

### Figurations of displacement in southern Europe: empirical findings and reflections on protracted displacement and translocal networks of forced migrants in Greece and Italy

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# TRAF'G

Transnational Figurations of Displacement

## Figurations of Displacement in southern Europe

Empirical findings and reflections on  
protracted displacement and translocal  
networks of forced migrants in Greece  
and Italy

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## SUMMARY

This *working paper* is based on empirical research on the Translocal Figurations of Displacement in Greece and Italy. The authors aim to compare protracted displacement in Greece and Italy, looking at the structural forces shaping it and their interactions with migrants' mobility and connectivity. This comparison is based on the analysis of the relations between two contextual variables (governance regimes and host population) and three key variables (mobility, connectivity and marginalisation). In this *paper*, they present findings from three study sites in Greece and four research locations in Italy.

Findings show that protracted legal and socio-economic marginalisation is a key feature characterising the lives of displaced people in southern European countries. It confirms the hypothesis that protracted displacement does not end when forced migrants reach Greece or Italy. Restrictive governance regimes at the national and EU level severely limit mobility opportunities within Greece and Italy and across the European Union (EU). To cope with and resist marginalising and immobilising policies, displaced migrants in Italy and Greece put in place several strategies, ranging from adapting to governance regimes and taking the most out of them to resisting them and finding ways to avoid, bypass or overcome such regimes.

In this framework, mobility and connectivity emerge as a resource and a trap for displaced migrants in southern Europe. On the one hand, migrants' strategies of intra-national and intra-EU mobility may help them out of protracted displacement, while on the other, certain types of mobility (hyper-, circular, paradoxical) can entrap, rather than free them. Similarly, local, translocal and transnational networks emerge as a crucial resource for displaced people in Greece and Italy. At the same time, family and co-ethnic networks may also be experienced as disabling, hampering one's aspirations to get out of protracted displacement. Fieldwork in both countries highlighted common factors shaping the relationships between displaced migrants and host communities. We also observed different facets of intergroup relations, ranging from indifference to friendship.

The *paper* concludes by highlighting similarities and differences on the findings from both countries, based on qualitative and quantitative data.

### KEYWORDS

protracted displacement, forced migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, governance regimes, agency, mobility, marginalisation, connectivity, migrant–host community relations, Europe, Greece, Italy.

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## Introduction

Protracted displacement has emerged as an important policy concept in developing countries, which are the first countries of asylum for the vast majority of refugees. Displaced people tend to remain stuck in these countries for years, at times living in camps, without real prospects for long-term social, legal and economic inclusion. While the number of refugees worldwide has increased in the last decades, “durable solutions” identified by UNHCR—namely return, local integration and resettlement—have not been accessible in ways that solve (or improve) their situation (Etzold et al., 2019; Kraller et al. 2020). Whereas attention to protracted displacement in developing countries has increased in international discourse, only few attempts have been made to link this debate to that on migrants’ marginalisation and exclusion in Europe.

In the framework of the TRAFIG project, we aim precisely to do this by exploring differences and continuities between the ‘lives in limbo’ experienced by refugees in developing countries and those who arrive in Europe. Is the concept of protracted displacement applicable to the European context? What are its specific features? The research conducted in southern Europe examines different aspects and meanings of living in protracted displacement in Greece and Italy to expand the boundaries of this concept and explore the continuities of the lived experience of forced migrants before and after their arrival in Europe.<sup>1</sup> As we will see, protracted legal and socio-economic marginalisation emerges as a key feature characterising the lives of displaced people in southern European countries.

## Structure

In this *working paper*, the authors compare protracted displacement in Greece and Italy, looking at the structural forces shaping it and their interactions with migrants’ mobility and connectivity. The comparison is based on a thorough analysis of the relations between two contextual variables (governance regimes and host population) and three key variables (mobility, connectivity and marginalisation) guided by a set of six research questions, as described in the next section.

In the following, we first describe the conceptual framework that guided our research on protracted displacement in Greece and Italy and the empirical design of the study (Section 1).

After focussing on the specificities of protracted displacement in southern Europe (Section 2), the research findings from our fieldwork in the two countries are illustrated and compared based on our research questions.

Section 3 focuses mainly on the impact of governance regimes on mobility/immobility and socio-economic and legal marginalisation in the two countries, while Section 4 analyses findings more directly related to the agency of migrants.

Section 5 takes a closer look at relations between migrants and host communities.

Finally, in Section 6, we develop some comparative reflections on protracted displacement in Greece and Italy, based on quantitative and qualitative data.

<sup>1</sup> In this *paper* we use the term “forced migrants” to refer to all migrants who are forced to leave their countries due to exogenous factors (e.g. conflict, violence, fear of persecution or inhuman treatment, economic crisis causing destitution, environmental disasters, etc.). “Asylum seekers” are migrants who have applied for international protection; “refugees” are asylum seekers who have been granted refugee status (or broadly speaking a form of international protection). “Protection beneficiaries” are asylum seekers who have been granted some form of protection, either international protection (including refugee status and subsidiary protection) or a national-based complementary form of protection (e.g. humanitarian protection and special protection in Italy).

# 1. Conceptual framework and empirical design

## 1.1 Conceptual framework for research on protracted displacement in southern Europe

The starting point of our collective intellectual journey was the necessity to adapt the project's overall conceptual framework to the peculiarities of the European (and more specifically southern European, i.e., Greek and Italian) empirical context. In particular, we felt it necessary to specify TRAFIG's overarching research hypothesis<sup>2</sup> to pursue two distinct and potentially diverging goals: a) **maximising the explanatory and comparative potential with regard to our specific research subject** (i.e., protracted displacement in Greece and Italy); b) **ensuring the best possible level of comparability** of southern European cases with other study cases, in Europe as well as in other world regions.

In pursuing these fundamental objectives, which we felt were critical for effective fieldwork in the two target countries, conceptual help came from TRAFIG's *working paper no. 1* (Etzold et al., 2019). To begin with, the *paper* by Etzold et al. was key in clarifying the perimeter of our research subject by providing an autonomous analytical definition of **protracted displacement**, one that is distinct from other existing definitions that mainly originate from practical concerns and have a prevalent regulatory, organisational or statistical function. More specifically, TRAFIG's definition of protracted displacement distinguishes itself from mainstream policy-oriented definitions (as in UNHCR, 2018, p. 22) in two fundamental ways:

1. It is **not anchored to pre-defined quantitative parameters** (in particular, the number of people who find themselves in a "protracted refugee situation" as well as the minimum duration of such collective condition) and can thus also encompass individuals or small groups that have been displaced for less than five years (i.e., the standard temporal threshold in UNHCR's operational definition);
2. TRAFIG's definition of protracted displacement is broader than those used by UNHCR and other international organisations also in that it is **not dependent upon established regulatory categories**. As put by Etzold et al.,

*the term displacement should not be restricted to refugees and IDPs, i.e. those who were clearly forced to leave in the context of violent conflict or due to persecu-*

*tion, but also include those migrants who are caught in crisis situations and become displaced after their initial departure and require protection and assistance [...], and those whose agency is severely constrained by structural factors ranging from political instability, environmental hazards and economic crisis to deprivation (2019, p. 16).*

In addition, TRAFIG's *working paper no. 1* provides fundamental input for setting the conceptual foundations of this comparative *paper*. It does so by developing an analytical framework for understanding and operationalising the structural factors that determine and shape protracted displacement.

With reference to the condition of a given migrant or group of migrants in a given country of current residence (irrespective of the legality of such residence), Etzold et al. identify three sets of structural constraints that seriously hamper or entirely prevent local integration, return to the country of origin and further migration to other (and preferred) destinations, namely all three 'durable solutions' as conventionally identified in the official UN doctrine.

*Protracted displacement should rather be re-conceptualised as a persisting, although constantly evolving figuration, which unfolds at particular places and points of time in cycles of displacement, and which is shaped by distinct structural forces that limit migrants' agency in three distinct directions, namely displacing forces, marginalising forces and immobilising forces (Etzold et al., 2019, p. 16; emphasis added).*

Against this backdrop, the overarching research question for our focus on southern Europe is: How do these different 'forces' or structural factors interact with migrants' mobility and connectivity?

Our next step was then to break down such a broad question and operationalise it as a structured investigation on the interactions of three key variables (see below) among them and with selected contextual variables (concerning governance regimes and relations with host populations). In line with the general design of the TRAFIG project, our three key variables are the following:

1. Migrants' **mobility** (both international and internal, i.e., within the current country of residence);
2. Their **connectivity** (measured by the scope, density and quality of their networks with both co-nationals and others, at the local and transnational level);

<sup>2</sup> "The more connected and mobile refugees, IDPs and other migrants are, the less likely it is that they end up in a situation of protracted displacement. Conversely, the less connected and the more immobilised displaced persons are, the greater the risk that they are vulnerable, dependent and become stuck in precarity." (Etzold et al., 2019, p. 28).

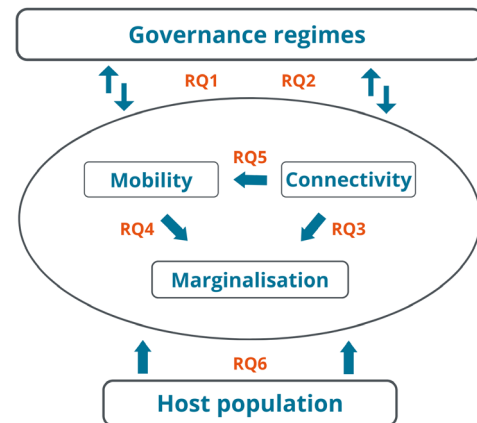
3. The forms and degrees of migrants’ **marginalisation** (we chose to focus on this concept and the related analytical perspective rather than ‘integration’, which we perceived as too value-loaded and in fundamental dissonance with the overall very poor levels of ‘integration’ of our research participants).

We have thus formulated our final research questions to focus on what we consider to be the most meaningful (given our project’s objectives) among all possible interactions between pairs of key and/or contextual variables. Such research questions are listed here in the order in which they are dealt with in the following pages:

- RQ1: How do governance regimes affect the mobility aspirations, opportunities, strategies and trajectories of people in protracted displacement situations? And how do affected people cope with, adapt to and (possibly) resist existing regulatory frames?
- RQ2: What is the impact of governance regimes on the socio-economic and legal marginalisation of people in protracted displacement situations? And how do affected people cope with, adapt to and (possibly) resist existing regulatory frames?
- RQ3: What is the impact of connectivity on the socio-economic and legal marginalisation of people in protracted displacement situations?
- RQ4: What is the impact of mobility/immobility on the socio-economic and legal marginalisation of people in protracted displacement situations?
- RQ5: How does connectivity shape the mobility aspirations, opportunities, strategies and trajectories of people in protracted displacement situations? To what extent do networks facilitate or limit mobility?
- RQ6: How do intergroup relations between host communities and people in protracted displacement affect marginalisation, connectivity and mobility aspirations, opportunities, strategies and trajectories of people in protracted displacement situations?

Figure 1 visualises how our research questions are meant to explain relations between contextual variables (i.e., governance regimes and host population) and key variables (RQs 1-2-6) and between selected pairs of key variables (RQs 3-4-5).

Figure 1: Linkages between variables and research questions



## 1.2 Research teams, locations and sampling

### Research in Greece

Fieldwork in Greece started in November 2019 and ended in June 2021. The research team on the ground carried out qualitative and ethnographic research in multiple locations, whilst the survey mainly covered the region of Attica. Both were directed at migrants in protracted displacement belonging to different national communities.

#### Qualitative and ethnographic research

During the fieldwork design phase, the initial plan to have two field locations in Greece was changed to include a third field site. To guarantee a diversification in the local contexts of our field sites, we selected key locations comprising mixed features (urban, peri-urban, rural): Greater Athens, Thessaloniki and the east Aegean islands of Lesbos and Chios. The key sample groups we focused on in all research locations broadly reflect the main nationalities arriving (or crossing through) and seeking asylum in the country since 2015—Syrians and Afghans.<sup>3</sup> A third group was selected based on considerations combining research aims and questions with a review of the Greek context and available statistics. Originally, the third selected nationality group were Pakistanis.<sup>4</sup> However, following

3 Indicatively, between June 2013 and January 2020, among a total of about 291,000 asylum applications, 25 per cent were by Syrians and another 19 per cent by Afghans. See Asylum Service Factsheet (January 2020). In late 2020, these two nationalities formed 34 per cent and 31 per cent respectively of ESTIA accommodation beneficiaries (Population breakdown in ESTIA II Accommodation Scheme, 28.12.2020), while at the end of May 2021, they comprised 15 per cent and 47 per cent of the displaced population on Aegean islands (UNHCR Aegean Islands Weekly Snapshot, 24-30.05.2021), 23.5 per cent and 47.5 per cent in mainland camps (IOM SMS Factsheets, May 2021).

4 Pakistanis are the third-largest group of asylum applicants (11.5 per cent of total applications in 2013-2020), yet among the groups with the lowest asylum recognition rates (only 2.5 per cent receive some form of international protection), with very limited options for legal migration.



adaptations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the specific local context in our field locations (e.g., few Syrians remaining for long periods on east Aegean islands due to specific asylum procedures, few Pakistanis residing in Thessaloniki, etc.), we decided to enlarge the third group, without focusing on specific national origins but rather seeking diverse testimonies from people from South Asian, Middle Eastern and some African countries.

A team of four researchers with different disciplinary backgrounds carried out qualitative and ethnographic research in Greece, bringing together—and in dialogue with—perspectives from the fields of urban planning, social psychology, anthropology and human geography. As illustrated in the infographic on p. 12, our fieldwork resulted in a total of 121 qualitative interviews with displaced people, their network contacts, members of receiving communities and experts<sup>5</sup>, five focus group discussions (in Athens, Chios, Lesbos, and two in Thessaloniki) and significant ethnographic insights coming from transect walks and observations—among others, in camps, streets and shops in all field sites.

