

SEBASTIAN PAUL<sup>1</sup>

## A COMPARISON OF MEDITERRANEAN REFUGEE CAMPS: THE SITUATION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES IN GREECE AND ITALY

*The article examines the situation of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy and Greece with a particular focus on conditions in refugee camps. Whereas Italy can provide relatively acceptable living conditions in camps but fails to address the issue of homeless migrants in provisional camps, the situation in Greece is devastating. The Mediterranean countries are incapable of improving living conditions for migrants, and reasons for fleeing remain high. This paper compares the situation in both countries, and the findings emphasize the structural differences between Greece and Italy in terms of economy, location, policy implications, and the origin of asylum seekers and refugees.*

### INTRODUCTION

Since 2015, the EU countries on the Mediterranean Sea have become the foremost destinations for asylum seekers and refugees from the Middle East and the African continent. As a consequence, the influx of millions of migrants has broken the unity of European states into those who are willing to accept fleeing persons (e.g., Germany) and others that are not (e.g., Hungary). In the center of this dilemma are Greece and Italy. Both countries are first destinations for migrants arriving by sea and so host a significant number of people in so-called ‘reception centers.’ This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the situation of these asylum seekers and refugees in Greece and Italy and the devastating conditions in refugee camps in the Mediterranean region of the EU, as well as these countries’ contributions to the European refugee crisis. The relationship between poor living conditions and their effect on movement is explored.

The research aims to answer two questions: ‘What are the differences between refugee camps in Greece and Italy?’ and ‘Do they provide satisfactory living conditions for asylum seekers and refugees?’. The article conducts qualitative research and evaluates the situation of migrants in Greek and Italian camps by applying an analytical framework allowing comparisons between the living conditions of camps in both countries. Each case study includes current statistics of migrants in Greece and Italy, analyses the funding requirements of the camps, and concludes with a full description of the situation in the camps. The situation of the camps is evaluated by addressing factors of accommodation, nutrition, education, and health care.

Findings show that the situation in Greece is alarming, and many uprisings in the form of riots have already occurred in Greek refugee camps. All camps are incredibly overcrowded, the

<sup>1</sup> PhD student at the International Relations Multidisciplinary Doctoral School, Corvinus University of Budapest  
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conditions are adverse, and doctors warn of the outbreak of diseases. If people can make it to the Greek mainland, they can improve their living standards; however, people usually have to stay for months in the camps.

In contrast, the camp conditions in Italy compared to Greece quite good, but that does not mean they are sufficiently livable. Although the conditions in Italy are still miserable, there are, at least, no distribution battles over scarce resources, and the Italian state has still not lost its control over the 'official' camps. The main issue in Italy is the situation of homeless refugees or asylum seekers who have lost their right to proper accommodation (due to Dublin regulations, for instance) and live in improvised camps.

Neither Greece nor Italy can improve the situation of asylum seekers and refugees in camps. There are no incentives for people to stay in the region and to not flee to other parts of Europe. In any case, a new development strategy for camps, in general, is required since camps in Greece and Italy can not significantly enhance living conditions.

## **THE ROLE OF CAMPS IN THE CONTEXT OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEE STUDIES**

Migration has always been an essential part of human behavior (McNeil & Adams, 1978). Whereas neoclassical scholars such as Ravenstein (1885; 1889) or Lee (1966) followed push-pull patterns with a strong focus on economic aspects of the argument, the discussion has become more nuanced in the past decades. At the moment, there are approximately 272 million migrants worldwide (UN, 2019a), which is a total increase of 51 million migrants when compared to 2010 (UN, 2019a) with seventy-one million of them categorized as 'forcibly displaced people' (IDRs<sup>2</sup>, refugees, and asylum seekers) (UNHCR, 2020a). Even though this figure is tremendously high, it is still relatively small in comparison to the world population of 7.8 billion. Therefore, the vast majority of people worldwide do not migrate, even though many more of them should migrate according to push-pull models and economic circumstances (King, 2012). Thus, simple push-pull models cannot capture the whole complexity of the field and, therefore, the debate concerning migration has changed in the last 30 years. Castles and Miller (1993; 2009) describe the current era as 'The Age of Migration' and concluded that international migration 'has accelerated, globalized, feminized, diversified, and become increasingly politicized' (2009, 10-12).

