involved in only a formal consultation with little possibility to actually impact the Plan's drafting, and therefore little commitment to its implementation. Second, the implementation process

and the distribution of tasks among institutional actors have not been clearly defined; thus, its implementation has been limited to pilot actions carried out in three regions (Piedmont, Emilia Romagna and Calabria) with the collaboration of UNHCR, which co-drafted the Plan. The lack of integration measures specifically addressed to beneficiaries of international protection, together with the generally weak Italian welfare provisions, increase the risk of social marginalisation of protection beneficiaries.

Local implementation processes in two localities. Torino in the Piedmont region and Treviso in the Veneto region

The two localities of the province of Torino in the Piedmont region and the province of Treviso in the Veneto region were selected based on the criteria described in the Introduction to the volume. Both regions are located in the north of Italy: Piedmont in the north-west, Veneto in the north-east. They present similar features in terms of socio-economic conditions (both are relatively wealthy regions), ratio of asylum seekers to the resident population (0.25% in Piedmont and 0.20% in Veneto on December 31, 2018[19], that is, respectively, 2.5 and 2 asylum seekers for every 1,000 inhabitants; see also Figure 5.2), and problem pressure (they are not areas of first arrival; asylum seekers are usually relocated there after their arrival and identification). At the same time, the two localities differ under their political profile: the province of Torino in the Piedmont region has traditionally (although not exclusively) been led by progressive majorities belonging to the centre-left[20]; the province of Treviso in the Veneto region has been governed by conservative coalitions less favourable towards migrants, traditionally (although not exclusively) made up of centre-right parties.

Torino and the Piedmont region

Main features of the local reception system and its evolution in the last decade

Torino and some other small municipalities in the Piedmont region have been involved in the reception of refugees and asylum seekers since the 1990s, when people fleeing from the Yugoslav and Kosovo wars landed in Italy. At that time, CSOs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were the first to mobilise and they rapidly managed to involve local public authorities in the management of reception of asylum seekers. The experimentation of this model of cooperation between public actors and CSOs at the local level became a cornerstone for reception of asylum seekers in Italy, as it gave birth to the *Programma Nazionale Asilo* (PNA), later renamed and reformed as SPRAR/SIPROIMI (see above).

During the last decade the local reception system in Piedmont, and in Torino in particular, changed significantly as a result of the sudden increase

in numbers of asylum seekers, in line with the national trend. The first watershed was marked by the North Africa Emergency (see above) that in Piedmont was managed in a coordinated manner by regional authorities, the regional Civil Protection branch and the prefectures without any involvement of the local authorities. According to all local interviewees, even if ENA was generally managed in Piedmont as elsewhere with an emergency approach, it compelled both public and private local actors to acquire skills and professional knowledge in reception of asylum seekers, which proved essential for the management of the following (more significant) wave of arrivals. At that time, the province of Torino was the most affected by the arrival of asylum seekers in Piedmont, hosting slightly less than 1,000 people, while other provinces started to be involved in asylum and reception matters only from 2015. According to several local interviewees, this implied that Torino was more prepared to manage reception in the period 2014–2017 compared to other provinces, such as Cuneo, which have historically attracted mainly economic migrants and therefore were less prepared to manage the reception of asylum seekers (interview with an officer at the Foreign Office of the Municipality of Torino, Torino, October 19, 2018).

At the end of the ENA period, Torino experienced a massive phenomenon of occupation of empty buildings by those expelled from the ENA reception facilities. In the meantime, in 2013, the SPRAR/SIPROIMI Central Service asked the municipality of Torino to increase the number of people hosted through SPRAR/SIPROIMI projects. According to interviewed partners of the municipality of Torino, the municipality gladly agreed and the SPRAR/SIPROIMI places in Torino rose significantly: approximately from 50 in 2011 to 400 for the 2014–2016 programme. This increase in SPRAR/SIPROIMI numbers was the consequence of the municipality's need to ensure the continuity of funding for programmes in support of the integration of refugees formerly hosted with ENA. At the same time, the Prefecture of Torino adopted the SPRAR/SIPROIMI guidelines for the new extraordinary governmental centres (CAS) as well, in line with the national legislation which, until October 2018, aimed to unify first and second reception standards (see above).

The second watershed was thus triggered by the 2014–2017 record arrivals of asylum seekers which significantly impacted not only Torino, but also the other provinces (and municipalities) of Piedmont. If the physical presence of asylum seekers started to become visible with ENA, especially in Torino, the new opening of asylum seekers reception facilities, both CAS and SPRAR/SIPROIMI, in often small and highly dispersed municipalities across the region, made the phenomenon impossible to ignore for the local population (Openpolis and ActionAid 2018). In the province of Torino this increase in numbers and visibility was addressed by the prefecture, together with the Piedmont Region and in coordination with the municipalities of the province, and the numerous non-profit organisations in charge

of managing reception facilities, by creating several networks to coordinate reception and to ensure that best practices were shared, at least within the Torino province. Notwithstanding this approach of Torino institutions to reception conditions, according to representatives of CSOs and local public institutions alike, the paramount necessity of the prefectures to find facilities that were immediately available, especially in the period 2015–2017, led in Piedmont, but also in the Torino province, to the opening of CAS either partially or completely unfit for the purpose, or managed by organisations with no prior experience in the social realm.