#### Research locations and target population

The **Athens–Piraeus metropolitan area** has a population of about 3,300,000, with Greater Athens comprising 2,640,701 inhabitants and the city of Athens 665,046. As the Greek capital and largest urban centre, this urban area concentrates over one-third of Greece’s migrants, whilst 44 per cent of the country’s foreign population live in the region of Attica (also comprising peri-urban and semi-rural settlements). Some nationalities are disproportionately concentrated in Greater Athens, especially those our fieldwork was focusing on. In 2011, one out of ten of Attica’s residents (about one out of five in the inner municipalities) was of non-Greek citizenship. As a result, owing to historical patterns of migrant settlement, Athens is home to both formal and informal migrant and refugee communities and associations, including shops and businesses set up by settled migrants. Attica is home to seven migrant camps: One is located at the fringes of the city of Athens, two more in the metropolitan area, and four within the regional territory. In May 2021, over 7,240 displaced people were sheltered in Attica camps, making up over 30 per cent of the total camp population in mainland Greece. Two of the nine pre-removal detention centres in Greece are also located within the metropolitan area. In addition, in May 2021, more than 12,800 displaced people, mostly asylum seekers, were hosted in apartments through the Emergency Support To Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) programme, amounting to nearly 61 per cent of total ESTIA beneficiaries in Greece at the time (the majority in Athens metropolitan area and a significant proportion in the city of Athens). As of early August 2021, nearly 10,000

recognised refugees who enrolled in the Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection (HELIOS) programme were based in Attica, just over 30 per cent of the programme’s total number of beneficiaries.

**Thessaloniki metropolitan area** has a population of over 1,012,000, more than 80 per cent in Greater Thessaloniki and about one-third residing in the city of Thessaloniki itself. It is Greece’s second-largest city, with similar features as Athens, yet at a much smaller scale and with semi-rural areas within its boundaries. It is home to one-tenth of the country’s population but just over seven per cent of foreign nationals and is far less diverse; some 6.5 per cent of its residents are non-nationals (eight per cent in the city of Thessaloniki). Yet, in the past decade or so, Thessaloniki has become a major hub for newcomers arriving by land from the Evros border and for people attempting to (irregularly) cross the northern borders. Until recently, four camps were located in the prefecture district (one was shut down at the end of March 2021), and one is located within the metropolitan area: The displaced population accommodated in these camps was over 2,200 in May 2021, 9.5 per cent of the mainland total. In May 2021, more than 4,000 people were accommodated in ESTIA apartments in the region of Central Macedonia, more than three-quarters in the metropolitan area and over 30 per cent in the municipality of Thessaloniki. Moreover, 6,550 international protection beneficiaries living in the region were enrolled in the HELIOS programme (20 per cent of the total).

The **eastern Aegean islands of Lesbos and Chios** comprise semi-urban and rural locations. Lesbos island has a population of 85,330 (about 28,000 in Mytilini town), while Chios has over 51,320 residents (24,000 in the capital town). These islands are necessary stopovers for new arrivals, yet since March 2016, migrants and refugees have been stranded in Reception and Identification Centres (RICs, or “Hotspots”). The imposition of the geographical restriction in the context of the “Hotspot approach”<sup>6</sup> and the “EU–Turkey deal”<sup>7</sup> has rendered the islands

6 The “Hotspot approach” was introduced in the European Agenda on Migration in May 2015 “as part of the immediate action to assist EU Member States located at the external EU border”... “to help to fulfil their obligations under EU law and swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants” ([https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/orphan-pages/glossary/hotspot-approach\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/orphan-pages/glossary/hotspot-approach_en)). In practice, it aims at confining newly arrived migrants at the EU’s margins, disrupting, limiting and filtering their onward mobility (e.g. Dimitriadi, 2017; Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020).

7 In the Greek case, the Hotspot approach was implemented in the context of the EU–Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016. This was an agreement between the European Council and Turkey regarding cooperation to stop (irregular) migration to the EU via Turkey. Among others, it foresaw that, as of 20 March 2016, all migrants crossing to the Greek islands would be returned to Turkey, which was to receive a total of six billion euros to provide protection for refugees in its territory: see e.g. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement>. The Statement received much criticism focusing e.g. on its legal nature, the “safe third country” concept and its human rights implications (see Ineli-Ciger & Ulusoy 2021).

5 We carried out 30 expert interviews, 71 semi-structured interviews and 20 biographical interviews.

an internal buffer zone and a border within the country. The presence of thousands of displaced people living in appalling conditions, but also the deployment of a range of state- and EU officials, international organisations and humanitarian actors, civil society groups, volunteers and activists—especially on Lesbos—has contributed to a situation that incited escalating tensions with the local community. At the end of May 2021, nearly 9,200 people stayed in the Hotspots of the eastern Aegean islands. This represents a considerable decrease compared to early 2020, due to the government’s policy of ‘decongesting’ the islands through dubious procedures. Such procedures were accelerated in the context of the pandemic amidst enhanced mobility restrictions, and especially in the aftermath of the wildfire that destroyed the infamous Moria Hotspot on Lesbos. By May 2021, about 6,150 people (67 per cent of the total population in RICs) were staying in the Kara Tepe RIC in Lesbos and about 1,070 (11.6 per cent) in the Vial RIC in Chios. During the same period, another 1,024 lived in ESTIA apartments in Mytilini (about 70 per cent of the total ESTIA beneficiaries on the islands) and Chios town (30 per cent). By early August 2021, nearly 5,780 recognised refugees in the northern Aegean were enrolled in the HELIOS programme, yet fieldwork showed that the majority (are encouraged to) leave the islands.

### Survey

Despite several complications (see Sub-section 1.3), the quantitative survey was conducted by four interviewers between mid-April and the end of June 2021. Each of them used questionnaires for their work with specific sample groups. These groups were the same national communities of the previous qualitative research yet underwent a more structured selection of the third target group: Syria (100 participants), Afghanistan (100), Pakistan (50), and the DR Congo (50). In spite of the original design, time limitations due to the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic meant that the focus of the survey was almost exclusively on the Athens–Piraeus metropolitan area, with only a small section taking place in the islands of Lesbos and Chios.

### Research in Italy

Fieldwork in Italy started in February 2020 and ended in April 2021. Our research team carried out the qualitative and ethnographic research as well as the survey in multiple locations and was directed at migrants in protracted displacement belonging to different national communities.

#### Qualitative and ethnographic research

To guarantee diversification in the local contexts of on-site fieldwork, we selected two urban sites and two rural areas in northern, central and southern Italy. The urban locations were the city of Torino, where we focused on Afghans and Pakistanis, and the city of Rome, where we focused mainly on Eritreans. The rural locations were the area of Saluzzo in the Piedmont region and the area of Castel Volturno in the Campania region—

we interviewed West Africans in both rural sites. A team of four researchers, including three anthropologists and one scholar in socio-legal studies, conducted the qualitative and ethnographic fieldwork. The team engaged with about 120 research participants, including migrants, practitioners, social workers, civil society representatives, activists, institutional actors and members of local communities. As illustrated in the infographic on p. 12, we used multiple research methods, including expert interviews, semi-structured interviews with migrants and members of local communities, biographical interviews with migrants and focus group discussions involving three categories of participants: Migrants, members of local communities and experts.<sup>8</sup> Field research included ethnographic methods such as transect walks, mobile methods (e.g., explorations of places) and participant observation. These methods were crucial to reflect also on spaces and their meaning to research participants.

#### Research locations and target population

**Torino** is the fourth-largest city in Italy (890,000 inhabitants) and is located in the north-west of the country. Since the 2000s, it has undergone profound social transformation linked to de-industrialisation and the economic crisis. With more than 120,000 foreign residents in 2019 (Prefettura di Torino, 2019), it has always been a city of immigration. Recently arrived migrants (i.e., those who arrived after the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’) represent an increasingly important share of the overall foreign population. Fieldwork in Torino focused particularly on Afghans and Pakistanis, as these two national groups have grown significantly in the city over the last ten years, doubling their presence (Prefettura di Torino, 2019). Many held Afghan passports but grew up in Pakistan, as their parents moved from Afghanistan to Pakistan more than twenty years ago. Some young people with Afghan passports were actually born in Pakistan but never obtained citizenship there (Mielke et al., 2021). In addition, some people came directly from Afghanistan. The borders between these groups are very fluid, as many share the same religion and language and have family networks that cross the borders between the two countries. Most Afghans and Pakistanis in Torino are young men whose parents, siblings, wives and children are in their country of origin. To date, very few women from these countries have arrived in Torino, even among those protection beneficiaries who would be entitled to start a family reunification procedure. In the city, several reception facilities are hosting Afghan and Pakistani asylum seekers. Their presence has increased so much that the distribution of asylum seekers per nationality has changed in absolute terms. Until a few years ago, the same reception facilities used to host mainly Sub-Saharan migrants.

<sup>8</sup> We carried out 32 expert interviews, 51 semi-structured interviews, 26 biographical interviews and one focus group discussion (in the Saluzzo area) involving 10 participants.



**Rome**, the second-largest city in Italy (2,870,000 inhabitants), is a multi-ethnic cosmopolitan city with a stratified foreign population, which, according to official figures by the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), amounts to approximately half a million foreigners. Eritreans legally residing in Rome are about 2,100 (1,200 men and 900 women) of a total population of less than 10,000 Eritrean residents in Italy<sup>9</sup>. The Eritrean refugee population in Rome is composed chiefly of men between 20 and 40 years old, even though older generations of women who used to work as domestic workers for local families are still present. Younger women who arrived on their own or joined their partners are also increasingly visible in the squats inhabited by Eritrean communities. Here, along with single men, one also encounters a significant number of families with children (Cittadini del Mondo, 2014; 2018).

In Rome, we mostly interviewed Eritreans who were granted international protection and have resided in the country for more than five years. In the last 15 years, Eritreans have been one of the most numerous groups of asylum seekers in Italy. Although Eritreans are likely to receive a protection status in Italy, newcomers tend to move to other European countries. Those who remain in Italy are usually ‘trapped’ by the Dublin Regulation: Once fingerprinted or granted protection in Italy, they are systematically returned.<sup>10</sup> Rome represents an important site in this transnational flow. It is a historical site of the Eritrean diaspora in Italy, and it represents a familiar cultural environment for newcomers given the presence of community restaurants, shops, churches and cafés. Moreover, Eritrean refugees in Rome have also been able to secure some accommodation. At times along with other national communities, they have managed to squat and maintain for decades several buildings (occupied by more than 800 people), which are often the first go-to for those who want to hide after their arrival and before their departure to other countries. They also represent hubs for Dublin returnees to come back to.

The **Saluzzo area** consists of the town of Saluzzo (17,000 inhabitants) and small rural villages located in the province of Cuneo, in the Piedmont region, in north-west Italy. This province is famous for its agricultural production: With its 12,000 hectares of cultivated land, it is one of Italy’s most important agricultural fruit districts. In recent years, the cultivated area

has grown, while the indigenous population active in agriculture has aged and the need for workers during the harvest period has increased. Thus, the number of migrant agricultural workers has increased enormously, especially between 2018 and 2019 (Berton et al., 2020).

Since 2015, most seasonal workers in the Saluzzo area have been asylum seekers and protection beneficiaries—in line with a broader national trend of a ‘refugeeisation’ of the workforce in the agricultural sector (Dines & Rigo, 2015; Caprioglio & Rigo, 2020). According to data gathered annually by the Saluzzo Migrante project (a project run by the local branch of the religious charity Caritas, which offers assistance to agricultural workers in the Saluzzo area), in 2019, 69 per cent of migrant workers were protection beneficiaries, 27 per cent were asylum seekers, while only two per cent were holders of a work permit.<sup>11</sup> The vast majority comes from West African countries (79 per cent in 2019, according to Saluzzo Migrante data); they are mainly young, single men. They come to Saluzzo from other areas of the Piedmont region and other parts of Italy. Most of them have left reception facilities—either because they are no longer entitled to reception, have obtained a protection status or chose to leave the centres in search of a job. This population increases greatly during the harvest period between May and November; for the rest of the year, they can choose to remain in the area under conditions of extreme marginality or move to other locations in Italy or abroad.

The **Castel Volturno area** includes the town of Castel Volturno (27,000 inhabitants) and the surrounding municipalities. It is a “rur-urban” space (Caruso, 2014, p. 150) interconnecting the agricultural area of the northern province of Napoli and Caserta, in the Campania region, with the city itself. In the second half of the 20th century, the area emerged as a touristic hub, but today, its holiday villas are the most common accommodation for migrants in the area. Since the late 1980s, this location has become the main reference point in southern Italy for Sub-Saharan migrants. Indeed, Castel Volturno is the only town in Italy where the composition of the foreign population does not reflect the main nationalities in Italy (Romanians, Moroccans, Tunisians, Ukrainians, Pakistanis, Albanians). Due to its high number of Sub-Saharan immigrants, one of the highest in Italy, it has been named the “Italian Soweto” (Caruso, 2014, p. 153). Migrants in Castel Volturno are mainly West Africans, with Nigerians and Ghanaians accounting for over 50 per cent of the officially registered foreign population. Most of them have precarious legal statuses or are undocumented. They share their accommodation with other migrants in informally rented flats and sometimes in abandoned buildings. They are usually informal, daily workers in different economic sectors, mainly in agriculture, construction, cleaning and gardening. The area

9 See: <http://stra-dati.istat.it/#>. However, since many of them face difficulties in obtaining a registered residence, this number may underestimate the actual presence of this fluctuating population. Moreover, older refugees tended to be registered as Ethiopians and kept this nationality in the census.