Following Malmberg's approach (1997), migration operates in time and space and has to overcome the obstacles of distance and 'time in migration' (Cwerner, 2001). When speaking of international migration, a border typically needs to be crossed to migrate from one sovereign state to another (if there is no border-crossing, it is internal migration). Although this appears at first glance pretty obvious, it is not. Borders are abstract concepts and have been set up by humans. There is no 'natural' or 'universal' law, which defines borders. Thus, borders can suddenly change or disappear overnight. The examples of the former Soviet Union and the former Republic of Yugoslavia demonstrate how quickly these changes can happen. There are also vast differences regarding the permeability or density of borders, free movement in the Schengen Area, and closed external borders (King 2012). Concerning the time factor, a person usually

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<sup>2</sup> Internally displaced persons.

needs to live at least one year in the host country to be recognized as a migrant. However, the range reaches from one year to ten years or permanent residence. Temporary migration, otherwise, is very often connected with return migration to the original country, while permanent settlers only visit their original country (ir)regularly (King, 2012).

Furthermore, there is often the misconception that people can only migrate between two different countries (back and forth). Hence, cases where people move forward to a third country (or get stuck somewhere in between), are often ignored. Nevertheless, this form of 'onward' migration becomes more critical and common since migrants are spending a significant amount of time on their journey in countries not intended to be their destination. Suter (2012), who investigated the routes of Sub-Saharan migrants, concluded that Morocco, Turkey, and Libya were merely transit countries for most people on their way to Europe. Collyer (2007) came to similar results by tracing back the routes (first crossing the Sahara, then the Mediterranean Sea) of West African migrants to Europe.

All these studies provide comprehensive approaches and contribute to the field of migration studies, but have their limitations in terms of camps. Malmberg's (1997) and Cwerner's (2001) elaborations are distance and country orientated. They are not dealing with the case of transit zones, and according to King's (2012) definition, it is difficult to classify people in camps under a particular category as 'permanent settlers' or 'temporary migrants.' In contrast, Suter (2012) and Collyer (2007) recognize transit zones in their research but are also not considering the singular role of camps in the process of migration to Europe properly.

Subsequently, since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, asylum seekers and refugees have gained more attention from scholars. Usually, their research is following the aspiration and ability model (Carling, 2002; Carling & Collins, 2018), an approach, which is considered to be a more nuanced and flexible approach in comparison to neoclassical models. This development made fleeing reasons more critical, as well as the decision-making process behind destination choices. Whereas, Davenport et al. (2003) and Melander and Öberg (2007) stressed the effects of armed conflicts, human rights violations, and political threats as push factors, Neumayer (2004; 2005) and Moore and Shellmann (2007) focused on the analysis of where people do go. Their findings demonstrate that some countries are more attractive than others (e.g., countries with migration-friendly governments), and people from conflict zones mainly flee to neighboring countries. Again, these findings explain migration decisions but only reflect some aspects of the journey and neglect the role of camps.

Refugee camps are still a relatively new phenomenon and are only barely covered by the literature. Camps are complex socio-economic models that require an interdisciplinary approach that goes beyond the oversimplification of simple push-pull approaches. Newer studies, such as 'Push-pull plus' (Van Hear et al., 2017), consider 'migration complexes' but are still lacking in terms of the situations in camps by ignoring the people that are 'locked' in a no-man's land in those camps. The approach by Paul (2019) aims to close this gap by enhancing the debate with 'stay' factors in the context of camps, including satisfaction of basic human needs, development programs and urbanization processes, cultural, political, and economic participation, and employment.

Even though camps are supposed to be only short-term solutions for migrants, the reality is different. Usually, people stay at least for several months or years in the camps, and some of them even forever (de Montlocs & Kagwanja, 2000). Consequently, camps develop their own character and become complex socio-economic societies in terms of infrastructure, accommodation, small businesses, and markets. This circumstance makes camps, for many people, into more than just transit-zones on their way to their destination country. Very often, camps become the 'new home' for asylum seekers and refugees for the long-term.