At the regional level, the 2014–2017 increase in numbers of asylum seekers led to other significant changes. While at first several CAS were opened without the consent (or even the awareness) of municipalities, mayors became increasingly weary of the phenomenon and started to either oppose strenuously or find alternatives to the proliferation of CAS facilities on their territories. The search for alternatives was often supported by the prefectures. Thus, prefectures advised municipalities to open SPRAR/SIPROIMI in place of CAS, also as a consequence of the introduction in 2016 of the "safeguard clause" (see above). In the case of Torino, the prefecture proposed to consortia of municipalities in the province to establish innovative protocols, in order to hand over the responsibility for CAS to local authorities which, in turn, could regain control over the reception of asylum seekers in their territories. As a consequence, the SPRAR/SIPROIMI increased considerably and the practice of signing Protocols became widespread in Piedmont and more specifically in the Torino province (InMigrazione 2018).

Finally, according to all local interviewees, the political position of municipalities in Piedmont affected their decision to host asylum seekers and refugees and thus to decide to either set up SPRAR/SIPROIMI facilities or not. Municipalities in the province of Novara, for example, decided not to adhere to SPRAR/SIPROIMI even though in 2016 they had the chance to avail themselves of the "safeguard clause." At the time of the interviews (late 2018), there were 893 asylum seekers hosted in CAS in the Novara province and none in SPRAR/SIPROIMI. Interestingly, however, in the city of Torino, where the municipal majority changed in spring 2016, with the electoral victory of the Five Star Movement after more than a decade of centre-left governments, the governance of reception did not change in any significant way. According to some local interviewees, this is partly due to the longstanding presence, both in the prefecture and in the municipality, of people with great experience in the field and with a shared vision; and partly to the historic presence of networks of public and non-profit actors which have always experimented with innovative and effective ways to address other social challenges—e.g., mental disorders (interview with an NGO representative, Torino, October 16, 2018).

In sum, in the last decade, in order to overcome the challenges posed by the significant arrival of people seeking international protection, first in 2011 and then in 2015, the province of Torino in particular, and Piedmont

in general (albeit with some notable exceptions), experienced a strong mobi-
lisation, professionalisation and coordination of all local actors who had a
stake in reception of asylum seekers, including both public and non-profit
actors.

From decision-making to implementation

In Piedmont, asylum seekers' reception was implemented through the coor-
dination of a number of local actors, including public authorities, CSOs and
international organisations. This section presents the actors and their rela-
tionship in the governance of the local reception system while describing
what used to be the process through which an asylum seeker could access
the reception system in Piedmont.

Piedmont's regional hubs are the first entry points in the regional recep-
tion system for asylum seekers coming either from hotspots or from recep-
tion facilities located in other regions. The Piedmont region has two of the
few working regional hubs in Italy—i.e., *Centro Fenoglio*, Settimo Torinese
(TO)[21] and Castello d'Annone (AT) both run by the Red Cross—that ensure
that the distribution of asylum seekers across the region proceeds in an
orderly fashion. The transfer of asylum seekers from the hubs, where they
are usually hosted for a couple of days, is coordinated by the region and
the prefectures in cooperation with the Red Cross. CSOs managing recep-
tion centres are then alerted by the prefecture and go to the regional hub
to accompany the asylum seekers to their centres, either CAS or SPRAR/
SIPROIMI. In the province of Torino, asylum seekers are hosted first in a
CAS (after a short stay in the hub) and then moved to a SPRAR/SIPROIMI
centre following a positive decision of the Territorial Commission on their
international protection application. In Torino there are also reception pro-
jects and networks aiming to support those who have to stop relying on
reception measures but who have not yet become autonomous, coordinated
and financed by the office specialising in migration and asylum issues of the
Diocese of Torino (*Ufficio Pastorale Migranti*).

Prefectures are in charge of writing and managing the public tenders
for CAS and monitoring the activities of these centres. It must be noted
that while the prefectures with territorial jurisdiction are the main refer-
ence points for municipalities, the municipality of Torino instead became
the reference point for other municipalities in its urban area. Torino has
become a model of efficiently managing SPRAR/SIPROIMI and, more
interestingly, the CAS system as well, which has been managed since 2014
following the same guidelines of SPRAR. CSOs have been described by all
local interviewees as crucial actors in the reception system, both in the CAS
system and SPRAR/SIPROIMI. Indeed, in Piedmont, CSOs have experi-
mented with innovative reception methods in coordination with local public
authorities, thus inspiring through a bottom-up process the development of
SPRAR/SIPROIMI, as already mentioned. At the same time, CSOs became

crucial allies and managers of SPRAR/SIPROIMI in Piedmont and supported prefectures in finding and managing reception facilities in the CAS system. In 2018, more than one hundred CSOs were engaged in managing CAS in the province of Torino alone. In addition, an NGO (Italian Red Cross) has a role in managing the regional hubs. Finally, the government of the Piedmont region attends the Regional Coordinating Group on Asylum and manages the AMIF regional funding. These funds helped create and maintain new networks among CSOs and public institutions active in the reception and socio-economic integration of asylum seekers and refugees (e.g., the "Petrarca" project).