10 The European Union’s so-called Dublin regulation (604/2013) sets “criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national”. According to its provisions, the primary asylum processing responsibility lies on the first EU state entered by an asylum seeker. If the asylum seeker then moves to another member state, the latter is entitled to ask the first state of entry to readmit him/her. The asylum seeker who is returned to his/her country of first entry is usually called ‘Dublin returnee’.

11 See: <http://www.saluzzomigrante.it/dati-conclusivi-2019/>.

itself is characterised by deep legal and socio-economic precariousness, widespread informal economies and largely tolerated illegality. Due to these peculiar features, it also represents a safe space, especially for undocumented people, who manage to carry on a life based on the informal market of the area—a life also characterised by exploitation dynamics.

#### Survey

The quantitative survey was conducted between September 2020 and February 2021 by three interviewers. The survey focused mainly (but not exclusively) on three geographical areas: The north-west of Italy (mainly the city of Torino), the north-east of Italy and the city of Rome. The target population was predominantly the same national communities of the qualitative research: Eritreans, South Asians (Afghans and Pakistanis) and West Africans. Notwithstanding the difficulties posed by the second wave of the pandemic, we managed to complete the survey, interviewing overall 300 migrants.

### 1.3 Fieldwork challenges

Field research in Greece and Italy faced several challenges, with practical, methodological and ethical implications. The overall fluidity of the situation on the ground in terms of geopolitical developments, changes in the composition and direction of arrivals, government changes, policy and legislative shifts at both domestic and EU levels that not only had an impact on the landscape of displacement in both countries but also on the status, conditions and prospects of displaced people, represented a quagmire terrain for our fieldwork.

In Greece, a broad **shift in public discourse on migration** and change of government since July 2019 gave way to an ever more restrictive and xenophobic national context, with varying particularities in specific localities, including those under investigation. Field research faced a density of events at the beginning of 2020, including the government's attempt to build 'closed' reception facilities on the east Aegean islands in February, the diplomatic tensions between the European Union and Turkey affecting the Greek–Turkish borders in early March and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, Greece was only partially hit by the first wave of **the pandemic**, even though lockdown measures were in place from March to May 2020. On the contrary, Italy was the first European country to be severely hit. Stringent national lockdown measures were introduced from early March until June 2020. With the second wave, new lockdown measures were introduced in October 2020, with a new system (in place until the end of June 2021) imposing variable degrees of restrictions depending on the

epidemiological situation in each region, based on weekly monitoring. Greece was more severely affected by the second wave (especially during autumn 2020), and lockdown measures were applied anew from November 2020 until early May 2021.

This entire situation had a massive impact on field research in both countries: It not only 'froze' fieldwork when the strictest lockdown measures or the safety situation in the research locations impeded its continuation but also changed its context, shifted its focus, expanded its scope and led to methodological adaptations. Some of the practical adjustments involved a more flexible approach, a reshuffling of the different types of interviews, a partial shift to online interviews with experts and experimenting with innovative methodologies.

In some biographical interviews with migrants, we tested a methodology based on multiple conversation sessions (both online and face-to-face), photovoice techniques and other participatory research methods—asking interviewees to share their photos, videos, music and other expressive products as part of the interview process. This methodology was meant to foster migrants' engagement and active participation in the research. However, in many cases, this goal proved hard to achieve, both because in-depth biographical interviews require face-to-face interactions and because interviewees tended to perceive the 'creative' part of this methodology more as a task to fulfil than as a way to develop a sense of ownership of the research.

Due to the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, the research team had to postpone the survey in Greece and was only able to conduct it from April to June 2021. This short timeframe resulted in a reduction of our field sites. The survey in Italy (September 2020–February 2021) was also affected by the second wave of the pandemic and its restrictions. Nevertheless, the Italian team decided not to stop the survey but rather adapt it to the (constantly evolving) situation. First, since mobility across regions and municipalities was severely limited, the team mainly concentrated interviews in urban contexts (especially Rome and Torino) while reducing interviews in rural areas. Second, since access to respondents during a pandemic is more difficult, we established fruitful cooperation with local organisations in Torino that supported migrants and agreed to host the interviewer and respondents on their premises, offering a safe and trusted environment. Third, we also introduced the option to conduct the survey via phone or video call to avoid face-to-face interactions when we could not guarantee the necessary safety requirements. However, conducting a quantitative interview at a distance may be even more complex than a qualitative interview, and interviewers had to find creative ways to engage with potential respondents (e.g. recording short videos to introduce themselves and the TRAFIG survey).

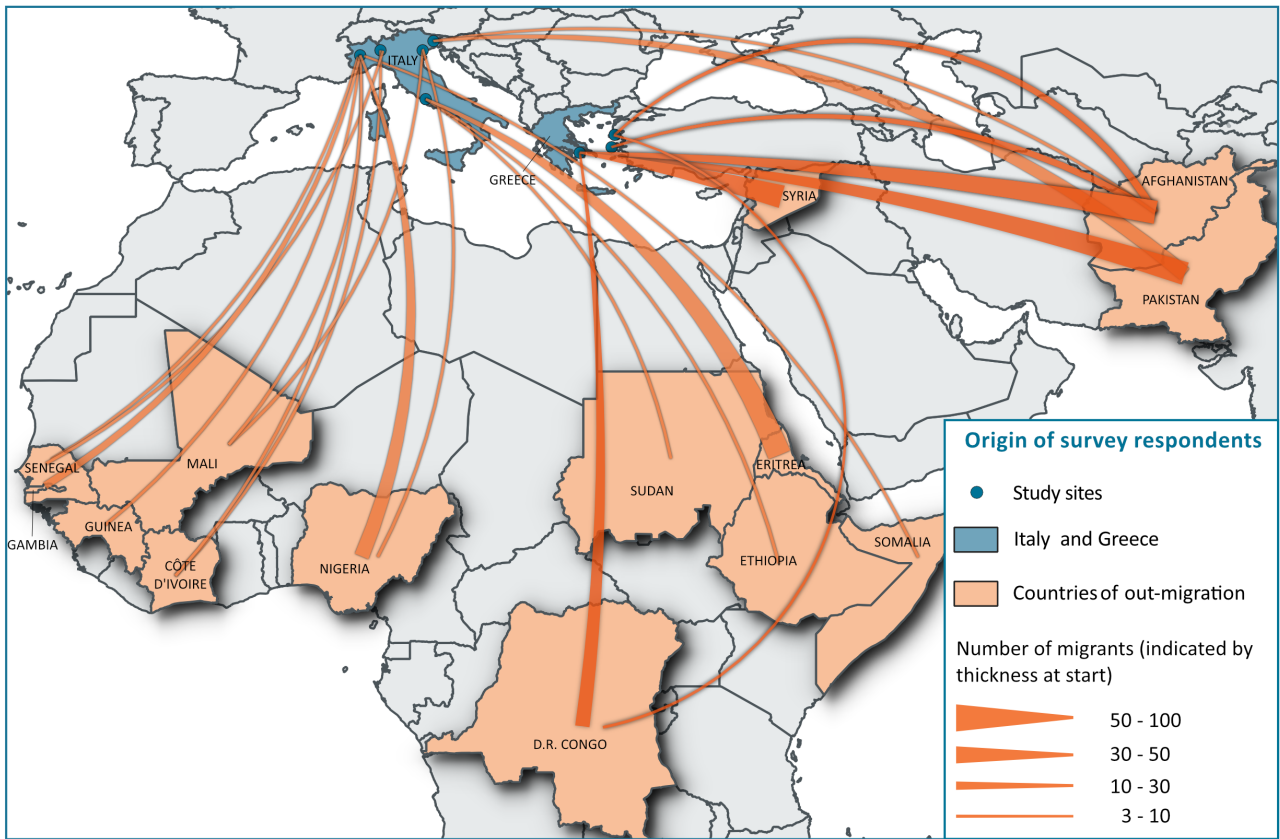
Besides the impact of the pandemic and related measures, we were confronted by several broader **methodological and ethical concerns** during fieldwork in Greece and Italy. When conducting research with disadvantaged people, such as migrants in protracted displacement, difficulties in building trust between researchers and ‘researched’ arise, sometimes reflecting mistrust towards an EU-funded project, or towards the contrast between ensuring anonymity while seeking informed consent, or towards the prospect of sharing information on one’s local and transnational networks and contacts, journey to Europe, visits to the country of origin, or support received from relatives and friends living elsewhere. This also relates to the inherent power relations, revealing issues of positionality and the role of researchers belonging to the dominant group seeking to interview marginalised people with an uncertain legal status, often with a background of trauma and loss, which led us to reflect on the unethical dimension of ‘listening’.

This dimension appeared to be more pronounced in certain research locations or with certain target groups, for instance, on Lesbos, Greece, which has been in the global spotlight since 2015—attracting researchers, practitioners, reporters and celebrities—and was marked at the time of visit by containment, harsh living conditions and severe restrictions. Key informants from the local community, humanitarian workers and activists also made us aware of the difficulties in building trust and overall reluctance to speak with a researcher. This was due not only to the island having become an over-researched location, but also to the difficulty in guaranteeing the informants’ anonymity within a small community.

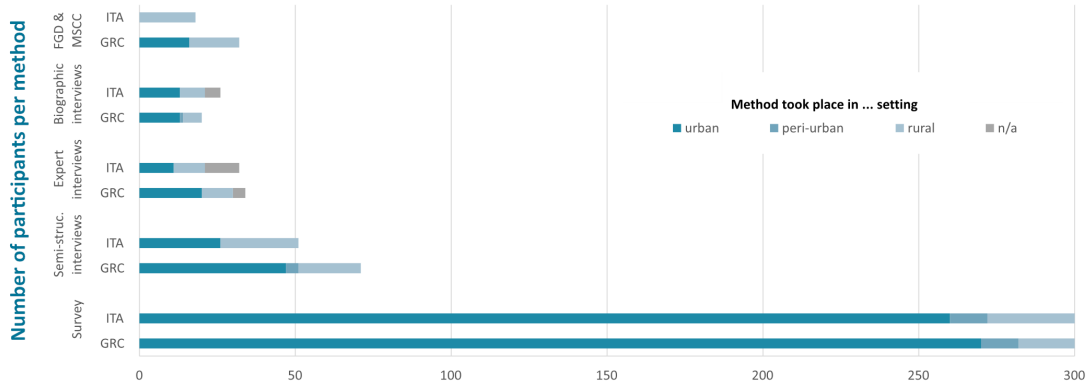
In Italy, similar issues arose with the Eritrean community interviewed in Rome, especially when it came to involving 100 Eritreans in the survey. Along with the moral challenge of encountering marginalised informants who live in extremely precarious conditions and are in desperate need of immediate support, interviewers had to deal with the reluctance of most prospective participants to share, mainly because they did not trust the purpose of the project and were sceptical of the concrete changes it could bring in their life. Many prospective informants questioned the project’s capacity to provide solutions based on the findings gathered from fieldwork. They had already been involved in other research projects in the past, which promised to offer solutions while providing no follow-up. This is telling not only about the problem of targeting an over-researched community like the Eritreans in Rome but also about the lack of any perceived direct benefits coming to these persons from their participation in research projects and the risk of raising false expectations.

Interviewers faced these challenges with an honest, open and respectful attitude, focused on the relational aspects of the interaction and the intrinsic value of dialogue and exchange between worlds that may not easily talk to each other. For instance, interviewers spent an equal amount of time with persons who refused to participate in the survey (to friendly discuss these issues, listen to their arguments and preserve a good relationship) as with those who accepted (Gonzales et al., 2021).

# TRAFIG Research: Italy and Greece



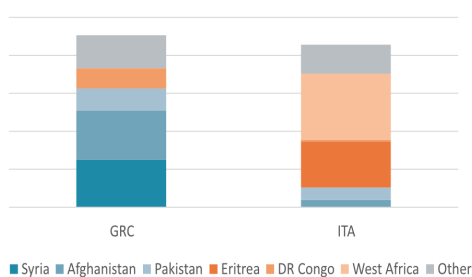
Time of empirical research: 11/2019 - 06/2021



**Sex of respondents**



**Respondents' country of origin**



**Respondents living in/outside of reception centres or other camps**



Source: FAO 2020, Natural Earth 2020, BICC 2021; Layout: Benjamin Etzold, Ben Buchenau, Jonas Spekker, BICC, August 2021.  
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by BICC.

## 2. Protracted displacement in southern Europe

### 2.1 Comparing Greece and Italy

With its focus on southern Europe, this *working paper* compares protracted displacement in Greece and Italy, looking at the structural forces shaping it and their interactions with migrants' mobility and connectivity. The comparison is based on a thorough analysis of the relations between the contextual variables and the key variables described in Sub-section 1.1 in both countries; such analysis is guided by the six research questions identified above.

The choice of these two case studies is justified and made particularly relevant by at least **three common structural features**, which deeply shape the patterns of mobility/immobility and in-/exclusion of migrants in protracted displacement.