However, just because camps host people for a significant amount of time does not mean they can provide sufficient living conditions, or eliminate push factors. It more accurately demonstrates that the obstacles (e.g., restrictive immigration laws) for many people remain too high to overcome and prevent them from continuing their journey. As early as 1998, Crisp and Jacobsen elaborated on the devastating conditions in most camps and criticized the lack of international standards. Despite all the efforts of international organizations like the UNHCR, the situation has not significantly changed in the past decades. In general, health care, nutrition, education, and housing are still serious issues (see Toole et al., 1988; Paardekooper et al., 1999; Sharara & Kanji, 2014; Sirin & Sirin, 2015; Acarturk et al., 2015). Berti (2015) sees scarce resources in the camps as a significant threat for the inhabitants and states that they burden the host country disproportionately. Another worrying aspect has become the security aspect of camps in terms of international terrorism and radicalization in recent years (Milton et al., 2013).

Therefore, camps cannot be considered as a sustainable solution for asylum seekers and refugees since people do not see long-term prospects there for themselves or their families. The vast majority ends up in camps because they have no other option. Therefore, people get stuck in 'no-man's land' because they can neither go back to their country of origin nor continue their journey to their destination. The question of if camps could reduce migration incentives by providing sufficient living conditions needs further research. Indeed, the intention of migration studies has, overall, slightly shifted to asylum seekers and refugees, but the role of camps in the context of migration is still little-known.

## METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN

The research is qualitative and aims to make the conditions of refugee camps in Greece and Italy comparable. The objective of the paper is to identify differences between camps in Greece and Italy. For this purpose, I applied an analytical framework based on UNHCR data, insights of the European Commission, and coverage from credible media and reporters. The results of the evaluation allow conclusions, which emphasize the importance of living conditions in camps in the context of migration to Europe. The table below explains the evaluation criteria.

Table 1. Evaluation of Camps in Greece and Italy

Evaluation of living conditions in camps	Greece	Italy
Figures, Numbers, and Statistics	The first section provides essential data regarding asylum seekers and refugees in Greece and Italy, including the number of migrants and their countries of origin. Additionally, the data shows the current trend of migration movements to these countries.	
Funding	Usually, refugee camps are dependent on funding from international organizations, states, or private donors. Whether the camps fulfill their funding requirements or not, says something about the situation in the camps, and the living conditions that they provide.	
The Situation in the Camps	The last section of the case studies elaborates on the living conditions in camps by using insights from media, NGOs, and other researchers. The focus is on the satisfaction of basic human needs such as nutrition, health care, education, and housing conditions.	

Of course, the work also has some limitations and weaknesses. Due to financial and time constraints, I was not able to visit any of these camps myself. Unfortunately, field research with in-depth interviews and surveys among asylum seekers and refugees was not possible. The following points are legitimate criticism:

- Subjective evaluation: The evaluation of ‘living conditions’ is, indeed, very subjective. There is no universal formula for it since many of these findings base on personal opinions and impressions. Everyone experiences ‘living conditions’ differently. What one person might consider as ‘reasonable,’ is for another devastating. The research is dependent on sources from international organizations and state institutions, as well as on field studies from reliable media outlets.
- Selection bias: The living conditions in the camps can vary significantly from camp to camp since it is nearly impossible to get an overview of every single camp. Thus, the ‘extreme case’ (negative and positive) may get the most attention in media coverage (e.g., camps on Greek islands), and it is often hard to make generalized statements, which fairly reflect the situation in the whole country.
- False information: Some of the information in the next section could be simply wrong based on insufficient research and field studies.
- Manipulation/Political Agenda: The migration topic has become highly controversial in recent years. There are many different interests, and not everyone might want to describe the actual situation, but instead follow a political agenda in order to accomplish specific goals.
- State Propaganda: This point is related to the previous one. The state, or more precisely the government of a state, might use its power to influence various aspects of the discussion in his favor.