The coordination among these actors is quite patchy and *ad hoc*, with the exception of a few coordinating groups, which during the last decade have facilitated exchanges among the local actors involved in the reception system, especially on operational matters, even though these have generally not been acknowledged as decision-making *loci*. The redistribution of asylum seekers across the territory of Piedmont is discussed and arranged at the Regional Coordinating Group on Asylum, which is summoned by the Prefecture of Torino and gathers together representatives from the Piedmont region, all the prefectures of Piedmont and representatives from ANCI's local branch. According to an ANCI Piedmont representative, this coordinating group has been particularly useful in Piedmont to raise awareness among prefectures on the challenges of reception and to discuss the redistribution of asylum seekers among provinces (interview with the Former Deputy Mayor for Social Policies—Municipality of Torino and Current Vice President of ANCI Piedmont, Torino, December 20, 2018). However, prefectures in Piedmont did not take a common approach over the years on reception issues, notwithstanding the opportunity of coordination offered by the Regional Coordinating Group on Asylum.

Another Roundtable on Asylum, summoned at the city level once a month since the 2000s and then formalised in 2011 by the municipality of Torino, had more success in terms of coordinating the work of CSOs managing SPRAR/SIPROIMI centres in the Province of Torino, but also the work of other CSOs and international organisations involved in the delivery of integration services to asylum seekers and refugees. According to a representative of the municipality of Torino, this remained over time an operational venue. Nonetheless, the Torino Roundtable on Asylum was also a venue where consensus was built among public institutions and CSOs, and proposals by both sides on the organisation of the delivery of reception services were discussed (interview with an Officer at the Foreign Office—Municipality of Torino, Torino, October 19, 2018). This implied the possibility of people working in the local reception system in Torino to have a channel through which to communicate to the higher levels of governance their main problems and claims. Moreover, the Prefecture of Torino has adopted an open-door policy towards all CSOs managing CAS in the province and multiple meetings have been held (some in the presence of the local population), not only in Torino but also in the reception centres scattered outside of the city. However, coordination among

organisations managing CAS never became a reality, except through *ad hoc* collaborations and personal ties.

Torino is unique in its governance of reception and the relationship among actors involved in the system, in part because of the creation of multiple networks. Among the most relevant ones are the networks *Non solo asilo* ("Not only asylum") and *SenzaAsilo* ("Without asylum"), in addition to the networks created by the Dioceses and the Valdese Church for the reception of people arriving through humanitarian corridors. These networks are an expression of the necessity of finding places to share not only organisational concerns but also proposals and solutions to common problems and thus to build consensus through a bottom-up process on numerous issues. The network *SenzaAsilo*, for instance, met in 2016 to express to the *Questura* of Torino the need to grant residence permits to asylum seekers who were denied protection status but had already found a job and housing. This network includes not only CSOs but also business owners.

Treviso and the Veneto region

Main features of the local reception system and its evolution in the last decade.

The issue of reception of asylum seekers emerged in Veneto in the 1990s, with the first significant refugee flows from the former Yugoslavia (Serbians first and Kosovars later). In those years, Caritas—the largest Catholic organisation in Italy—was among the few actors to provide first assistance and reception. The first key moment in the evolution of the local reception system in this region (as in the whole country) was in 2011. In the years 2011–2013, Caritas was still the main actor involved in the emergency management of reception under the ENA. A second key moment coincided with the increase in maritime arrivals that started in 2014, peaked in 2015–2016 and lasted until the first half of 2017; this challenged in an unprecedented way the Italian reception system at all levels.

In that period, two distinctive elements characterised the evolution of the reception system in Veneto: the proliferation of CAS established in hotels, and the set-up of regional hubs and large CAS in abandoned military facilities. According to local interviewees, these two reception measures took root in Veneto more than in other regions, and are both linked to the political attitude of a majority of municipal administrations, who decided to back out of any reception responsibility. Therefore, different from other regions, Veneto proved to be an infertile ground for the development of SPRAR/SIPROIMI projects and of a reception model based on "dispersed accommodation." Indeed, in 2017 in Veneto the percentage of asylum seekers hosted in SPRAR/SIPROIMI centres was 4% (Pettrachin 2018).

The adverse attitude of a majority of mayors, not only towards their own direct engagement in the governance of reception, but also towards

the mere presence of asylum seekers on their territory (although hosted in the prefectures' centres) was publicly demonstrated—and was presented to their electorate as a "political victory" against the central government. On several occasions, the prefectures called meetings with the municipalities with the purpose of promoting the creation of SPRAR/SIPROIMI projects, but in most cases their efforts were useless. At the first meeting convened in March 2014 by the Prefecture of Treviso with the mayors of the province, all the mayors left the room in protest (interview with the Director of the local branch of the religious NGO Caritas Treviso, Treviso, October 4, 2018). In another case, the Prefecture of Venice and the then Minister of the Interior Marco Minniti called a meeting with the municipalities of the province, but only twelve out of forty-four mayors participated in the gathering (interview with the former regional coordinator of the religious NGO Caritas North-East, Chioggia, October 31, 2018). As stressed by another interviewee, "Prefectures have desperately tried to obtain the municipalities' help, and to force them to take up the institutional task of managing reception directly through SPRAR" (interview with the Director, the former Director, and a collaborator of the research institution *Centro Studi Immigrazione*—CESTIM—, Verona, October 19, 2018); but they had no instrument to impose such a decision on mayors.

