

Asylum accommodation governance in Italy

Findings and recommendations

Executive Summary

In Italy, asylum seekers and refugees are initially housed in 'extraordinary reception centres' (CAS) and then moved into the SPRAR network, a form of integrated reception, made up of projects that collaborate with the third sector, private sector and local authorities, and which includes labour market initiatives. Launched its launch in 2002, the 'SPRAR model' - currently in the midst of substantial reform - relies on a network of local authorities that have access to the National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services (FNPSA).

This policy briefing relies on rigorous and qualitative research with stakeholders in Calabria to study approaches to housing governance of asylum seekers and refugees, to analyse their approach and impact in collaboration with decentralised¹.

Our study of the refugee reception system in Italy details emerging systems of refugee co-responsibility between local and national agencies, at the local and urban level. This responds to the needs of recipients and leads to differing outcomes depending on the implementation strategies of the host projects.

Much of the development comes from the work and skills of social workers who have also given much attention to the personal and professional peculiarities of refugees through the organisation of special support services.

ITALY TEAM

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1: Elia, A., Loprieno, D. (2018) Integration governance in Italy. Accommodation, regeneration and exclusion in Calabria. GLIMER WP3 Report: University of Calabria.



Context

Until November 2018, the Italian approach to the integration of migrants has been characterized by a multi-level governance approach that sought to bridge arrival and reception and long term integration. The Legislative Decree n. 18/20146 created the National Coordination Table in the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of Interior. The multi-level character of this includes European funds, in particular the Asylum Migration Integration Fund (AMIF), while the specific programs are implemented at the local level through the regional capitals.

The CAS System for asylum seekers

Centres for Extraordinary Reception (CAS) are the first means of accommodation of displaced migrants and refugees. These are provided by a network of Prefectures (site of administration in the regional capitals) that work in collaboration with the third sector, cooperatives, and private sectors. The terms of reference for awarding public contracts include the agreement of the local authority in whose territory the accommodation is located. This period of stay should be limited to the time strictly necessary for the transfer of the applicant to second reception facilities. The CAS are considered an effective tool to manage flows in arrival, but they are unsuitable for a longer period. The CAS system is characterised by a particular fluidity and often local administrations have to manage the effects on the territory of a new structure that has been opened without the necessary basic information and without administrative support.

The SPRAR for refugees and asylum seekers

The SPRAR System is designed to be more long term than the temporary and emergency response mode of the CAS system. In the SPRAR system, local authorities, relying on the support of the third sector, go beyond the distribution of food and emergency accommodation, and provide legal and social guidance, as well as assistance to develop individual paths for inclusion and socio-economic integration. The SPRAR is based on 'territorial networks' that rely heavily on local actors to run the projects. Today, Calabria has more than 3000 places, across Cosenza, Lamezia Terme and Villa San Giovanni. In these places, stakeholders and local authorities have amassed significant experience, often through experimentation. With respect to housing integration, in Calabria the settlement of refugees has been a means of regenerating and repopulating some areas.

GLIMER is informed by a combination of rigorous policy analysis, qualitative research with multi-party stakeholders, and secondary analysis.

This policy brief is especially reliant on ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15 stakeholders from devolved and local government, the third sector and community groups.

We studied several local authorities including Cosenza City Council, Mendicino City Council, Acquaformosa City Council, Gioiosa Jonica City Council, Riace City Council and SPRAR Central Service





The integration of reception projects in many small Calabrian towns has brought many social workers into the labour market, who often also collaborate with our citizens if requested by the municipal administration.

Findings

1. Urban regeneration and reception system

The Calabrian reception system is characterized by its 'capillary function', that is by its capacity to repopulate small and medium-sized urban areas, often depopulated by the past outward migration.

From the analysis of settlement processes of refugees in small towns, it appears that the presence of diasporic communities has regenerated urban spaces, squares, parks and repopulated schools. Urban renovation activities subvert mafia control of the region. In schools, the practice of including refugee children protects the right to study and supports the psycho-social development of the child.

The process of regenerating living space is also accompanied by the regeneration of welfare. These processes are activated locally in a horizontal subsidiarity system between local authorities (e.g. alternative institutional networks such as so called Re.Co.Sol., a Network of Solidarity that connects some local realities of the Calabrian Ionian area) and private social enterprises.

From the testimonies gathered, there appears room for manoeuvre within the parameters of imposed legislation on forced migration. This is especially evident in the participation of refugee women and men in the co-production of services and the fields of activism. For example, we observe the activity of the multidisciplinary team in taking charge of asylum seekers who are victims of torture, in the SPRAR project in Cosenza, this flowed from the coordination between volunteer doctors from the local health authority and project social workers. Moreover, renovation of properties is carried out with the support of the local voluntary network.