- Both countries are located at the southern external borders of the European Union (EU)** and exposed to significant arrivals of asylum seekers from the EU's southern and south-eastern neighbourhood. Thus, in the EU jargon, they are “**countries of first entry**”. Here, asylum seekers are generally immobilised due to the implementation of the Dublin Regulation, which establishes as a general rule that the EU country responsible for examining an asylum application is the country where the asylum seeker first enters the EU's territory. Those who try to overcome this rule and move onwards to request protection in another EU country are generally considered ‘returnable’ to Italy or Greece through the so-called Dublin return procedure.
- Both countries have comparatively low administrative capacity** in the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees. Greece and Italy have only recently developed a national asylum system under the double pressure of the EU integration process and rapidly increasing arrivals of asylum seekers (see Sub-sections 2.2 and 2.3). To cope with the difficulties that arise when having to rapidly develop a well-functioning asylum system, international organisations (UN Refugee Agency–UNHCR and International Organization for Migration–IOM) and European agencies (primarily the European Asylum Support Office–EASO) have supported both countries for years by partially taking over tasks that should be typically carried out by the state, such as
  - setting up the relevant legislative, policy and administrative framework,
  - carrying out administrative tasks linked to the asylum procedure, to managing reception and developing integration policies.
- Both countries are characterised by a combination of a stagnant official labour market and sizeable underground economies.** They have suffered the consequences of a prolonged economic crisis since the 2007 Great Recession and are still coping with the effects of structural adjustment

measures and austerity programmes. A hard-to-achieve full recovery has obvious effects on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged parts of the population, including migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, who often make a living by relying only on informal jobs, informal housing, etc.

However, for the purpose of this comparative *paper*, it is equally important to mention some **structural differences** and peculiarities of the two countries, which impact specifically on protracted displacement and mobility/immobility dynamics.

- Although the so-called **Hotspot approach** was introduced in Greece and Italy under pressure by the European Union in the context of the 2015 ‘migration/refugee crisis’, it has been implemented differently in the two countries. The way Hotspots on the Greek islands are managed, and living conditions and mobility restrictions imposed on migrants there (see Sub-section 2.2) is very peculiar to Greece and not comparable to the Hotspot situation in Italy.
- The **intra-EU mobility dynamics** of asylum seekers and protection beneficiaries are seemingly affected, among other factors, by a structural political geography difference. With Italy bordering three Schengen countries and Greece none, mobility from Italy to other EU countries is not only easier but also more fluid and circular, allowing for back-and-forth movements (especially of protection beneficiaries), whereas (circular) mobility in the case of Greece is in practice more complex.
- Always in relation to so-called secondary movements, while **Dublin returns** of asylum seekers to Italy are a widespread practice and have been subject over time to few jurisprudential limitations (e.g., Tarakehl v. Switzerland<sup>12</sup>), Dublin returns to Greece have been long suspended as a consequence of national and European case law (e.g., M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece<sup>13</sup>). More recently, in line with this jurisprudence, some German courts have applied the same principles to protection beneficiaries as well, allowing that recognised refugees who received protection status in Greece and subsequently moved to Germany were not returned to Greece due to the serious risk of inhumane and degrading treatment they could face.<sup>14</sup>

12 ECtHR, Tarakehl v. Switzerland (no. 29217/12), GC Judgment, 4 November 2014, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-148070>.

13 ECtHR, M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece (no. 30696/09), GC Judgment, 21 January 2011, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-103050>. Based on this ruling, Dublin transfers to Greece have been suspended since 2011, and despite a European Commission's recommendation to have them reenacted by mid-March 2017, ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO\\_16\\_4253](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_16_4253)), they take place to a very limited extent.

14 <https://www.courthousenews.com/refugees-cannot-be-returned-to-greece-german-court-rules/>



Despite the challenges posed by the specificities of the two case studies, we believe that the common structural features characterising Greece and Italy allow for an interesting and valuable comparative analysis of protracted displacement in the two countries.

## 2.2 Protracted displacement in Greece

During the last quarter of the 20th century, Greece experienced a transition from a country of emigration to a migrant destination. However, it has never ceased to be a place of transit and stopover for people heading ‘to Europe’ in search of safety, decent livelihoods and better life prospects. Unauthorised border crossings began increasing around the mid-2000s, and the unrealistic policies at the time resulted in thousands of displaced people, most coming from South Asia and the Middle East, staying in limbo for shorter or longer periods. In 2010, an estimated 54.5 per cent of all “detections of illegal border crossing” into the European Union occurred along the so-called Eastern Mediterranean route, the vast majority crossing from Turkey to Greece.<sup>15</sup> As recently as in 2011, Greece started developing its asylum system<sup>16</sup> and ‘invested’ in enhanced border control and (excessive use of) detention. None of these measures were enough to address what came to be called the ‘migration/refugee crisis’ of 2015, when most displaced people landing on east Aegean islands headed towards Idomeni at the northern border to continue the journey towards other EU member states. More than 855,000 people were estimated to have crossed through Greece that year alone, more than half from Syria, about a quarter from Afghanistan and one out of ten from Iraq.<sup>17</sup>

When borders along the ‘Balkan route’ were sealed and the EU–Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016 was enacted, this restricted such movements. Following the Hotspot approach, most people on the move were obliged to stay in the newly established reception facilities (the reception and identification centres, RICs). Since then, a sharp rise in asylum applications has been observed, as illustrated in Figure 2 below. The number of asylum applications increased by 40 per cent from 2014 to 2015, nearly tripled in 2016 and continued rising reaching a peak of 77,275 in 2019. Since 2019, applications have fallen considerably, reflecting a decline in arrivals along the eastern Mediterranean route, linked to various factors, including stricter border controls following diplomatic tensions with Turkey in March 2020 and the overall downturn in human mobility in the context

of the pandemic. Governmental change in July 2019 and a stricter approach focusing on deterrence also played a role.

In parallel, Greece recorded an increase in first-instance decisions and (to a more limited extent) in decisions on appeal or review. The annual average of first-instance decisions in 2017 to 2020 was about 38,000, compared to just over 11,200 in 2011 to 2016; in 2020 alone, 62,155 asylum decisions were issued at first instance. Similarly, decisions on appeal/review also increased from less than 4,000 before 2014 to an average of nearly 10,000 a year between 2015 and 2019. In 2020 alone, 23,755 final decisions were issued. Even so, the number of pending applications remained as high as 57,347 cases at the end of 2020, despite a decrease by 34 per cent from the year before, following a substantial backlog accumulated since 2015.<sup>18</sup> Positive decisions on asylum applications have also increased as a result of a better functioning asylum system; asylum recognition rates have risen from an annual average below two per cent before 2014 to half the number of applications between 2017 and 2020.

In the post-2015 context, protracted displacement in Greece primarily concerned asylum seekers mainly from Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq (but also the DR Congo). This includes

- those stranded in the RICs or Hotspots on the eastern Aegean islands (more than 42,000 people in February 2020), whose numbers had been substantially reduced to less than one-fourth by May 2021<sup>19</sup> ;
- those accommodated in the 31 camps operating on the mainland, about 23,540 people (over 40 per cent children);
- another 21,000 vulnerable people hosted in urban apartments.

Along with asylum seekers, protracted displacement in Greece also concerns undocumented migrants, i.e., people who for various reasons have never entered the asylum system or were pushed out of it. However, as our research revealed, even regularly resident migrants or recognised refugees struggled to survive in extremely precarious conditions.

## 2.3 Protracted displacement in Italy

Within the European Union, Italy is one of the main countries of destination and transit for migrants coming from Africa and Asia, including a significant component of forced migrants and protection seekers. Due to its position along the Central Mediterranean route, Italy is the first European country of arrival for many who cross the Mediterranean from North Africa, mainly but not exclusively from Libya and Tunisia. Along this route, nationalities are mixed: Most migrants come from Sub-Saharan

15 FRONTEX (2012) Annual Risk Analysis 2012, [https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk\\_Analysis/Annual\\_Risk\\_Analysis\\_2012.pdf](https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2012.pdf) (see Table 2).

16 Law 3907/2011 established the Asylum and First Reception Services (becoming operational in 2013) aiming at harmonising the Greek legal framework with the European Directives on Reception and Return (Goumenos & Hatziprokopiou, 2020).

17 See UNHCR Operational Data Portal (Mediterranean situation/Greece): <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean/location/5179>

18 See AIDA (Asylum Information Database) Country reports and updates for Greece (2015 onwards) on the website of the European Council for Refugees and Exiles: <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/greece>.

19 See statistics on the Ministry of Migration and Asylum website: <https://migration.gov.gr/en/statistika>

and northern African countries, but some also come from the Middle East and South Asia.<sup>20</sup> Along with maritime arrivals, Italy has received growing numbers of forced migrants, mainly from Pakistan and Afghanistan entering the country through its eastern land borders and transiting through Greece and the Western Balkans.

Due to the rapid sequence of the ‘migration crisis’ of 2011, triggered by the collapse of the Tunisian and Libyan regimes, and the ‘migration/refugee crisis’ of 2015, following the Syrian war, Italy has undergone not only an increase in arrivals of forced migrants but also profound changes in its reception system (Giannetto et al., 2019). Figure 2 shows a first peak in asylum applications in 2011 and a second peak, more prolonged over time and significantly more relevant in terms of numbers, between 2014 and 2017. The rapid increase of asylum seekers’ arrivals since 2011 had a huge impact on the (still immature) national reception system, determining its (rapid and rather messy) growth until 2016.

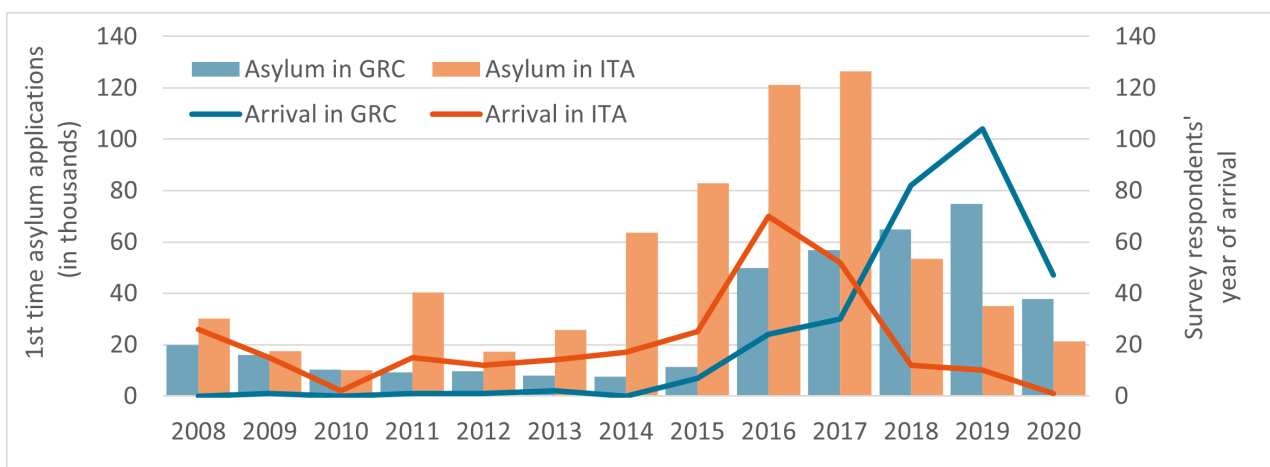
While in 2017, Italy received the second-highest number of asylum applications in the European Union (preceded only by Germany), in 2018, applications fell considerably—a trend that continued in the following years. This is likely due to a decline in arrivals along the Central Mediterranean route, linked to multiple factors. One factor, the controversial cooperation established by the Italian government with Libyan authorities, has played a crucial role. This decrease in asylum requests coupled with the entry into force of Law decree 113/2018<sup>21</sup>, the so-called Salvini decree (see Sub-section 3.2.2), reduced the number of people hosted in reception centres from more than

180,000 in 2017 to more than 130,000 at the end of 2018<sup>22</sup>, further decreasing to about 90,000 in 2019 and about 80,000 in 2020 (Openpolis & ActionAid, 2020, p. 5).

Parallel to this decline in asylum applications, Italy recorded an increase in first instance decisions and (to a more limited extent) higher instance decisions. Consequently, in 2018, pending asylum cases decreased by 32 per cent compared to 2017 (EASO, 2019) and in 2019 by 54 per cent compared to the previous year (EASO, 2020). Simultaneously, following law decree 113/2018, in 2019, the recognition of humanitarian protection (a national protection status) fell substantially, producing a significant increase in rejections at first instance, from 58 per cent in 2017 to 81 per cent in 2019 (Giannetto et al., 2020).

These rejected people risked being pushed out of the asylum system and joining the population of undocumented migrants present in the country, which has constantly been growing since 2013 (when the latest regularisation took place) mainly due to the lack of legal entry channels for work (Openpolis & Action Aid, 2019). At the end of 2019, renowned research centres estimated the number of undocumented migrants present in Italy in the order of 600,000 (ISMU, 2019). This is probably the most vulnerable category of migrants in protracted displacement present in the country, often living informally at the margins of the legal, administrative and socio-economic system. However, as argued in the following sections, also migrants with a (more or less stable) legal status—including asylum seekers and refugees—may live (or rather survive) in Italy in extremely precarious conditions, for instance, in informal settlements (Medecins Sans Frontières, 2016; 2018) and face huge obstacles in their path towards socio-economic inclusion.

Figure 2: Asylum applications in Greece and Italy (2008–2020) and survey respondents' year of arrival



Source: Eurostat ([https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr\\_asyappctza&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyappctza&lang=en)); TRAFIG survey (n=600)

20 Ministry of the Interior, Cruscotto statistico al 10 agosto 2021 [Statistics on 10 August 2021]. Available at: <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/stampa-e-comunicazione/dati-e-statistiche/sbarchi-e-accoglienza-dei-migranti-tutti-i-dati>.