The consequence of this widespread refusal was the concentration of migrants in the few municipalities where abandoned military bases were located. These were transformed by the prefectures into large reception centres or regional hubs. Having limited negotiating power, these small municipalities were forced to accept the presence of a disproportionate number of asylum seekers (compared to their population), who were hosted in inadequate facilities, thus generating an explosive situation. A case in point was the centre established in Conetta (VE), a hamlet counting 170 inhabitants within the village of Cona (less than 3,000 inhabitants), which became the second biggest hub in Italy, hosting up to 1,500–1,800 people in 2017. Second, lacking municipality-led alternatives, for-profit actors became key players and former hotels or hotels facing a decline in guests and economic difficulties were transformed into CAS. In most cases, the owners of these hotels considered reception of asylum seekers as merely a business activity, and this affected the quality of services provided. An anonymous former institutional interviewee confirmed that the negative consequence of having few municipalities implementing reception through SPRAR/SIPROIMI projects or accepting CAS on their territory was that prefectures were forced to establish large reception centres and hubs, and to also involve for-profit actors in the management of CAS, even though they were aware that these solutions could not work (interview with an institutional representative, Venice, December 17, 2018) (see also Calesso and Chaibi 2017).

With regard to the province of Treviso in particular, in 2014–2015 the local reception system was in a situation of "serious emergency" (interview with the Director of the local branch of the religious NGO Caritas

Treviso, Treviso, October 4, 2018) as a result of its limited reception capacity compared to the number of arrivals. In that period, Caritas Treviso played a crucial role as one of the few actors with an expertise in reception, together with a few local cooperatives. However, as explained by the director of Caritas Treviso, "while in 2015 only fifteen municipalities in the whole province were hosting asylum seekers on their territory, nowadays they are about fifty; this shows that there has been a gradual development, if not of reception, at least of a more tolerant attitude towards the presence of asylum seekers" (interview with the Director of the local branch of the religious NGO Caritas Treviso, Treviso, October 4, 2018).

Until 2015, in the whole province there were no SPRAR/SIPROIMI centres. The local reception system was based on a number of CAS and two larger hubs located in abandoned military facilities (*Caserma Serena* opened in Treviso in 2014, and *Caserma Zanusso* opened in Oderzo in 2015) hosting hundreds of asylum seekers. In 2015, two SPRAR/SIPROIMI projects were established by the municipality of Treviso (together with another ten smaller municipalities) and the municipality of Asolo together with the municipality of Possagno. However, the number of available places is very limited: fifty places in Treviso, and fifteen places in Asolo and Possagno.

When considering the factors that led to the creation of these two SPRAR/SIPROIMI projects, local interviewees mentioned: the political willingness of some (centre-left) municipal administrations to finally provide the province of Treviso with its first SPRAR/SIPROIMI system[22]; the prefecture's pressures; and the advantages municipalities could derive from a more functional integration of asylum seekers reception within the local welfare system. In addition, the "safeguard clause" introduced by the national government in 2016 (see above) represented an incentive, especially for the municipality of Treviso, which hosted the highest number of asylum seekers in the province (interview with a representative of the former municipal government—Municipality of Treviso, Treviso, November 19, 2018).

From decision-making to implementation

According to local interviewees, since 2015 in Veneto local-level decision-making and implementation in the field of reception has been largely in the hands of prefectures. As a result of the local administrations' attitude described above, prefectures (upon the Ministry's request) had to establish numerous CAS in order to accommodate the increasing number of asylum seekers. The management of CAS was assigned through a public bid to non-institutional actors (both for-profit and non-profit), who became the prefectures' main interlocutors. According to local interviewees, during the peak in arrivals Prefects used to take decisions concerning the redistribution of asylum seekers across the provinces without any consultation with other institutional actors, especially municipal authorities. "In some cases mayors were not even informed by the prefecture about the arrival of

buses of asylum seekers; these episodes have fuelled tensions and protests" (interview with a representative of the former municipal government—Municipality of Treviso, Treviso, November 19, 2018). Only a minority of municipalities decided to engage in the implementation of reception, either by supporting the establishment of CAS on their territory (often upon the proposal of a CSO) or by directly establishing SPRAR/SIPROIMI projects.

With regard to the region, most interviewees in Veneto affirmed that the regional government has entirely stepped away from the local governance of reception, with the excuse that management of asylum seekers' reception is not under its jurisdiction, but rather is the exclusive authority of prefectures. As noted by the regional coordinator of Caritas, "if on the one hand the regional government might have a good point when affirming this, on the other hand it is also true that other Italian regions have decided to engage in the governance of reception, playing a proactive role both at the national level within the Conference of the Regions, and at the local level within formal and informal roundtables with other local actors" (interview with the former regional coordinator of the religious NGO Caritas North-East, Chioggia, October 31, 2018). Furthermore, a former institutional interviewee stressed that the Veneto region has always opposed the decisions of the national government in the field of reception and was also against the inter-institutional Agreement of July 10, 2014 (see above) (interview with an institutional representative, Venice, December 17, 2018).