## GREECE

### FIGURES, NUMBERS & STATISTICS

According to the UHNCR, there are currently 112,300 refugees or migrants in Greece, 71,200 in the mainland, and 41,100 on the islands (UHNCR, 2019a). In 2019, the number of new arrivals had increased significantly by 50 percent or 74,600 people in comparison to the previous year. Most of the new arrivals are families with children from Syria or Afghanistan. The camps on the islands are tremendously overcrowded since 36,400 people sharing space (camps) designed initially for only 5,400 people. In December 2019, the UHNCR had to provide cash assistance to 67,300 people and 25,500 relief items to people in need. In December 2019 alone, the UHNCR contributed 8.7 million EUR. The organization also rents buildings and accommodations across the country. In 2019, the UHNCR was able to provide accommodation for 25,800 asylum seekers and refugees.

### FUNDING

The biggest donor is by far the European Union and its member states (UNHCR, 2020b). Two significant funds are responsible for the donations to Greece. The ‘Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund’ (AMIF) and the ‘Internal Security Fund’ (ISF) (EC, 2019a). The AMIF is

intended to improve reception capacities, maintain the standards of asylum procedures, support the integration process of migrants, and improve the effectiveness of return programs. The ISF, on the other hand, is a support program to protect borders and fight international crime organizations. In the period from 2014 until 2020, Greece received 328.3 million EUR from the AMIF and 285.2 EUR from the ISF (613.5 million EUR in total). However, this is not all. The EU also provides additional emergency assistance. Since 2015, the EU has contributed 816.4 million EUR to other international organizations and NGOs that are operating in Greece. Their aim is to lower the humanitarian crisis for refugees and asylum seekers. On rare occasions and under exceptional circumstances in crises, the Commission can apply the ‘Emergency Support Instrument.’ This mechanism is designed to support people in need, as well as member states, UN agencies, NGOs, and other international organizations that were cooperating with member states during major crises. Since 2016, the EC has contributed 643.6 million EUR via this mechanism.

The latest funding update is from February 2020. At the moment, the UNHCR has received only five percent of its total funding requirements for 2020 (UNHCR, 2020b), which means, by using statistical projection, the UHNCR would not be able to reach its requirements by a large margin.

### **THE SITUATION IN GREECE AND THE CAMPS**

Greece has a long tradition of migration and refugee camps. Papadopoulou did (2004) research on Greece as an essential transit-country and its role in the migration to Western Europe. After the outbreak of the refugee crisis in 2015, several other scholars investigated the Greek situation. Sotiris & DeMond (2017) interviewed 50 volunteers in refugee camps, and Kousoulis et al. (2016) concluded that the Greek health care system is dysfunctional, and the necessary medical care for Syrian refugees has been insufficient. Hermans et al. (2017) stated there is a crucial need for mental and dental health care in refugee camps, and Ben Farhat et al. (2018) examined the harsh conditions for refugees during their journey and stay in Greece in terms of violence and mental health.

In October 2019, the UHNCR published a situation report about dangerously overcrowded reception centers on Greek islands after the arrival of over 10,000 new asylum seekers and refugees and a total of 30,000 people living in inhumane conditions (UNHCR 2019b). The situation on Lesbos, Samos, and Kos is critical. The situation of the Moria center on Lesbos is especially alarming. Shelters designed for 2,000 to 3,000 people currently house 12,600 people. The report says 100 people shared one toilet, and a fire in a container that killed a woman led to riots and clashes with the local police. On Samos, 5,500 people had to live in a space designed for only 700-800 people without access to proper nutrition or medical care. On Kos, 3,000 people are staying in an area planned for 700. The UHNCR called this situation ‘inadequate,’ and ‘insecure,’ and ‘inhumane’ and demanded that at least 5,000 people be transferred from the islands to the mainland for further asylum procedures. New and more accommodation was demanded. Again, a long-term solution and a concept for the integration of refugees was completely missing. Four thousand four hundred unaccompanied children had to live in these worrying conditions, and most of the shelters were not intended to house children. Hundreds of children had no other choice than to live with strangers in a warehouse on Moria. On Samos, children even were forced to sleep on container roofs. The UHNCR describes this situation as ‘extremely risky’ and

‘potentially abusive’ for unaccompanied children in Greece and continued by criticizing the EU migration policy for not allowing these children to reunite with their families in the EU.