21 Law decree 113/2018 of 04.10.2018 converted in Law 132/2018 of 01.12.2018.

22 Ministry of the Interior, Indagine conoscitiva in materia di politiche dell’immigrazione, diritto d’asilo e gestione dei flussi migratori [Fact-finding investigation on migration policies, right to asylum, and management of migration flows], 29 May 2020, [https://www.camera.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg18/attachments/upload\\_file\\_doc\\_acquisiti/pdfs/000/001/791/Memorie\\_Prefetto\\_Michele\\_Di\\_Bari.pdf](https://www.camera.it/application/xmanager/projects/leg18/attachments/upload_file_doc_acquisiti/pdfs/000/001/791/Memorie_Prefetto_Michele_Di_Bari.pdf).

### 3. Governance regimes and their effects

The governance of protracted displacement in Greece and Italy has multiple impacts on mobility aspirations, opportunities and strategies of migrants in protracted displacement. It also affects their socio-economic marginalisation and legal precarity. These impacts occur through specific immobilising and irregularising forces, which are reproduced at multiple levels within the legal and policy framework. Mobility rights, especially within the European Union (but to some extent also within the countries of study) are determined by the legal status a migrant holds in that precise moment, within a broader context of overall restrictive intra-EU mobility policies targeting third-country nationals.

This section aims to address the following two research questions:

- How do governance regimes in Greece and Italy affect the mobility aspirations, opportunities, strategies and trajectories of people in protracted displacement situations? (RQ1)
- What is the impact of governance regimes in Greece and Italy on the socio-economic and legal marginalisation of people in protracted displacement situations? (RQ2)

#### 3.1 The impact of governance regimes in Greece

##### The impact on mobility

The governance of displacement in Greece is complex and polymorphic, comprising differentiated actors, with a crucial role performed by international organisations (IOs) and some non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The consolidation of the Greek asylum system through mushrooming and constantly shifting legislation<sup>23</sup> within the broader EU regulatory framework on migration management and border control has produced “a multifaceted labyrinth” migrants are faced with (Tsitselikis, 2019). In this context, the decision to contain asylum seekers in camps—built initially to respond to a situation labelled as “emergency”—marked a decisive shift in Greece’s reception policies, prolonging and expanding displacement within the country (Kandyllis, 2019). At the same time, the national regulatory framework lacks a coherent and comprehensive integration policy, with only a few scattered project-based initiatives, the major one being the IOM-managed HELIOS programme<sup>24</sup>. This section focuses on the major obstacles

posed by the existing governance regimes to both intra-EU and intra-national mobility.

##### Immobilisation within the European Union

Since the EU–Turkey Statement and the sealing of borders along the Balkan route, movements of forced migrants within the European Union have been severely interrupted, and newcomers have been obliged to remain in Greece and apply for asylum in the country, as determined by the Dublin Regulation. This practice has been virtually one of the few legal migration channels to Europe, even for people for whom Greece was not their final destination. Especially for newcomers to the five Greek islands governed under the Hotspot approach and the EU–Turkey Statement, there is no other option but to apply for asylum upon arrival or be deported. As mentioned by an interviewee who arrived on Lesbos with his family wishing to continue their journey to Germany: “In Moria [...] they told me that here, I can only apply for asylum in Greece, if not, I had to return to Turkey” (SsInt-AUTH-EP-212-GRC).

In general, the obligation to apply for asylum in Greece hinders displaced people’s mobility opportunities towards other EU countries. Yet, for some, this may be a way to reach their desired destinations, once they are granted some form of international protection and have their travel documents issued. Despite EU-level restrictions on refugees’ settlement in other EU countries, specific institutional practices have permitted refugees recognised in Greece to settle in (or, at least not be returned from) other EU member states. Several court decisions have acknowledged the serious risk of inhumane treatment that refugees could face in Greece in case of return (see Sub-section 2.1).

The other channel for legal migration to another EU member state is that of family reunification under the Dublin Regulation, which foresees that every asylum seeker who has close family members in another EU country can be reunited with his/her family and then have his/her application examined in that country. However, adult children are not entitled to family reunification because they do not fit within the Dublin definition of family unit, unless they can prove ‘dependency’—either they depend on someone’s care or that someone depends on their care. Thus, family reunification may facilitate mobility on the one hand and result in other types of immobilisation and disconnections on the other (for relevant ambiguities, see Sub-section 4.1.1).

<sup>23</sup> Law 4375/2016, adopted only days after the EU–Turkey Statement, regulated a wide range of issues related to asylum and reception and formulated the core of the Greek asylum policy. At the beginning of 2020, the government elected in summer 2019 and led by the conservative New Democracy party adopted Law 4636/2019 on asylum, protection and reception, restricting even more the legal framework on asylum.

<sup>24</sup> The Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection (HELIOS) is the only national-scale integration project operating in Greece at

the moment (from June 2019 to September 2021), financed by DG HOME and implemented by the IOM and partners (see <https://greece.iom.int/en/hellenic-integration-support-beneficiaries-international-protection-helios>).

The complexity and stratification of the governance regime in Greece has an impact on displaced people's intra-EU mobility opportunities and strategies in many different ways. For example, when traversing Greek border crossings where Hotspots are not established, displaced people may avoid registration, identification and asylum application upon arrival. This may result in further irregular intra-EU mobility trajectories.

Despite its (so far) limited implementation, return mobility to the country of origin should also be mentioned as part of the constantly reshaping governance regime. The Greek government's aspirations to increase voluntary returns through the IOM Assisted Voluntary Returns and Reintegration scheme (AVRR) are constantly advertised at the different reception facilities and through multiple communication channels.<sup>25</sup>

#### Immobilisation within Greece

A number of immobilising forces are also reproduced within the Greek reception system, which permits specific mobilities to asylum applicants while forbidding others. Displacement is dominated by three distinct figurations, in which asylum procedures are interrelated with specific reception and accommodation facilities and mobility restrictions:

- the forced containment of displaced people in the Hotspots of five eastern Aegean islands, where they are subject to a 'geographical restriction of movement' prohibiting departure towards the mainland before their asylum claims are examined (with few exceptions);<sup>26</sup>
- the dispersal of asylum seekers in mainland camps (after official transfer from the Hotspots or from elsewhere), usually located in remote areas at urban margins or in rural sites, without adequate transportation, far from basic services and opportunities to socialise;<sup>27</sup>
- the stay of the most vulnerable asylum seekers in subsidised rented urban apartments through the accommodation programme ESTIA, coordinated until recently by UNHCR, and transferred to the administration of the Ministry of Migration and Asylum in summer 2020.<sup>28</sup>

A possible 'violation' of geographical restriction (in the authorities' terminology) and asylum seekers' unauthorised movement from the islands to the mainland may have an impact on the asylum process and limit access to reception. Only applicants identified as 'vulnerable' (based on constantly shrinking criteria), or applying for family reunification under Dublin, are exempt from geographical restriction and transferred to a mainland reception facility (either a camp or an ESTIA urban apartment). Vulnerability, thus, plays a crucial role in asylum seekers' mobility, as it may end their immobilisation on the islands; yet it may also lead to family separation, as only specific vulnerable members may be exempted from geographical restriction. As framed by an asylum applicant from the DR Congo who stayed in the Samos Hotspot: "They wait for people to get sick to go out! If someone is not sick, he will not go out [of the camp]" (SsInt-AUTH-EP-221-GRC).

Different asylum recognition rates also affect the mobility strategies of different nationalities on the islands. The manager of the Vial Hotspot in Chios explained that Syrians and Afghans want to move to the mainland to avoid having to return to Turkey; in contrast, Palestinians and Somalis, due to their high recognition rates, prefer to remain on the islands until the asylum process is over (EInt-AUTH-FV-104-GRC).

The transfer of asylum applicants to a mainland accommodation (after the lifting of geographical restriction) brings further mobility restrictions until the issuance of the asylum decision. Law 4636/2019 introduced, for the first time, the possibility to limit or end the "material reception provisions" (including accommodation) for asylum seekers who, e.g., escape geographical restriction on the islands, leave their accommodation without informing the manager of the facility, violate accommodation rules, etc. Thus, mobilities from accommodation facilities are severely hindered and controlled through so-called population verification measures implemented by the facilities' managers to count present and absent asylum seekers. The latter may lose their accommodation in the facility, which will be then considered again as empty and available.

*Yes, if you're not in your accommodation (container), there is a 90 per cent chance of losing it; people who were in Thessaloniki to visit families and friends already lost their living spaces, the camp manager gave them to the refugees living in the tents (PO-AUTH-EP-702-GRC).*

25 AVRR is one of the longest programmes implemented by IOM in Greece with over 52,000 people returned between 2010-2020 (40 per cent since June 2016); for more info see: <https://greece.iom.int/en/implementation-assisted-voluntary-returns-including-reintegration-measures-and-operation-open-center>.

26 Law 4375/2016 provided for the operation of RICs, while the geographical restriction was decided a few months later.

27 Temporary reception and accommodation facilities have been established in Greece since 2016, originally with the assistance of UNHCR, and with the IOM providing "site management support" since autumn 2018, while a number of NGOs operate specific services; see: <https://migration.gov.gr/en/ris/perifereiakes-monades/domes>.

28 The Emergency Support To Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) programme was initiated by UNHCR in late 2015. Thanks to European Commission funding (AMIF), since late 2017, it has evolved into an urban accommodation programme for asylum seekers classified as vulnerable, combined with cash assistance (<http://estia.unhcr.gr/en/home>). The programme was renewed (ESTIA II) in summer 2020, with the accommodation component gradually handed over to the Greek government (<https://migration.gov.gr/en/ris2/filoxenia-aitoynton-asylo>). ESTIA is implemented locally by partners, such as NGOs and local authorities.



At the local level, there are various differences in these provisions' implementation, resulting in different modes and impacts of immobilisation across different reception facilities within the country. Such differences increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, specific mainland camps were put under quarantine, even when restrictions for the rest of the population had been lifted. Hotspots on the islands also faced constant lockdowns and dehumanising living conditions—which in the case of Lesbos, led to the fire that destroyed the Moria Hotspot in September 2020. Thanks to authorised transfers to the mainland and limited relocations to other EU countries, the number of people on Lesbos was reduced, but immobilisation through geographical restriction for those remaining on the island was maintained. In conclusion, immobilising forces within Greece are reproduced mainly through the reception system and are shaped by the geographical restriction on the islands and strict regulations on mobility and absences for those residing in reception facilities on the mainland.

### The impact of governance regimes on socio-economic and legal marginalisation

In Greece, people in protracted displacement have been marginalised, in socio-economic and legal terms, since the 1990s, when the country started receiving significant migrant populations. Marginalisation intensified during the financial crisis of the last decade, also affecting those who had arrived since 2015 and had experienced protracted limbo situations during their migration journey, even before crossing the Greek border. Integration prospects are thus hindered by Greece's ongoing economic woes, following a decade of recession and austerity, but also the recent economic downturn caused by the pandemic. Fieldwork revealed that socio-economic and legal marginalisation are closely interconnected and related to migration governance, yet with different outcomes for displaced people with different legal and asylum statuses.

#### Socio-economic and legal marginalisation within the asylum system

As regards asylum applicants, staying immobilised within the asylum system (as explained above) potentially leads to the end of their **legal marginalisation** after asylum has been granted. Yet, at the same time, this immobilisation hinders asylum seekers' prospects from overcoming **socio-economic marginalisation**, especially while waiting for the asylum decision to be made. This is because a number of recent legal amendments have left asylum seekers even more marginalised: Restrictions on leaving accommodation facilities reduce their opportunities for occasional informal work (e.g., in agriculture), and hiding their (even informal) employment risks losing certain provisions (e.g., cash assistance). Moreover, formal employment is permitted only six months after the submission of the asylum application. Access to employment and healthcare have been hindered since summer 2019 through the replacement of the

National Insurance Number (AMKA) with a Foreigner's Temporary Insurance and Health Coverage Number (PAAYPA), adding additional obstacles to pre-existing bureaucratic procedures. For most asylum seekers, cash assistance from UNHCR is their only income, the amount of which is not enough, especially for families with children.

Marginalisation is also reproduced in the context of reception and related accommodation. Limbo, waiting, and harsh living conditions are usually the 'rule of life' in Hotspots and mainland camps. Despite significant differences between the sites, common persisting problems relate to overcrowding, unsuitable accommodation in tents or containers, lack of sanitation and running water, limited access to medical care, services and amenities, and tensions among the camps' population (that is between different nationalities, gender-related issues, etc.). Geographical restriction on the islands exacerbates marginalisation, which in turn is aggravated by confinement as a result of COVID-related measures imposed by the authorities. Such confinement posed a direct threat to asylum seekers' life, as rules like social distancing could not be applied in mass accommodation facilities. The remote areas where mainland camps are usually located also intensify social marginalisation through segregation and invisibility. In the words of an asylum applicant: "In the camp, we lived like animals. [...] Life in camps is not human" (SsInt-AUTH-EP-206-GRC). Prolonged confinement during the pandemic has cultivated the ground for the government's plans to establish closed (rather than open) reception facilities, as foreseen in Law 4636/2019. What is more, living under such inhumane conditions may also affect a person's performance in the asylum interview, and hence the authorities' decision, thus potentially leading to rejection and irregularisation. As an expert interviewee mentioned:

*This is very important. That living conditions can even affect the asylum application. A person who stays in Moria and for many reasons may not manage to sleep the night before the interview because of the living conditions, may also face psychological problems which are exacerbated (EInt-AUTH-FV-101-GRC).*

In camps and ESTIA apartments (where living conditions are better), limbo and waiting are interrelated with increased dependency on humanitarian relief services, but also, on a personal level, on the NGO workers or volunteers who provide these services. Dependency is reproduced due to various factors: A chaotic asylum system and limited access to suitable information; the inactivity of asylum seekers created by how services are provided; the absence of interpreters in public services and the extensive use of the Greek language in documents related to asylum procedures and the absence of a cohesive set of long-term policies aimed at integration, such as in the fields of education, language learning and job training, which could foster self-reliance and self-determination.