As concerns non-profit actors, Caritas and other religious charities have traditionally played a key role in the governance of reception in the province of Treviso. With only one exception (*Cooperativa Una Casa Per l'Uomo*)[23], small locally based cooperatives had no previous experience in the field of reception. Some local interviewees observed that, generally speaking, in Veneto there is a lack of coordination among non-profit actors and limited efforts are made in order to create alliances and pursue common strategies. Nonetheless, a positive example of a network among non-profit actors comes precisely from the province of Treviso, where in 2016 the "Dispersed Accommodation Network" (*Rete Accoglienza Diffusa—RAD*) was established. The network includes a number of religious and non-profit actors involved in the governance of reception that share common values and standards, and aim to promote a reception model based on dispersed accommodation[24].

According to the director of Caritas Treviso, this experience is very promising; "conversely, what is sometimes missing is the necessary support of public institutions; the problem is establishing synergies with institutional actors as well" (interview with the Director of the local branch of the religious NGO Caritas Treviso, Treviso, October 4, 2018). This is a crucial element, as the daily implementation of reception is based not only on the interactions between CAS managing entities and the prefecture, but on a network of relationships involving several institutional actors—e.g., the local *Questura* for residence permits; the local public hospital for health

issues; the Centre for Adult Education for language classes; the Public Recruitment Centre for job and training opportunities.

The actors identified so far may also interact within formal and informal roundtables and coordinating groups. Regarding the Regional Coordinating Group on Asylum (see above), in the case of Veneto the potential of this inter-institutional coordination body was not exploited at all. As reported by a contact person from the regional administration, the Coordinating Group met only once in January 2017 and saw the participation of the Regional Council member in charge[25]. A former institutional actor confirmed that the meeting was held in the presence of the regional government representative, the prefectures of the region, the president of ANCI Veneto, and representatives of some municipalities (interview with an institutional representative, Venice, December 17, 2018). In his view, the main purpose of this meeting was to push mayors to establish more SPRAR/SIPROIMI centres, but he confirmed that, even on that occasion, the feedback was not positive.

Conversely, at the provincial level each prefecture in Veneto has regularly convened Prefectures' Roundtables, gathering the organisations in charge of managing the CAS operating in the province (including both non-profit and for-profit actors) and the *Questura*. Municipalities' representatives normally did not participate in these meetings. A representative of the former municipal government of Treviso affirmed that he has tried to promote the establishment of a common roundtable involving the Prefecture of Treviso, CAS managing organisations and municipalities. In his view, this could be the venue to discuss and coordinate management of the whole local reception system, including both CAS and SPRAR/SIPROIMI. However, he did not manage to achieve this goal during his mandate (interview with a representative of the former municipal government—Municipality of Treviso, Treviso, November 19, 2018).

Interviewees in Veneto described these roundtables as the only assemblies where the daily functioning of reception was discussed and coordinated among actors directly involved in its implementation; therefore, they played a crucial function in making the reception system work. Roundtable meetings were convened regularly, approximately every 2–3 months. In most cases, the issues discussed concerned the day-to-day management of reception (i.e., banal practicalities and bureaucratic issues), as reported by the regional coordinator of Caritas talking about the Prefectures' Roundtables of Venezia and Rovigo (interview with the former regional coordinator of the religious NGO Caritas North-East, Chioggia, October 31, 2018), rather than substantial issues (e.g., dispersed accommodation and socio-economic inclusion) as occurred at the Prefecture's Roundtable of Treviso, according to the director of the local Caritas (interview with the Director of the local branch of the religious NGO Caritas Treviso, Treviso, October 4, 2018). Based on the interviewees' accounts, the proportion between the two was rather heterogeneous across different provincial roundtables. According to both institutional and non-institutional interviewees, relations between

CAS managing organisations, prefectures and the *Questure* within the roundtables were in most cases smooth and conflicts were limited. In sum, if operational coordination (functional to the practical management of reception) at the provincial level has been ensured by the prefectures, what has been missing in Veneto is broader policy coordination at the regional level involving all the stakeholders, including representatives of the region and municipalities.

When reflecting on the main flaws of the local reception system in Veneto, local interviewees focused on the dysfunctionality of the institutional setting. Prefectures were not prepared and equipped to bear the main responsibility in the field of reception and to manage the largest part of the reception system. Therefore, according to most interviewees, prefectures should not be blamed for the way they managed decision-making processes concerning asylum seekers' reception and its implementation. In Veneto, they were not in a position to interact and cooperate with other institutional actors with a stronger planning capacity and proper policy-making authority, i.e., the municipalities and the region. According to interviewees, this was mainly the result of political factors. The regional and local governments, which for the most part share the same political orientation, seem to have established a common front by stepping away from the governance of reception. According to representatives of Caritas, local political parties in Veneto have either publicly expressed their anti-immigrant position and strongly opposed the establishment of CAS on their territory (the League and other minor far-right parties, but also centre-right parties like *Forza Italia*, and in part the Five Star Movement) or have remained silent and for the most part have backed out of the governance of reception (the Democratic Party and centre-left administrations), because they feared losing electoral consensus, especially when local competitors made the refusal of asylum seekers their political flag and were able to mobilise consensus around this option.