The Tagesschau (German State Television) reported in November 2019 that the Greek government had decided to shut down the camps on Lesbos, Samos, and Kos. The current reception centers shall be replaced by new container facilities used as ‘Identification and Departure Centers’ with capacities for 5,000 people each. These new facilities provide water, electricity, and sanitation. The spaces are designed for people who have no chance to get asylum status. The inhabitants of the containers will not be allowed to leave the new camps. The speaker of the Greek government said that the original concept was to send a message: People should not come to Greece after the country has restricted its immigration laws even more. As a solution, Greece wants to transfer at least 20,000 people from the islands to the mainland and accommodate them there in apartments or former military facilities.

Nevertheless, people continue arriving on the islands, and it is still not clear what should happen to them. Some smaller camps are planned on Greek islands, but the UNHCR is skeptical if the new plans comply with the UN charter. In December 2019, Caritas International reported in ZEIT ONLINE that the number of people in Moria Lesbos had increased to 15,000 (5,000 of them children), and the migrants in camps are suffering more because of the cold winter. Many people are physically and psychologically sick. The Commission was anxious about the situation, but other member states still refused to relocate people, not even the children. Thus, at the end of November, there was only space for 2,216 children, according to the National Center for Social Solidarity. Approximately 3,000 children were still without proper accommodation. Deutschlandfunk came in December 2019 to a similar assessment (Göbel 2019). Christos Christou from Medicins Sans Frontiers International compared the situation in Greece with war zones and stated that EU-Turkey has failed. Critics claim that there is too much bureaucracy involved, and the asylum procedures are not efficient. The result is almost no readmission to the country of origin can be realized, but the migration flows from Turkey, and other states continue.

The latest update is from February 2020. SPIEGEL ONLINE reported about demonstrations on Greek islands, Lesbos in particular, against EU and Greek policy (Christides & Lüdke, 2020). The migrants claim that they are held hostage for months and years on the islands. There were again clashes with the Greek police. Footage showed children trying to escape teargas as well as several arrests of demonstrators.

Furthermore, Greek citizens from the island demonstrated against the situation on the island. The atmosphere is tense and can be described as ‘everyone against everyone’ since the number of migrants has increased to 42,000 on the islands (20,000 on Lesbos). The conservative Greek government has applied its new migration system, which says the asylum decision must be made within 25 days for new arrivals. The consequence is more deportations without sufficient examination of the cases.

On the other hand, people who are already on the island still have to wait for months or years until their asylum status is determined because of the changes in the Greek asylum procedures. The UNHCR reports that, since January, people are getting arrested and immediately have to defend themselves in court without any legal assistance. The goal of the government is to deport 200 people every week. Currently, there are nearly 100 new arrivals daily on Greek islands, which is, for February, an extraordinarily high number. The predictions are that this number will increase in the upcoming months when the weather gets warmer. Further escalation in- and outside the camps is feared. Greece has still not the capacity to manage these substantial migration flows.

Just a few weeks ago (mid-February), Time magazine (USA) reported UNHCR calls for ‘emergency measures’ and The Guardian (UK) published an interview with Dr. Hana Pospisilova, who volunteers on Lesbos, with the following remarks: ‘I am an experienced doctor, I have seen many patients in my life, but what I saw there had me crying. I saw many children I was worried about would die because they were suffering malnutrition. I met a baby who smelled bad; his mother had not washed him for weeks because there was only cold water, and she was worried he would die.’ She concludes with a warning regarding the risk of disease outbreaks: ‘People come and go to the medical facilities, they take antibiotics, they are still coughing, they still have a temperature. If you read about Spanish flu, it was exactly like this that is began to spread, in overcrowded facilities where people had a viral infection that became a bacterial infection that killed them.’

## ITALY

### NUMBERS, FIGURES & STATISTICS

Italy is another country that has a long tradition with migration because of its Mediterranean location and proximity to the African continent. The most common way migrants arrive in Italy is by sea. Since the outbreak of the refugee crisis in Europe, and even before that, Italy has become one of the main destinations for refugees and asylum seekers. In 2014, 170,100 people arrived by sea, followed by 153,842 in 2015, 181,436 in 2016, 119,360 in 2017, 23,370 in 2018, and 11,471 (UNHCR, 2020b). Regarding the demographics, 70 percent are male, 10 percent female, and 20 percent children. In the same period, approximately 16,000 people died or are still missing on their way to Europe in the Mediterranean Sea.