Moreover, even if a positive asylum decision may offer an **end to legal marginalisation, socio-economic marginalisation is still in place**—if not deepening—for recognised refugees who are forced to leave reception facilities (camps or apartments) just one month after their asylum procedure is completed, when cash assistance also stops. The so-called exits from reception facilities have led many to homelessness, especially in urban centres. To deal with this, authorities in Athens have transferred homeless refugees from downtown public spaces to specific camps, where they stay again in tents, most often waiting for the issuance of travel documents so that they can leave the country. A resident of Malakasa camp in Attica comments:

*The situation in Malakasa camp is better than in Moria Hotspot, but now Malakasa has become a small Moria in Athens. Many homeless people, refugees, have come to Malakasa and live in tents (SsInt-AUTH-EP-219-GRC).*

#### Marginalisation outside the asylum system

Marginalisation is even more pronounced in the case of displaced people who are outside or at the margins of the asylum system. In particular, the group of people whose asylum application has been rejected is growing, as a negative asylum decision is usually followed by prolonged irregularisation and homelessness or precarious living conditions. This irregularisation and marginalisation may be the outcome of the authorities' recent emphasis on the acceleration of asylum procedures. Even if the prolonged waiting time of asylum applicants were reduced, there is the danger that accelerated procedures lead to mistakes, unfair treatment, multiplication of negative decisions and the increase in the number of undocumented people in the country, as highlighted by several actors in the field:

*The new Law [4636/2019] will only result in an increase of precariousness [...] because it will kick many people out of the procedure. [...] Through the new Law, more asylum seekers will be rejected, [...] and these people will remain without documents and no protection framework (EInt-AUTH-EP-102-GRC).*

Legal marginalisation also concerns beneficiaries of subsidiary protection who were granted protection in Greece before 2015 but whose status was not renewed over the last few years. Our encounters with people originating from Afghanistan or Iran revealed that, despite being settled in Greece for years, they may find themselves again in legal and socio-economic marginalisation, as their employment may again be at risk. Migrants who have been settled in Greece for decades and, due to the demanding legislation, are placed in multiple sequences of irregular statuses are also concerned about problems with the renewal of residence permits. Finally, albeit expected,

people who have entirely skipped the Greek asylum procedures (usually with a plan to cross into other EU countries) but remain in Greece (more or less) temporarily until they (are able to) implement their next steps are also marginalised (in legal and socio-economic terms). For most people who find themselves in any of these cases, everyday life is harsh, as (ir)regularity affects their daily livelihood and movements. They can be subject to frequent police controls, transfers to police stations and possible detention, and live under constant fear of deportation to their country of origin.

#### Key findings

- *The interplay between the Dublin Regulation, the Hotspot approach and the EU–Turkey Statement restricts and contains refugee movements within Greece, especially on the north-eastern Aegean islands, which have become an EU buffer zone and a border within the country.*
- *Immobilising forces for asylum seekers within Greece are reproduced through the reception system (geographical restriction on the islands and mobility restrictions in mainland reception facilities). Vulnerability criteria and asylum recognition rates play a crucial role in asylum seekers' (im)mobility.*
- *Recent legal amendments, immobilisation within the reception system and dependency on humanitarian relief services hinder asylum seekers' prospects from overcoming socio-economic marginalisation.*
- *Legal marginalisation is increasing, sometimes as the outcome of the acceleration of asylum procedures that may lead to unfair treatment and the multiplication of negative decisions. Non-renewal of status for beneficiaries of subsidiary protection (especially from Afghanistan and Iran) places them in multiple sequences of irregular statuses and socio-economic marginalisation.*

## 3.2 The impact of governance regimes in Italy

### The impact of governance regimes on mobility

Governance regimes play a crucial role in affecting the mobility and immobility of people in protracted displacement in Italy. In this section, we will first analyse the obstacles to intra-EU mobility posed by the existing EU regulatory framework. Then, we will focus on factors that may hinder intra-national mobility. Finally, we will examine the multiple mobility disruptions caused by the restrictions introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Immobilisation within the European Union

Due to the existing EU regulatory framework, mobility within Europe represents a challenge for asylum seekers and protection beneficiaries in Italy. As concerns asylum seekers, generally speaking, intra-EU mobility is prohibited based on the Dublin Regulation. The Regulation represents a problem, especially for adult asylum seekers who have family members in other EU countries whom they would like to reach but who do not fall under the definition of “family” set out by the Regulation, which includes only the applicant’s spouse or minor children. This is a source of distress for migrants. As highlighted by an interviewed lawyer:

*It is difficult for migrants to understand the Dublin Regulation. They perfectly understand the issue of the country of first entry, but they cannot understand why if they have family members in another member state, they cannot join them (EInt-FIERI-ER-003-ITA).*

Even when, based on the Dublin rules, the legal intra-EU mobility of an asylum seeker is possible (e.g., in the case of unaccompanied minors), administrative hurdles and the extremely long waiting times are the main problems. A lawyer mentioned the example of an Afghan national who has been waiting four years to know whether Italy is the country responsible for examining his asylum application. “These are cases of real protracted displacement. The life of these persons is indeed suspended” (EInt-FIERI-ER-003-ITA).

EU law allows protection beneficiaries holding an Italian residence permit to freely move across the Union, but only as tourists and for a maximum of three months, and provided that they can obtain travel documents. They formally cannot overstay this period, although many take the risk to do so: They find an informal job and settle irregularly in another EU country. This is true for beneficiaries of international protection and beneficiaries of complementary forms of protection. This practice forces protection beneficiaries to periodically return to Italy to renew their Italian residence permit (every five or two years, depending on the form of protection granted) if they do not want to become undocumented. To renew their permit, they have to provide Italian authorities with an official residence address in Italy, which they do not have. As described below in Sub-section 5.2.2, a flourishing market has developed, providing illegal services and fake documents necessary for protection beneficiaries to overcome this and other bureaucratic restrictions.

Several interviewees defined this mechanism as a trap, which obliges protection beneficiaries to keep coming back to Italy in a circuit of “protracted constrained mobility” (Hatziprokopiou et al., 2021). As observed by a representative of a civil society organisation:

*Some of them would just like to settle permanently and regularly in another EU country, but EU rules do not allow them to regularise their status in another EU*

*country. They remain linked to the country that granted them a form of protection and a residence permit. Due to the Dublin Regulation, this coincides with the country of first arrival (EInt-FIERI-ER-004-ITA).*

The stories told by our interviewees demonstrate how immobilising forces originating in the EU legal framework (such as Dublin Regulation, no EU freedom of movement for protection beneficiaries, no EU-wide recognition of qualifications) may drive persons with a regular legal status in Italy to a different and multi-layered form of irregularity. First, while holding a regular legal status recognised in Italy, they become ‘irregular’ in another EU country. Second, to maintain their legal status in Italy, they end up resorting to illegal behaviour. This shows how immobilising and irregularising forces end up multiplying irregularity and precarity.

### Partial immobilisation within Italy

Unlike in Greece, asylum seekers in Italy do not stay in the Hotspots in the south until their asylum application is examined but are redistributed to reception centres across the country. Thus, the immobilisation of asylum seekers upon arrival is not as pervasive as in the case of the Greek islands. However, depending on the number of arrivals and other factors, the intra-national redistribution mechanism may not be that rapid. In consequence, asylum seekers’ stay in Hotspots may last weeks, at times months, and this has led to concerns about the duration of stay and its lawfulness.<sup>29</sup>

Although intra-national mobility of asylum seekers is not formally prohibited in Italy, similarly to Greece, those hosted in reception centres risk losing their right to accommodation in the case of prolonged unauthorised absence. This provision hampers work- or network-related mobility to other Italian regions. Conversely, for those asylum seekers and protection beneficiaries who are no longer in the reception system, intra-national mobility is widespread. As we will see, this is often employment-driven mobility, often of a seasonal and circular type, as in the case of seasonal agricultural workers.

The COVID-19 pandemic and multiple mobility disruptions  
The restrictions introduced by the national government during the first pandemic wave (March–June 2020) produced a further disruption of mobility at different levels for people in protracted displacement across Italy, Europe, and at the international level (for instance, to and from the country of origin), with relevant socio-economic and relational effects. At that time, intra-EU mobility was completely frozen due to government prohibitions, border closures, police controls and lack of public transport. But also, mobility across the country and at the micro- level (i.e., within the town or village) was severely limited.

<sup>29</sup> Italian law foresees that the deprivation of a person’s liberty has to be validated by a judge within 48 hours, while the de facto detention of asylum seekers in Hotspots is not validated by any judge.

Asylum seekers and protection beneficiaries hosted in reception centres had to abide by the general restriction forbidding them to leave their dwelling without justification, and managing entities were obliged to notify unjustified absences to the local police daily. In those months, all transfers, new entries and exits in/from reception centres were stopped, and beneficiaries who reached the end of their reception period had their stay extended. A social worker responsible for a reception centre in Rome described the situation as follows:

*The life of people hosted in the centre is not just their 'normal' limbo-life, but it is a sort of hyper-limbo; the usual levels of immobilisation and marginalisation are exacerbated by COVID-related conditions (EInt-FIERI-ER-001-ITA).*

The situation has not been better for those living outside the reception system. A representative of a civil society organisation in the area of Castel Volturno emphasised that COVID-related mobility restrictions at the local, national and international level had a huge impact on seasonal migrant workers.

*They cannot reach the fields in Castel Volturno, cannot move to Foggia or to northern Italy to follow the usual circular migratory trajectory linked to harvest seasonality. People are stuck. Others, who went to another EU country or back to their country of origin temporarily, cannot come back to Italy. This has also enormous socio-economic consequences, with a huge increase in poverty and precarity, because migrants who cannot work and whose subsistence was based on informal daily jobs cannot access any form of unemployment or income support (EInt-FIERI-ER-004-ITA).*

## The impact of governance regimes on socio-economic and legal marginalisation

In this section, we will analyse the impact of some specific elements of the Italian migration governance regime on the legal and socio-economic precarisation of people in protracted displacement. First, we will focus on the latest immigration and asylum law reforms adopted in Italy between 2018 and 2020 and consider how changes to the legal framework interact with continuities (and structural deficiencies) contributing to affect migrants' precarity. Second, we will look at the impact of the regularisation measure introduced by the Italian government in 2020.

### The latest asylum law reforms and their impact on legal and socio-economic precarity

Changes in the governance regimes are among the factors that may produce progress and/or regression in the situation of protracted displacement of a person, affecting their legal and

administrative situation as well as socio-economic conditions. Looking at the national legal framework, many legal experts we interviewed highlighted the consequences of Law decree 113/2018<sup>30</sup>, the so-called Salvini decree.

This law has intentionally produced an increased precariousness of forced migrants in Italy. First, the law abolished 'humanitarian protection'—a widespread form of protection based on Italian law granted to most asylum seekers in Italy—which was substituted by various more circumscribed (and limited in terms of rights) complementary forms of protection. Holders of a humanitarian protection permit risked being pushed towards irregularity and exposed to additional vulnerability and marginalisation. Second, the law prohibited asylum seekers from getting a registered residence through civic registration at the municipality where they reside. Third, the law reformed the national reception system and excluded asylum seekers from accessing integration services; this has significantly lowered the reception standards for asylum seekers compared to protection beneficiaries<sup>31</sup> (Roman, 2020). The combination of these provisions (together with other provisions of the Salvini decree, such as those modifying the asylum procedure) have made the daily lives and future prospects of asylum seekers more precarious and uncertain and have introduced additional obstacles to their socio-economic inclusion.

On the one hand, interviewed experts emphasised the ruptures produced by the Salvini decree, while on the other, they also pointed out the continuities in the governance regime and the existence of structural deficiencies affecting the conditions of migrants in protracted displacement. For some, like mobile seasonal workers in Saluzzo or migrants living in occupied buildings in Rome, getting a registered place of residence was already a problem before the Salvini decree (Belloni & Massa, 2021). Moreover, long waiting times throughout the whole asylum process have been a constant feature of the Italian asylum system—starting from prolonged stays in Hotspots to alarming delays in the judicial appeal phase. Such delays produce a sense of ongoing uncertainty among migrants and defer their inclusion pathways. Finally, another key problem is the structural lack of integration policies targeting asylum seekers and protection beneficiaries and contributing to their marginalisation. Integration projects implemented during the reception period have only limited effects, and the support protection beneficiaries receive when reception ends is insufficient.

In 2020, the judiciary first and a new government later intervened to address some of the most controversial aspects introduced by the Salvini decree. In July 2020, the Italian Constitutional

30 Law decree 113/2018 of 04.10.2018 converted into Law 132/2018 of 01.12.2018.

31 The changes introduced by the Salvini decree were analysed in a TRAFIG report on the Italian legal and policy framework, which contributed to the drafting of TRAFIG working paper no 3. Available online: <https://trafig.eu/output/internal-trafig-reports/governing-protracted-displacement-in-italy>.

Court declared that the provision excluding asylum seekers from civic registration is unconstitutional, as it violates Article 3 of the Italian Constitution, the principle of equality and non-discrimination.<sup>32</sup> In October 2020, Law decree 130/2020<sup>33</sup> (the so-called Lamorgese decree) was introduced to address some controversial aspects of the previous legislation. First, it incorporated the Constitutional Court judgement making it possible again for asylum seekers to get a registered residence at the municipality where they reside. Second, although it did not restore the humanitarian protection that was in place before the Salvini decree, it broadened the set of rights attached to several forms of complementary protection.<sup>34</sup> Third, it reformed the national reception system once again, changing its name to SAI (Reception and Integration System) and restoring the possibility for asylum seekers to access integration and socio-economic inclusion services.