Finally, local interviewees maintained that in Veneto a particularly dysfunctional governance of reception (based on CAS managed by for-profit actors and large reception centres in abandoned military facilities) has affected local communities' perceptions and attitudes towards asylum seekers, producing a "culture of refusal" (interview with the former regional coordinator of the religious NGO Caritas North-East, Chioggia, October 31, 2018). In particular, the concentration of a high number of asylum seekers within a small community was identified as the main factor negatively affecting the perceptions of local populations. As a result, in 2016 Veneto was the region with the highest number of anti-immigrant protests in Italy (Pettrachin 2018, based on *Lunaria*'s figures). Local media also played a role in mediatising political protest around asylum issues, thus fuelling the local population's fears and prejudices. "Local communities perceived the arrival of asylum seekers on their territory as a destabilising event; every time there were new arrivals, local newspapers talked about the citizens' anti-migrant protests" (interview with the former regional coordinator of the religious

NGO Caritas North-East, Chioggia, October 31, 2018). An interviewee highlighted the opposite role played by religious actors in Veneto: "Local religious authorities and religious charities like Caritas were extremely helpful not only in the concrete management of reception, but also in mitigating the reactions of local communities" (interview with an institutional representative, Venice, December 17, 2018).

The outcomes

In this section, we assess the policy outcomes with the aim of understanding whether the Italian reception system has become more or less heterogeneous over time. All interviewees agree that heterogeneity increased since 2011 when the inflows started to grow following the Arab Spring and identify three main explanations for this development.

First, the setting up of governmental emergency facilities accentuated the two-pronged nature of the reception system. Against this backdrop, while SPRAR/SIPROIMI centres usually fulfil high reception standards and consist of small facilities or shared apartments, CAS are much more heterogeneous in terms of types of accommodations (including large-size centres) and quality of services provided.

Second, the rapid expansion of the reception system has attracted organisations operating in fields different from asylum and migration and has produced a high heterogeneity in terms of management standards. Many (profit and non-profit) organisations lacked both the skills and human resources to provide adequate services—and, in the worst cases, were merely seeking opportunities to increase their budget with little real commitment to asylum seekers' and refugees' rights and social inclusion.

Finally, the stances and degree of efficiency of public actors involved in reception (especially regions, municipalities and prefectures) as well as the level of collaboration between them have strongly affected policy implementation, constraining the homogeneity of the reception system.

The outcome of this increasing heterogeneity has been that the quality of reception and integration services enjoyed by asylum seekers and protection beneficiaries has largely depended on chance, their distribution across localities and types of facilities being made on the basis of reception places available.

Yet, within this overall process of divergence of policy outcomes in the field of reception, a partial (and temporary) convergence occurred. Since the end of the North Africa Emergency (ENA) in March 2013, no further emergency procedure has been launched (not even in 2016, when a peak of 180,000 arrivals was reached) showing a progressive "normalisation" of reception governance. Moreover, in the period between the end of ENA and the formation of the League-Five Star Movement government in May 2018, national authorities and key stakeholders, such as ANCI, UNHCR and the main national-level CSOs, worked together to reduce the gaps between

the SPRAR/SIPROIMI and CAS facilities. However, this common effort showed two main liabilities. First, it was mainly focused on the regulation of reception facilities while other organisational aspects that could play a role in ensuring an improved management were disregarded (e.g., creating a register of organisations meeting specific quality standards; professional requirements for managing reception centres; etc.). Second, this attempt passed through soft laws, such as internal administrative regulations, inter-institutional agreements and the bid scheme for governmental centres. As a consequence, this gradual process of convergence between the ordinary and the emergency reception systems was abruptly interrupted and its achievements were substantially and easily dismissed by the reforms introduced with Legislative Decree 113/2018 and the new bid scheme for governmental centres adopted in November 2018.

Against this backdrop, local actors have tried to enhance coordination and common solutions within their territories. According to the interviewees in Piedmont and Veneto, in the last few years the local reception system has gradually been evolving towards increased homogeneity within the two provinces considered (Torino and Treviso). This process has been encouraged by the numerous opportunities for dialogue and exchange (e.g., at the Prefectures' Roundtables and within networks of non-profit actors), which have allowed service providers to improve their skills, elaborate common good practices, and improve cooperation with prefectures. According to all of the Piedmont interviewees, the changes towards convergence, especially in the Torino province and much less at the regional level, in the organisation of the system were triggered for the most part by the rapid increase in numbers of refugees and asylum seekers hosted, and significantly less by changes in legislation, modes of funding and political views of the local governments. Interviewees in Veneto agreed that changes in the reception system were mainly triggered by the recurrent asylum crises, especially the one in 2015. However, they also stressed that despite the efforts towards convergence, the political position of, and the low level of collaboration between, institutional actors in Veneto (region, municipalities and prefectures) have strongly affected the implementation of the reception system, constraining homogeneity. In addition, local interviewees in both Piedmont and Veneto stressed that the reform introduced by Legislative Decree 113/2018 produced an abrupt interruption of this gradual process towards increased homogeneity at the local level as well, and they questioned the outcomes achieved up to that moment.