In November 2019, there were 95,020 asylum seekers and refugees in Italy (UNHCR, 2019c). They are housed across the country in reception facilities. Sixty-seven thousand nine hundred seventy-one people are accommodated in first-line reception facilities in Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, and Piedmont. Another 24,568 people live in second-line facilities, which are primarily in Sicily and Latium. Four hundred eighty-one persons lived in so-called hotspots regions, in particular Sicily.

From January 1<sup>st</sup> until the 30<sup>th</sup> of October, Italy has received 29,526 new asylum applications. Thus, the number of asylum applications decreased by 38 percent in comparison to the same period of the previous year (47,475). By far, the largest group of asylum applicants comes from Pakistan (20 percent), followed by Nigeria (8 percent) and Bangladesh (6 percent). Syria was nowhere near the top-groups. The most sea arrivals register in Lampedusa. The latest numbers are from February 2020. There are already 2,072 sea arrivals since January 1<sup>st</sup> (UNHCR, 2020c).

### FUNDING

Indeed, Italy is benefiting from the same EU funds as Greece does. From 2015 until May 2019, Italy has received EU support in the form of AMIF and ISF (EC, 2019b). The aim was to strengthen Italy’s borders and to help Italian authorities manage migration inflows. In total, Italy has received 950.8 million EUR; 519.9 million EUR came from the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund and 434.9 million EUR from the Internal Security Fund. The vast majority of the money was awarded under the provisions of EU long-term funding and national programs (724.4 million EUR). The funding is allocated at the beginning of each EU budget period

(2014-2020) and is managed and implemented in compliance with the Commission. The other 226.4 million EUR were awarded as EU short-term funding in the framework of 'Emergency Assistance,' which can be requested by every EU member state under certain urgent circumstances. The institutions and organizations that benefited most from EU funding are the Ministry of Interior, Coast Guard, Financial Police, Navy, and the Ministry of Defence.

### THE SITUATION IN ITALY AND THE CAMPS

Recent publications concerning refugee camps mainly focus on the outbreak of diseases. Ciervo et al. (2016) identified poor living conditions, famine, war, and refugee camps as 'major risk factors for epidemics' by analyzing cases of louseborne relapsing fever and its connection with asylum seekers, who stayed for a while in camps in Africa and Sicily, Italy. Stefanelli et al. (2017) contributed similar research by investigating cases of infection with serogroup X meningococci, another infectious disease. The outspread of the disease was observed in Italian refugee camps, specifically in reception centers. The authors conclude that diseases like this are an 'emerging health threat for persons arriving from Africa.'

The Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration (ASGI), located in Italy, provided a comprehensive overview of the living conditions in refugee camps and reception centers in Italy on the website of the Asylum Information Database (2020)<sup>3</sup>. The general regulation says people should be treated with respect regarding private life, gender, age, physical and mental health, family, and vulnerable persons. Nevertheless, the conditions in the reception centers can vary significantly between reception centers, and unfortunately, annual reports about the circumstances in reception centers for Italy are not available. Asylum seekers usually have to stay for several months in one of the facilities. The system is divided into 'First Reception Centers' and 'Temporary Centers.' The First Reception Centers are described as big, overcrowded, and isolated facilities that have almost no connection to Italian urban centers or the outside world. Usually, these places do not have the same standards as smaller reception centers. Limitations of these centers are, for example, a lack of living space, legal advice, and social life. The Italian NGO *LasciateCIEntrare* visited the first reception centers in Sant'Anna (Crotone, Calabria), Mineo (Catania, Sicily), Villa Sikanìa (Agrigento, Sicily), Cavarzerani (Udine, Friuli-Venezia Giulia), and Friuli (Udine, Friuli-Venezia Giulia) in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. In Sant'Anna, doors could not be closed, and bathrooms had to be shared, unaccompanied children were treated as accompanied, and the medication in the hospitals was insufficient. In Mineo, probably the most famous camp, people lived isolated entirely from the outside world, the sanitation was precarious, and infrastructure in total was ailing.