Experts interviewed after the adoption of the Lamorgese decree welcomed these changes. Nevertheless, they highlighted that the detrimental consequences of the previous legislation have had an impact on the lives of many people, sometimes irreversibly, as in the case of many beneficiaries of humanitarian protection, who could not renew their residence permit and lost their legal status. They also stressed that, despite the new positive emphasis put on integration as part of reception, the socio-economic inclusion of protection beneficiaries remains the Achilles' heel of the system, especially in terms of integration in the labour market. Even though asylum seekers are allowed to work earlier in Italy compared to Greece and other EU countries (only 60 days after having submitted their asylum application), they either work (and are exploited) in the informal labour market or are employed through very weak and precarious job contracts (e.g. internships).

#### The 2020 regularisation: Failing to address irregularity and precariousness

In May 2020, the Italian government adopted a regularisation measure in the context of a broad law decree, which was meant to address the detrimental socio-economic effects of the pandemic and boost the economy.<sup>35</sup> This provision established the regularisation of migrants working in the agriculture, domestic

and care sectors through two different tracks. In the first track, third-country nationals who had been in Italy without a valid residence permit since October 2019 could apply for a six-month residence permit to look for a job. In the second track, employers could apply to have their foreign (and Italian) workers employed without a regular contract or employ new workers who had been irregularly present in Italy before March 2020. By obtaining a regular job contract, these migrants could get a residence permit for work, thus a legal status.

Even though in theory, this measure was meant to improve the lives of migrants living in precarious legal and socio-economic conditions, in practice, it did not succeed in helping them out of irregularity and precarity—first of all due to its very limited scope of application in terms of economic sectors and time requirements. In actual fact, this law produced several perverse effects: Many migrants fell into additional exploitation dynamics (see Sub-section 5.2.2), and many asylum seekers, due to a misinterpretation of the provision, withdrew their asylum claim to apply for regularisation. Furthermore, this measure is in practice producing a new protracted limbo situation for applicants as, based on data provided by the Ministry of the Interior, one year after the launch of the regularisation measure, only 14 per cent of 220,000 applications had been examined, and only five per cent of applicants had received a residence permit, with worryingly low rates recorded especially in big cities like Rome and Milan (Ero Straniero, 2020). For many, applying for regularisation did not lead to obtaining a legal status but rather prolonged their precarious situation.

#### Key findings

- *Governance regimes at the European Union and national level act as immobilising forces, hampering intra-EU mobility and, in some cases, limit intra-national mobility of displaced people in Italy. These immobilising policies amplify precarity and irregularity.*
- *The COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions caused additional mobility disruptions, from the micro to the international level, with relevant socio-economic and relational effects for displaced migrants in Italy.*
- *Recent changes to the Italian legal framework on immigration and asylum interact with the system's structural deficiencies affecting migrants' legal and socio-economic precarity. Even the regularisation measure introduced in 2020 meant to improve the lives of migrants living in precarious legal and socio-economic conditions in practice failed to help them out of irregularity and rather prolonged their precarious status.*

32 Constitutional Court, Judgement 186/2020 of 09.07.2020. English Press Release available online: <https://www.cortecostituzionale.it/actionSchedaPro-nuncia.do?anno=2020&numero=186>.

33 Law decree 130/2020 of 21.10.2020 converted in Law 173/2020 of 18/12/2020.

34 Most national temporary protection permits can now be converted into work permits, and the requirements to get them were broadened. For instance, the "special protection permit", introduced by the Salvini decree to substitute the humanitarian protection permit, is now valid for two years (instead of one), it may be renewed and converted into a work permit. In addition, its scope was broadened to fully incorporate two international law obligations that were not adequately implemented in the Italian legal framework—the principle of non-refoulement and the respect for private and family life, as established by Articles 3 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, respectively.

35 Art. 103, Law Decree 34/2020 of 19.05.2020 converted into Law 77/2020 of 17.07.2020.



## 4. Agency of migrants in protracted displacement

Faced with a situation of protracted displacement and multiple obstacles imposed by the governance regimes described above, migrants still demonstrate their ability to cope with, adapt to and resist the hurdles and restrictions they are confronted with. By focusing on migrants' agency, this section delves into the multiple strategies implemented by people in protracted displacement. Such strategies have to do with migrants' interactions with governance regimes, their mobility and immobility trajectories, their daily lives (livelihood, accommodation, etc.) and their local and translocal networks. Moreover, we see that strategies deployed by people in protracted displacement are aimed at time control, space control and control over social relations.

This section aims to bring in relation the key variables of mobility, connectivity and marginalisation, looking in particular at how mobility and connectivity impact marginalisation and how connectivity affects mobility. More specifically, we address the following questions:

- How do affected people cope with, adapt to and (possibly) resist existing regulatory frames? (RQ1-2)
- What is the impact of connectivity on the socio-economic and legal marginalisation of people in protracted displacement situations? (RQ3)
- What is the impact of mobility/immobility on the socio-economic and legal marginalisation of people in protracted displacement situations? (RQ4)
- How does connectivity shape the mobility aspirations, opportunities, strategies and trajectories of people in protracted displacement situations? To what extent do networks facilitate or limit mobility? (RQ5)

### 4.1 Agency of migrants in Greece

As displaced people's testimonies indicate, they exercise agency in various and unexpected ways. Asylum seekers, international protection beneficiaries and migrants negotiate the immobilising and marginalising forces emerging from the asylum system on the one hand by inventing and adopting social, economic and spatial practices that could improve their living conditions. On the other, they use the existing regulations regarding asylum seekers' mobility and accommodation subversively. Moreover, it is clear that gender, nationality, class and legal status are significant factors affecting how displaced people experience their everyday lives and shape their strategies to cope with socio-economic and legal precarity and marginalisation.

### Adapting to governance regimes

Navigating through governance regimes involves knowing the asylum system well enough to be able to trace the cracks in the system that open up possibilities for speeding up bureaucratic procedures, getting exempted or bypassing mobility restrictions and, in general, improving the living conditions within the set of specific conditions and constraints. From this perspective, the reception and protection system in Greece, the asylum application process (stages and duration) and the applicants' rights and obligations shape displaced people's own survival strategies. In these cases, asylum seekers usually balance between legality and illegality—and several 'grey zones' in-between—combining official and unofficial means to improve their position within the asylum system.

#### Becoming vulnerable

Up until recently, asylum applicants who were identified as vulnerable in the context of the asylum system—minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled people, elderly people, single parents with minor children, pregnant women or persons with severe (mental) health problems—were exempted from 'geographical restriction' and transferred to reception facilities on the mainland. Moreover, the most vulnerable categories of asylum seekers are housed in ESTIA urban apartments (see Sub-section 3.1.1), which is considered a more privileged form of accommodation in terms of living conditions than the overcrowded camps located in remote areas.

As fieldwork shows, the legal recognition of vulnerability status in the asylum system prescribes a survival strategy for some asylum seekers, who attempt to convert themselves into vulnerable subjects and become eligible fitting the official criteria to have access to more privileged accommodation and ensure further mobility. As phrased by an activist:

*So vulnerability began from UNHCR. [...] But vulnerability has many effects on people's psychology and situation. [...] For health, freedom, food, they have to prove that they die, or else, nobody will help them. Obviously, through this procedure, mechanisms of exploitation were created, people had to make false statements, false situations, to gain what they should already have (EInt-AUTH-EP-114-GRC).*

According to interviewed experts, examples of women getting pregnant to be allowed to remain in ESTIA apartments have increased after the amendments to the legal framework that introduced the obligatory termination of accommodation for recognised refugees, with few exceptions for the most vulnerable.



However, even though asylum seekers use such strategies of ‘vulnerability construction’ to improve their conditions, these may also disempower them. The ‘vulnerability label’ victimises displaced people, rendering them persons in need. Motherhood, for instance, signifies an unequally distributed care burden for women defining their sphere of action and, thus, reducing their coping mechanisms. However, vulnerability may also lead to family separation, as vulnerable members may be exempted from the geographical restriction and transferred to the mainland, unlike other family members not considered ‘vulnerable’.

#### Embracing the reception system

Navigating through the complex reception system also entails demanding as many resources as possible and making the best use of the services provided by NGOs, humanitarian organisations and institutions. Asylum seekers’ requests for more services, such as interpreters, and complaints about the harsh living conditions and the long asylum application procedure, demonstrate that agency does not always equate to resistance. From this perspective, we can argue that claiming to be served as best and as quickly as possible and adjusting to and taking advantage of the reception system—its structure of dependence, its constraints and potentialities—could be considered as strategies used by asylum seekers to secure a better livelihood, proceed with their asylum application and challenge the power relations, without, however, reducing their dependency on humanitarian aid.

#### Negotiating accommodation facilities

Due to the substandard reception conditions in overcrowded Hotspots and mainland camps—resulting from a lack of sanitation and running water, limited access to healthcare, services and amenities—asylum applicants seek better accommodation solutions based on their economic resources and support networks, balancing between legality and illegality. Some asylum seekers who have the economic means prefer to rent an apartment and stay in the nearby city while keeping their place in the camp so that they are not excluded from asylum procedures and/or related provisions (especially cash assistance). This is the case of Saabir<sup>36</sup>, an asylum seeker from Afghanistan who, while he was officially registered in Malakasa camp, chose to live in Athens, renting a house with his friends and paying the rent with his own money. He takes this risk even though he has a job in a factory close to Malakasa and he is not allowed to be absent from his accommodation place in the camp.

*Officially, I live in Malakasa camp now. But in reality, I live in an apartment in Athens, because in Malakasa things are difficult, there are fights every night. [...]*

*Malakasa is close to my work, but I don't like the situation there. I prefer staying in Athens, even if I have to travel every day to work (SsInt-AUTH-EP-201-GRC).*

Moreover, camp managers we have spoken to revealed that they have noticed asylum applicants subletting their container rooms to other camp residents (usually their co-ethnics) who live in tents and renting a house in the city for themselves in search of better accommodation conditions. Such strategies shed light on the economic dimensions of negotiations over accommodation. Yet, we should also mention the widespread asylum seekers’ attempts to improve their living conditions in the camps through spatial re-arrangements. In these cases, planting, gardening, redecorating rooms, claiming a few inches of land that asylum seekers could manage as they wish could also be seen as a way to regain control of their lives.

Within the set of conditions and constraints imposed by the reception system, displaced people’s spatial adjustments, housing arrangements and economic negotiations regarding accommodation testify forms of agency and at the same time reveal complex and invisible networks as well as radical inequalities due to gender, race, class, country of origin, etc.

#### Family separations and reunifications

Applying for family reunification constitutes a legal way for asylum seekers to reach other EU countries under the Dublin Regulation. As such, family reunifications may, to a certain extent, be prearranged by displaced people who intentionally separate from their family members to claim and strive for a reunion later on. This is the case of one of our interlocutors, Imran, a man from Syria, who decided to have his son smuggled to Germany where his brother lives and later to a friend in the Netherlands so that he can apply for family reunification and be able to move there himself. He explains that he took the risky decision to transfer his son irregularly to Europe when he realised that he could not “have a safe life here for my family” (SsInt-AUTH-AS-219-GRC). In cases like his, taking advantage of the governance regime and trying to adjust their lives to specific asylum policies is another strategy indicative of asylum seekers’ agency, despite the dangers and precariousness this entails.

However, family reunification as a means to navigate the EU asylum system may also lead to asylum seekers’ disempowerment, as it is a distressingly long procedure with uncertain outcomes not only with respect to the journey and the final decision but also to family relations. In some cases, family reunification procedures separate family members rather than connecting them, as they bring them apart legally, geographically, but also emotionally. This is what happened to Rahmat, a 24-year-old Afghan asylum seeker (SsInt-AUTH-FV-214-GRC). His mother and two sisters were transferred

<sup>36</sup> All of the names used in sections 4 and 5 to identify migrant interviewees are fictitious.

to Finland through the family reunification scheme under the Dublin Regulation. However, the Dublin Regulation clarifies that adult children are generally not entitled to family reunion (see Sub-section 3.1.1). Therefore, Rahmat, who had already reached the age of adulthood, was excluded from reunification with his family members and was left behind in Lesvos, alone, waiting for the asylum decision.

## Strategies of not staying put

### Violating geographical restrictions

Greece's reception and protection system imposes restrictions and penalties for certain forms of mobilities for asylum seekers and refugees in the country. As mentioned above, most displaced people who arrived on the Aegean Islands after the EU–Turkey Statement face geographical restriction and are not allowed to move before their asylum requests have been examined (see Sub-section 2.2). However, as our interlocutors' testimonies show, in some cases, people attempt to circumvent mobility restrictions in various ways and for different reasons, shaping new mobility patterns. Some newcomers try to leave the islands incognito upon arrival, pretending to be tourists, hence avoiding geographical restriction by not registering an asylum claim. This was the case of Eziz, now a recognised refugee from Turkmenistan living in Lesvos with his family: "At the port, no one checked our IDs. We were from Russia supposedly" (SsInt-AUTH-FV-206-GRC). Others may decide to unofficially leave the islands towards mainland Greece while waiting for their asylum interview in RICs. Some may use fake asylum documents not subjected to geographical restriction or engage in desperate efforts to escape the Hotspots' uncertainty and harsh conditions, even though they risk being caught before embarking on a boat. As phrased by an activist with a refugee background himself:

*It is human nature to leave from hell. And it is very difficult. In Mytilene, two-three people have died in their efforts to get illegally inside the ship. Or they have tried to get inside a piece of luggage; there are photos of a mother and two kids. Irrational logics... (EInt-AUTH-EP-114-GRC).*

Moving unofficially from the islands to the mainland—thus disrupting the prolonged waiting period and challenging the rules of the reception system—is a survival strategy and a means to cope with socio-economic and legal precarity, even if this practice may put asylum seekers' legal status in danger. According to the current legal framework on asylum and reception, 'violating' geographical restriction on the islands negatively affects the asylum procedure. Asylum seekers who 'violated' geographical restriction are asked to return to the islands to remain in the asylum system and follow the procedure of their application.