Overall, the (fluctuating) efforts by the central government to better regulate reception and to define clearer standards in order to increase homogeneity throughout the country's territories, or at least curb increasing heterogeneity, have been hampered by the pressure of problems (such as the peaks in arrivals of asylum seekers). Furthermore, the substantial discretion enjoyed by Italian prefectures as well as their actual ability to manage such a challenging task as coordinating emergency reception have

generated a diverse implementation of the central government's decisions. Finally, municipalities and regions' political positions and key actors' willingness to cooperate with the central government (e.g., in the province of Torino) or, on the contrary, to undermine its approach (e.g., in the Veneto region) have been crucial factors in producing limited homogeneity across the country. Overall, convergence seems difficult to achieve and when it is achieved, particularly at the local level, it is pursued through horizontal coordination rather than through enforcement of the central government's decisions, leading to the emergence of locally based solutions rather than to a homogenous reception system throughout the country. Paradoxically, convergence towards common solutions at the local level has brought about a variety of locally based solutions that increased heterogeneity across the country.

Final considerations on MLG

Regarding the presence (or absence) of MLG arrangements in the field of asylum seekers' reception, Italy seems to have been moderately oriented towards MLG. Even though Italy is a regionalist state, which in the last decade has had to deal with a sudden increase of asylum seekers and with an increasingly politicised context, coordination between the national and local levels has been mainly of a consultative nature. The only notable exception is that of the SPRAR/SIPROIMI system, which nevertheless constitutes the smallest share of the Italian reception system. As for the emergency system, the two venues of coordination, i.e., the Regional Coordinating Groups on Asylum and the National Coordinating Group on Asylum, are essentially consultative institutions, whose relevance largely depends on key actors' willingness to act, and therefore has varied over time and across the country. Furthermore, they played a relevant role in policymaking only in the period 2014–2016 (see above).

Overall, since 2011 the governmental reception system's expansion has been more rapid than its regulation, leaving significant room for policy agency at the local level. The two local cases investigated, namely, Torino in Piedmont and Treviso in Veneto, are clear examples of that.

In Piedmont, while at first several CAS were opened without the consent (or even the awareness) of municipalities, mayors became increasingly weary of the phenomenon and started to either oppose strenuously or find alternatives to the proliferation of CAS facilities on their territories. In some cases, in order to avoid further conflict between the Prefecture of Torino and municipalities, innovative protocols were signed: consortia of municipalities, in exchange for their consent to host a certain number of asylum seekers, were entrusted by the prefecture with the tasks of setting up and managing CAS.

The municipality of Torino has gone far beyond anything foreseen by the law in terms of governance of reception. The Roundtable on Asylum,

convened at the city level once a month since the 2000s and then formalised in 2011 by the municipality of Torino, has the goal of coordinating not only the work of CSOs managing SPRAR/SIPROIMI centres in the Province of Torino, but also the work of those involved in the delivery of integration services to asylum seekers and refugees. The roundtable has become a channel through which CSOs can share their problems and claims with local authorities.

The Veneto region, in contrast, represents a case where policy agency was used to undermine the reception system as conceived by national laws. The regional and local governments, which share for the most part the same anti-immigration political orientation, seem to have established a common front by stepping away from the governance of reception. Local political parties in Veneto have either publicly expressed their anti-immigrant position and strongly opposed the establishment of CAS on their territory (the League and other minor far-right parties, but also centre-right parties like *Forza Italia*, and in part the Five Star Movement) or have remained silent and mostly backed out of the governance of reception, because they feared losing electoral consensus (the Democratic Party and centre-left administrations). The consequence of this widespread attitude has been the concentration of migrants in the few municipalities where large facilities, including abandoned military bases, were transformed by the prefectures into reception centres or regional hubs. Conversely, the SPRAR/SIPROIMI project established in 2015 by the municipality of Treviso (the first in the whole province) owes its creation to specific political-institutional factors, namely the political willingness of the then centre-left municipal administration (which governed the city from 2013 to 2018) and the prefecture's pressure to finally provide the province of Treviso with its SPRAR/SIPROIMI system.

In conclusion, in Italy MLG arrangements for asylum seekers' reception appear more relevant than in the centralist countries analysed in this volume but they are non-binding; therefore, they largely depend on the willingness of the Ministry of the Interior and its local branches (i.e., the prefectures) to involve other actors, and on the willingness of key stakeholders to cooperate. Because of that, MLG arrangements changed over time and substantially declined after 2017. For this reason, the first hypothesis formulated in the Introduction to the present book on the emerging MLG arrangements in the field of asylum seekers' reception, according to which MLG policy-making is likely to be more relevant in federalist/regionalist state structures than in unitary states, is only partially confirmed.

The relevant impact of socio-political legacies and the political culture in shaping reception at the local level, as well as the refusal to host asylum seekers by the Veneto region and the large majority of its municipalities lead us to also reject the second hypothesis, according to which MLG arrangements develop from below to more efficiently address particularly complicated issues that require coordination among many stakeholders. These findings instead confirm the third hypothesis, according to which

MLG will eventually stem from the agency of local-level authorities and non-public actors depending on their definition of the situation and interest in the issues at stake.

Concerning the instances of multilevel policy-making illustrated in the Introduction to this volume, the Italian case shows relevant MLG arrangements on paper. In practice they vary over time and across the country: they played a crucial role in the period 2014–2016 and have lost relevance since 2017 so that hierarchical policy-making appears eventually to prevail, even though partially counterbalanced, especially in the reception policies' implementation at the local level, by instances of network governance resting upon the collaboration between public and non-public actors.

Notes

1 Leila Giannetto wrote the section on problem pressure and that on Torino and Piedmont; Irene Ponzo wrote the section on the Italian reception system; Emanuela Roman wrote the Introduction and the section on Treviso and Veneto. The three authors co-authored the last two sections.