Furthermore, security was a big issue considering black markets, exploitation, prostitution, and drug trafficking. The camp in Cavarzerani was overcrowded, people had to live in tents (no light and heating), and the hygienic conditions were critical as well. In 2018, an Afghan Dublin returnee committed suicide in the camp. The Friuli camp in Udine opened as a response to the adverse conditions in Cavarzerani.

<sup>3</sup> The Asylum Information Database website is financed by the EU AMIF fund.

The Temporary Centers should guarantee the same standards as the First Reception Centers. However, NGOs and reporters criticized the conditions of the facilities, lack of hygiene, and the insecure environment. In Enea (Rome, Lazio), 316 persons had to share three washing machines, and there was no hot water. In Roggiano Gravina (Cosenza, Calabria), everyone received the same medicine regardless of their actual health issues. In Piano Torre di Isnello (Palermo, Sicily), the camp administration did not heat the buildings, and there were not enough clothes for the cold winter months available. In Telesse (Campania), there were similar problems. Other temporary centers are located in Milan (Lombardy), Casotto (Veneto), Cona (Venezia, Veneto), and Montalto Uffugo (Calabria).

Moreover, in 2018, over 10,000 asylum seekers lived in makeshift camps and were not allowed to participate in the reception system. These camps are described as improvised and are spread across the country, including Piedmont, Lazio, Apulia, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Some of them had to close by the end of the year 2018. The inhabitants received the warning only two days before the evacuation, and it remained unclear if the people were transferred to other facilities or not.

In the summer of 2019, the Italian government announced the closure of the reception center in Mineo, Sicily, once the largest refugee camp in Europe with over 4,000 people (UNHCR, 2019d). Wallis (2019) called the camp on InfoMigrants.net<sup>4</sup> as a synonym for ‘crime, overcrowded, and mismanagement’. Violence, rape, and murder happened in Mineo. Even crime gangs were operating from there. Some further reports suggest that camp administrator has cut costs to make a profit with the camp (mishandling of EU funds). Human rights organizations criticized the shutdown of the camp as another form of profit-maximization since the Italian state would save millions of Euro without it. Many people might have to stop their psychological or medical treatments because of the shutdown of the camp. Despite all the criticism, the Italian government executed the shutdown.

A few months before these developments, a German reporter team from Monitor (2019) (German state television) investigated the situation in Italy and showed the consequences the shutdown of camps might have and how harsh the living conditions for refugees and asylum seekers in Italy are. The camp that is reported on in South Italy is called ‘The Slum’ and approximately 1,000 people living there. There is no freshwater, and self-constructed improvised ‘houses’ even do not have functional toilets. The report says Italian state authorities are refusing to provide proper accommodation. Some people in camps complain the situation is worse than in Africa. People are living like homeless people, and many of them are suffering because of Dublin regulations. In fact, Dublin returnees often do not get any state benefits. The current Italian law states that people who have left their camps in Italy for unknown reasons might lose their accommodation; in other words, they become homeless in Italy. These actions forced ten thousands of migrants to live on the streets.

Italy is another disturbing case of failures in the EU migration policy. The result is every year, thousands of dead people in the Mediterranean Sea, and even though the Italian state is relatively

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<sup>4</sup> A partnership between France Médias Monde (France 24, Radio France International, Monte Carlo Doualiya), the German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle, and the Italian press agency ANSA. InfoMigrants is co-financed by the European Union.

wealthy, refugees and asylum seekers suffer from poor living conditions in camps. The former Italian government under far-right Interior Minister Salvini even did not allow sea rescue boats filled with humans to stop at Italian ports. Consequently, the conditions in the camps are getting worse, and people live in insecurity.

The Italian case also questions the Dublin system, just like the Greek example questions the EU-Turkey deal. It cannot be a sustainable solution that Dublin returnees end up being on the street of Italy and become homeless. Again, a long-term strategy is not applied. The contrary is the case. It seems like Italy is following a restrictive migration and asylum policy to make the living conditions as intolerable as possible for as many migrants as possible in the hope they voluntarily return to their country of origin. However, in the short-run, the mafia and other criminals are taking advantage of the situation of these people. Moreover, in the long-run, it also remains unclear if people return to a place where they have to fear torture, arrest, or worse. Ironically, one could argue that the Italian migration and camp policy, in particular, has eliminated the poor living conditions in the camps by making the whole country a big open-air camp for refugees and asylum seekers.