2. Emergency vs. integrated management

With regard to the general reception system for migrants, the Calabrian territory has given greater attention to the CAS system, as a result of the latest

Local government stakeholder

governmental and political choices, but the presence of SPRARs is still very established. However, the CAS system works through methods that have been designed for the Public Administration and does not always have the health and care of the migrant as its main objective.

In any case, we are registering an expansion of the SPRAR system, which it is worth remembering remains the responsibility of local authorities to host. In contrast, the Centres for the Extraordinary Reception are sometimes imposed by the Prefectures on the basis of an immediate need.

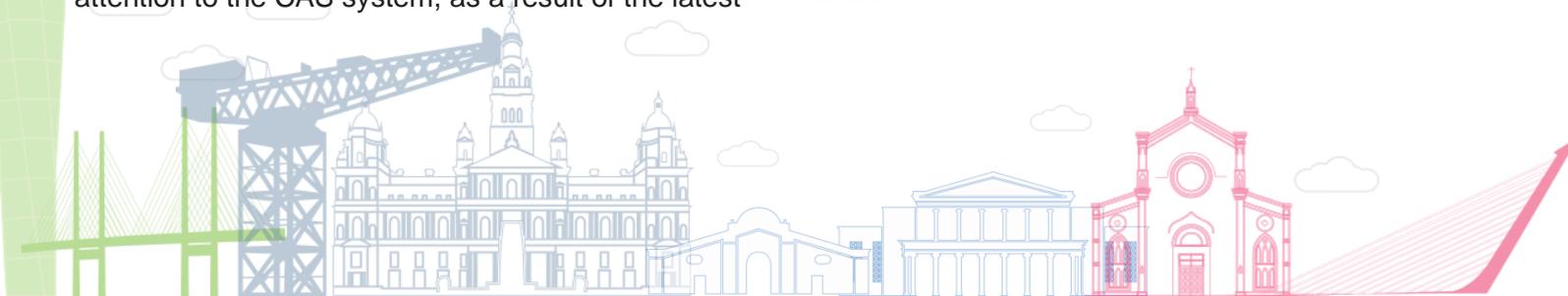
3. Local, third sector and community networks

With respect to the relations between public authorities and the private sector (associations, NGOs, etc.), a great synergy emerges, also in contexts such as the one analysed, where the local government is often put to the test by the instability and uncertainties due to the possible infiltrations of organized crime.

With respect to this last aspect, the experience gained in the territory of Reggio Calabria and Villa San Giovanni is to be considered as excellent, where the local administrations have frequently alternated to address this risk.

What is evident is the importance of the reputation and solidity that each association acquires on the territory through the management of the reception project. For example, the positive impact of Lamezia Terme and Cosenza projects has been extended from the simple reception to the local services (e.g. Centre for torture victims) and to the fight against social exclusion of migrants.

Calabria is the only region that has experienced the territorial coordination of the SPRAR Central Service, with more than 200 active reception projects between ordinary, unaccompanied children and people with disabilities.



Conclusions and recommendations

The governance of reception and housing in Calabria, until now, has been managed through projects of small and medium size, in as many cities that have focused on many measures of housing inclusion, employment introduction and local welfare.

Much of the effort of management weighs on the capacity of third sector associations and NGOs to create networks with private actors, with the support of the public administration.

Refugees and asylum seekers - especially within the SPRAR system - have helped to repopulate some areas and reactivate some essential services. This is mostly evident with regard to ordinary refugees (i.e. people who have no disabilities or other vulnerabilities, with particular reference to women), families (even in the case of resettlement) and unaccompanied minors.

The more receptive the territory, the stronger the connection that migrants maintain with the receiving community. The study shows that they live in central areas and/or historic city centres, entirely integrated with the receiving families. As opposed to the CAS system, the SPRAR network has also encouraged the inclusion of vulnerable people and/or victims of trafficking in increasingly multi-ethnic housing contexts.

The fruitful collaboration between local administrations, especially small and medium sized ones, with private organizations should be encouraged, especially because, since its reformulation, the SPRAR system has been a key point for housing and integration policies in Calabria.

Cities like Cosenza, Gioiosa Jonica and Villa San Giovanni would be able to sustain (as in the past) large migratory flows, if they were supported above all by the central government.

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The GLIMER (Governance and Local Integration of Migrants and Europe's Refugees) Project is jointly funded by JPI Urban and Horizon 2020. Bringing together researchers and practitioners from five lead institutions – the University of Edinburgh, the University of Glasgow, Università della Calabria, Malmö Universitet and the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies – it researches how issues relating to governance impact displaced peoples' experiences of integration in contemporary Europe