2 Representatives of the regional branch of ANCI, of the Prefectures of Treviso and Venice, of the main CSO managing the SPRAR/SIPROIMI of the municipality of Treviso, and the current and former mayors of Treviso either refused to take part in the research or did not reply to our requests. As concerns the regional government, the responsible officer declined, and we were unable to schedule a meeting with the relevant political representative, despite repeated attempts.

3 The document released by the Ministry of Interior does not include third-country nationals crossing into Italy through land borders (i.e., the border with Slovenia).

4 For further information, see https://www.interno.gov.it/it/temi/immigrazione-e-asilo/modalita-dingresso

5 A comparison between numbers of third-country nationals disembarked and the asylum requests in Italy is available at: https://www.openpolis.it/esercizi/la-stretta-del-decreto-sicurezza-al-sistema-di-accoglienza/

6 In 2017, the asylum procedure in Italy already lasted, on average, more than two years, according to the then Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini. https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/339764.pdf

7 Official Italian version available at http://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/Libia.pdf Unofficial English version available at http://www.asgi.it/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ITALY-LIBYA-MEMORANDUM-02.02.2017.pdf

8 For further information, see https://www.camera.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg18/attachments/upload_file_doc_acquisiti/pdfs/000/001/791/Memorie_Prefetto_Michele_Di_Bari.pdf

9 Ministry of Interior, *Cruscotto statistico al dicembre 31, 2018*, available at: http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/cruscotto-statistico-giornaliero

10 For further information, see https://www.siproimi.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Atlante-Sprar-Siproimi-2018-leggero.pdf

11 The ordinary system was called SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) until the 2018 reform which changed its name into SIPROIMI (Protection System for Beneficiaries of International Protection and Unaccompanied Minors) (see further information in the chapter). In order to avoid multiple labels throughout the chapter, we call it SPRAR/SIPROIMI.

12 It fixed a ratio of 2.5 hosted asylum seekers per 1,000 residents with adjustments for small municipalities under 2,000 residents (fixed quota of six reception places) and for the capital cities of metropolitan areas (2 places per 1,000 residents).

13 The organisations belonging to the Asylum Roundtable of CSOs are the following: A Buon Diritto, ACLI (*Associazioni Cristiane Lavoratori Italiani*), Amnesty International, ARCI, ASGI (*Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione*), Caritas Italiana, Casa dei Diritti Sociali, Centro Astalli, CIR (Consiglio Italiano per i Rifugiati), CNCA (Coordinamento Nazionale Comunità di Accoglienza), Comunità di Sant'Egidio, FCEI (*Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche in Italia*), MEDU (*Medici per i Diritti Umani*), MSF (*Medici Senza Frontiere*), Oxfam Italia, Save The Children, Senza Confine. UNHCR is a permanent invited member with no voting rights.

14 However, after the Bari Agreement was signed in December 2016, the annual National Operational Plan was not adopted. Some interviewees explain this with the central government's belief that the Agreement was sufficient to provide the necessary criteria for redistribution, showing the government's limited attention to policy planning (interview with a representative of an international organisation, Rome, October 11, 2018).

15 This was an additional national form of protection foreseen by Italian law (Legislative Decree 286/1998, article 5.6). It is alternative and residual to the refugee status and subsidiary protection provided for by EU law.

16 Hotspots are regulated by a law passed two decades ago, i.e., the so-called *Legge Puglia* (Law 563/1995), recalled under Legislative Decree 142/2015, article 9. Legislative Decree 13/2017 (converted into Law 46/2017) further regulates the procedures at hotspots and defines them as "crisis points" (*punti di crisi*).

17 "Special permits," as modified by Legislative Decree 113/2018, include residence permits granted for medical treatment, environmental disasters in the country of origin, acts of civic value, social protection, victims of domestic violence and victims of labour exploitation.

18 Office of the Constitutional Court, Press Release, July 9, 2020; https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/documenti/comunicatistampa/CC_CS_20200709165957.pdf

19 This is the percentage of asylum seekers and protection beneficiaries hosted in reception centres (ca. 11,000 in Piedmont, ca. 9,400 in Veneto) compared to the total resident population of the regions (ca. 4.3 million in Piedmont, ca. 4.9 million in Veneto) as of December 31, 2018. Asylum seekers and protection beneficiaries who are outside the reception system are not included.

20 Since the end of 2018, when the fieldwork for the present chapter was concluded, the Piedmont region has experienced a drastic change of administration with the election, in June 2019, of a centre-right majority (*Forza Italia*, the League, and *Fratelli d'Italia*).

21 *Centro Fenoglio* was already being used as a hub during the ENA period although it only officially became a regional hub in 2014. In 2015–2016 this regional hub hosted up to 800 asylum seekers, who would remain there from one day to two weeks maximum when arrivals were peaking.

22 In particular, in the case of Treviso, the establishment of a SPRAR project was included in the political programme of the centre-left coalition that won the local elections in 2013 and governed the city until June 2018, when a League-led coalition returned to power.

23 For additional information, see https://www.unacasaperluomo.it

24 For additional information, see http://www.laesse.org/news/attiva-treviso-la-rete-laccoglienza-diffusa/

25 E-mail conversation, September 27, 2018.

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