The results of the Italian migration policy are dead people in the Mediterranean Sea, countless homeless people, and worsening living conditions in- and outside the camps. It is a situation where nobody wins.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The situation in Greece is alarming, and many riots have already occurred in Greek refugee camps. All camps are entirely overcrowded, the conditions are adverse, and doctors are warning of the outbreak of diseases. Experts state that the conditions are worse than in Turkey (ZDF, 2020). Only when people make it to the Greek mainland, they improve their living standards. However, usually, people have to stay for months in the camps.

On the contrary, the camp conditions in Italy compared to Greece are quite high, which does not mean they are sufficient. Although the conditions are on a deficient level, sometimes below that, there are at least no distribution battles over scarce resources, and the Italian state has still not lost its control over the 'official' camps. The main issue in Italy is the situation of homeless refugees or asylum seekers who have lost their right for proper accommodation (due to Dublin regulations, for instance) and live in improvised camps. The situation of these persons is as concerning as the situation of other people who have to live on Lesbos, for example. The differences that we can identify between camps in Greece and Italy are the following:

- **Economy:** The Greek economy is still suffering from the austerity policy during and after the 'Euro crisis' (Kaplanoglou & Rapanos, 2016; Petrova, 2017; Perez & Matsaganis, 2018). Debts are still high and hinder the development of the country (Statista, 2020). Greece simply does not have the resources to manage the enormous migration inflows by itself and is highly dependent on EU funding. Italy, on the other, is one of the biggest economies and industries in the world. While Italy has also suffered from the debt crisis and the overall condition of the economy is not thriving, the country is still in tremendously better shape than Greece. Thus, it is not surprising that Italy can provide higher living conditions in camps and reception centers.

- Geography: This is the apparent reason. Greece is located much closer to Turkey, and Turkey is a vital transit-country for many Syrians on their way to Europe. Therefore, Greece is more affected by the (armed) conflicts in the Middle East.
- Origin of refugees and asylum seekers: The composition of migration flows is entirely different between Italy and Greece. While most immigrants in Greece are coming from the Middle East, Italy is profoundly affected by migration flows from the African continent (many asylum seekers are also coming from Pakistan).
- Policy implications: Greece is the most important country in terms of applying the EU-Turkey deal<sup>5</sup>. The EU has a keen interest in controlling, managing, and limiting migration through this statement. Hence, this policy measure directly influences the situation in Greek camps. Italy, on the contrary, is not affected by the EU-Turkey deal, but the country applies its domestic policies, including making many Dublin returnees homeless.

In general, Italy is doing slightly better, but the situation for refugees and asylum seekers is harsh in both countries. Neither Greece nor Italy are able to provide proper conditions in terms of housing, nutrition, and life quality. Therefore, migrants do not have any incentive to stay in the region and are still keen on moving forward to Northern Europe. A distribution mechanism among EU member states does not exist, which leads to burden-sharing issues. Whereas some member states are willing to accept migrants (e.g., Germany), others are not (e.g., Poland), and the Mediterranean countries have no choice according to the Dublin regulations. The EU struggles with weak and inconsistent policy measures. Kasperek (2016) describes the absurdity of the system after an interview with a Somalian refugee as follows: the person lived on the streets of Italy, moved to different EU states, and applied there for asylum but got denied every time and send back to Italy, where he ended up being homeless again.

Guild et al. (2015) speak of an efficiency dilemma, and Trauner (2016) concludes that the EU overburdens the Southern member states. Consequently, many asylum seekers and refugees find themselves in situations where returning to their original country is not an option due to severe threats to their life, but staying and living under poor conditions is also not reasonable. Thus, push and pull factors could only be reduced in the long-run by improving life quality and providing reasonable opportunities and perspectives for people. This approach is not only limited to the Mediterranean EU countries since non-EU countries are struggling with the same issues (for example, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan). Early anticipation and prevention by improving living conditions are, in this context, still the best ways to reduce mass migration to Europe and inappropriate burden-sharing among EU member states.

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<sup>5</sup> In 2020, the deal got suspended by Turkey. The current status is unclear.

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