### Micro-mobilities

Micro-mobilities between the camps and the cities reveal displaced people's efforts to cope with everyday marginalisation. Except for those stuck in isolated camps in remote rural areas, asylum seekers move back and forth from the camp to the city on a daily basis, despite the difficulties related to poor and inadequate public transportation that make these trips lengthy, tiring and costly. Such movements serve everyday errands and socialisation needs, such as buying food and groceries or meeting co-ethnics. For some, micro-mobilities are related to their asylum procedure, including accessing information and related services; for others, they are aimed at generating means of survival, such as seeking financial support or looking for work; and for others, they are linked to exploring possibilities for onward mobility, including contacting smugglers who could provide forged documents or otherwise help them organise their onward journeys to Europe. Moving away from reception facilities, even temporarily, also provides an escape from the regulated life in camps that dehumanises asylum seekers and thus becomes a way to take control of their lives. In addition, the frequency of these mobility practices and their circular nature, back-and-forth from camp to city, demonstrate how asylum seekers successfully combine various strategies, networks and services—official or unofficial—to navigate through governance regimes and beyond.

### 'Paradoxical' mobilities

Paradoxically, camps, initially regarded as disgraceful in terms of living conditions, may be considered and experienced as safe places considering what follows after asylum seekers are recognised as international protection beneficiaries, such as being evicted from the reception system. We have come across asylum seekers returning to camps, even to Moria camp in Lesvos, in an attempt to deal with the hardships and especially the lack of services they faced outside the camp. Returning to camps—however paradoxical this may be—indicates how camps may become familiar environments and contact zones (between displaced people and different institutions and actors) in conditions of protracted displacement that provide a safety net. Furthermore, it shows how mobility constitutes a key survival strategy for displaced people contributing to their empowerment, but at the same time to their social marginalisation. The project coordinator assistant working for Médecins sans Frontières in Lesvos states:

*It happened several times throughout the year. People are finding themselves in the big city, among many others who are homeless in the squares in central Athens. To see a doctor, it isn't easy to see a doctor here. We talk about Moria eh? The asylum service is there, the medical staff are there, and the sense of community, too. It is more reassuring than being in Athens in a completely new environment, among new people, new things. You need to*

*see a doctor, to take the metro, to commute for one hour, it isn't easy. We also have heard of people, recognised refugees, who lived in apartments in the ESTIA programme, they don't know where to go, and they go back to Moria. The first case of COVID on the island was a Somali guy, a recognised refugee who had returned from Athens (EInt-AUTH-FV-109-GRC).*

#### Invisible trajectories: Skipping asylum procedures

Displaced people may follow irregular trajectories in their efforts to move towards other EU countries, beyond (the ever-shrinking) legal routes, usually by skipping Greek asylum procedures to escape the restrictions of the Dublin Regulation's "first-country-of-entry rule". People who wish to avoid identification procedures at the RICs usually arrive in Greece through the Evros land borders or islands where Hotspots are not established and are hence not subjected to geographical restriction. They move towards mainland Greece, where they stay for a short period relying on the support of NGOs, informal solidarity initiatives and (crucially) co-ethnic or family networks.

In these cases, their irregular status affects their everyday lives during their stay. They can be easily subject to police controls on the streets, transfers to police stations and possible detention and return to Turkey or their countries of origin. For fear of deportation, they avoid social contacts, micro-mobilities in the city or spending time in public spaces. Yet, they often develop a restricted (usually co-ethnic) network that can provide the necessary information and resources to deal with their legal and social precarity and possibly open up pathways for further cross-border mobility.

#### Everyday acts of agency

##### Agency in waiting

When asylum seekers refer to their everyday life in camps and Hotspots, they usually describe a timeless experience of waiting in queues—for food distribution and medical care, submitting their asylum application, for information or various bureaucratic issues. Contrary to the dominant perception of queuing as empty and wasted time, waiting in a line also means everyday negotiations (for example, with care workers, camp managers, co-ethnics, relatives), decisions (whom to address, where to go, what to buy), establishing transnational, translocal and local contacts, obtaining the necessary and up-to-date information and planning and adjusting strategies to the shifting political conditions, in short, everyday practices of refugees under conditions of protracted displacement that Bruns (2015) has described as "agency in waiting".

On the one hand, the monotonous and timeless repetition of certain actions and activities—establishing and reproducing asylum seekers' institutional dependency—results in people's physical and mental exhaustion, disempowerment and devaluation. On

the other, this experience may motivate them to take action to reduce or use their waiting time differently. Doing something rather than nothing and engaging in a range of activities could lift them from the condition of waiting and staying put and contribute to their integration or further mobility in the future.

Working voluntarily for NGOs active in the camps, attending language courses, going to the gym daily, participating in team activities (e.g., football matches) are different time management experiences for asylum seekers living in camps. Asif, a Syrian refugee, explains that he volunteered for the Red Cross and used to commute daily between the camp and the nearby town, where a cultural centre was located, to take part in team activities because he wanted to live "like a natural person" (SsInt-AUTH-AS-203-GRC). By taking advantage of the limited number of activities offered and indirectly imposed by the asylum system—mainly associated with leisure—refugees attempt to reform their daily lives claiming some kind of normality. As asylum seekers' testimonies indicate, waiting is not only interrelated with the promise of the event to come (Bissell, 2007) and future expectations but also leads to coping strategies that concern the precarious present.

And yet, waiting could itself be a survival strategy. Latif, a recognised refugee from Syria, who was asked to abandon his apartment in the ESTIA accommodation programme, refused to leave and explained to us that he was "going to wait and see how things go" (SsInt-AUTH-AS-207-GRC). Waiting could turn into an effective strategy in the context of a confusing, chaotic, blurred and constantly shifting asylum and reception system, since—as it has already been proven—regulations may be repealed, re-adopted or never be applied.

##### Being present

Visibility, that is, showing oneself by regularly visiting social services, NGOs' offices, informal meeting places for refugees, places where someone could find work and reminding people of one's existence, needs and pending issues, constitutes a strategy of asylum seekers and recognised refugees, especially men, who are excluded from the humanitarian aid system and need to seek means for survival. In these cases, waiting—this time in informal meeting places—and being on the move—from the camp to the city, from business to business, from squares to public parks—is crucial for refugees' livelihood.

In Thessaloniki, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants from different ethnic backgrounds gather outside Faizan's mini market, a refugee from Pakistan (PO-AUTH-AS-702-GRC). He mentions that many of them ask for financial help or a job. This indicates that they do not hang out there for mere everyday shopping purposes or to socialise, but crucially also to seize opportunities of getting involved in various micro-transactions and arrangements and developing parallel, informal markets.

## Networking

Connectivity plays a significant role in transnational mobilities, as the use of and support from multiple networks could ensure a successful border crossing. Networks of contacts that range from family members, close relatives, friends, people met during the journey—either displaced people themselves or activists and NGO volunteers—may provide financial support during the journey, necessary information about how and where to cross the borders, the legal system in the destination country, shelter for the first period of stay, work opportunities and a sense of safety. Therefore, asylum seekers invest considerable time and effort to establish, sustain and multiply their networks. Sometimes, however, they also try to escape from existing networks that may be restrictive or disabling. Staying in touch with relatives and friends abroad (in European countries and the home country), using online and social media networks, developing social bonds and friendships with activists and NGO volunteers, leaving their accommodation places to live close to family members, daily visits to refugees' shops that popped up the last few years in central areas of major cities, and becoming members of the informal networks emerging around them could also be considered survival strategies inscribing their agency, as they contribute to asylum seekers' efforts to redefine their status, rearrange everyday life and redesign their future.

Networks are fundamental, especially for the livelihoods and mobility of those who did not apply for asylum. Based on information provided by family members who were already in Greece, displaced people, after having crossed the border, tend to move towards large cities, especially Athens or Thessaloniki, visit specific camps where they can stay for a few days unofficially or find shelter in the homes of friends and relatives, informal (and often highly exploitative) housing markets or squats and seek ways to leave informally towards other EU countries. Moreover, social contacts and mostly ethnic bonds are important for navigating within the country in search of work. For instance, in our research, we encountered male newcomers from Pakistan wandering around the city and looking for co-ethnics to obtain information about the job market, accommodation, social services or to contact smugglers' networks. When Hamza arrived in Thessaloniki, a Pakistani man offered to help him find seasonal agricultural work in the Peloponnese. After a few months, his co-ethnics helped him again by telling him about the asylum procedure and social services, such as the refugee day centre that provides lunch to homeless people (SsInt-AUTH-AS-208-GRC).

However, shared ethnicity does not guarantee unregistered migrants' wellbeing and does not protect them from being mistreated, cheated and abused, putting in question dominant perceptions of ethnic communities' cohesion and harmonic relations between their members. Sometimes, this experience may lead asylum seekers to move again to find a safe place to stay. In that respect, in certain cases, disconnections may lead

to empowerment, as ethnic and family networks may prove to be repressive rather than supportive, reinforcing to some extent displaced people's social marginalisation. In these cases, especially for women who must comply with gendered roles and values in their country of origin, escaping from one's closer network constitutes a strategy to deal with family issues, domestic violence and gender ideologies, indicative of women's desire to renegotiate their gender identity and roles.

After coming to Greece, Arezo, a female asylum seeker from Afghanistan, decided to get a divorce from her abusive husband and move to another city to be protected and safe. Even though she often feels alone, as she does not know anyone there, she explains that she enjoys being in a small city where there are not many refugees, clarifying that she avoids visiting places where her co-ethnics gather around. In her case, the lack of networks helped her to renegotiate dominant gender behaviours, cultural values and beliefs of her country of origin and redefine her gender identity. This is why she also refuses to stay in the same house and in the same city with her family, which has just arrived in Greece, as she fears that her parents will try to keep her under their control challenging her self-reliance (SsInt-AUTH-AS-210-GRC).

## Key findings

- *The reception and protection system in Greece decisively shapes displaced people's own survival strategies. They negotiate the immobilising and marginalising forces they are faced with by subversively using existing legal regulations of intra/trans-national mobility and accommodation, including family reunification under the Dublin Regulation.*
- *The legal recognition of 'vulnerability status' in the asylum system emerges as a survival strategy for some asylum seekers who attempt to convert themselves into vulnerable subjects and become eligible by fitting the official criteria to have access to more privileged accommodation and ensure further mobility.*
- *Mobility—involving bypassing mobility restrictions from the islands to the mainland, from one camp to another, from camps to the cities, or even following paradoxical and irregular trajectories—constitutes a means to cope with socio-economic and legal precarity.*
- *Visibility and connectivity—establishing, sustaining and multiplying networks at a local and translocal/transnational level—are crucial for displaced people's livelihoods and further mobility.*
- *Displaced peoples' survival strategies may also lead to their disempowerment and reproduce their marginalisation.*



## 4.2 Agency of migrants in Italy

As we have seen, governance regimes are a key factor that contributes to creating and reproducing conditions of protracted displacement over time, in the form of legal status uncertainty, limited access to rights, socio-economic precarity and marginalisation. Due to governance regimes, migrants live in a condition of dispossession, and despite this, they manifest various strategies to regain control over time, space and social relations. In the following paragraphs, we present how people in protracted displacement in Italy exercise their agency by adopting various temporal, spatial and relational strategies. For each strategy we also discuss its ‘dark side’, that is, the ever-present risks that every strategy entails. As we discuss our cases, we employ an intersectional approach to highlight how gender, age and different ethnic and racial characteristics have an impact on the strategies and possibilities of the people we met.

### Time control strategies

Migration requires a significant investment of economic and social resources and, above all, time. Once arrived in the country of asylum, governance regimes strongly affect forced migrants’ capabilities to manage their time. In some cases, the regulatory framework extends waiting times and traps migrants in a state of waiting (see Sub-section 3.2.1) while, in other cases, instead, it ‘compresses’ time by setting a short window of bureaucratic opportunity for migrants to provide, for instance, valid documentation for their residence permit to be renewed. In this perspective, governance regimes appear as instruments that produce temporalities—mechanisms that strongly affect migrants’ lives. Above all, migrants’ social condition turns out to be marked by the phenomenon of waiting.

#### Waiting and the condition of protracted displacement

Every interaction with the governance regime involves waiting: From arriving on the ‘quarantine ships’ to the process of becoming long-term residents or citizens, waiting marks the entire arc of protracted displacement and affects migrants’ lives and opportunities. Governance regimes, in fact, deform and distort migrants’ concept of time, the time they put into play when they decided to leave, for example, the time needed to carry out the migratory project, to repay the debts of the journey, and/or to send remittances to their country of origin. Confronted with the lack of these achievements, migrants often link a better future to better socio-legal conditions.

From this point of view, waiting has a dual function: On the one hand, it limits migrants’ possibilities; on the other, it fuels hope for change. In this sense, a condition of perpetual liminality marks migrants’ life. Governance regimes, in fact, offer the possibility of an ongoing reopening of liminality: Even after the final rejection of the asylum application or an expulsion decree, it is often possible to start new procedures. It is possible to start waiting again.

This situation is unbearable for many migrants, especially those with the most fragile legal statuses and socio-economic conditions. At a certain point, they give up and start a life of mere survival in informality. Sabir is a young man from Ivory Coast who built a stable existence in Castel Volturno after years of labour exploitation and waiting for a residence permit. About those who gave up, he said:

*Many people don't make it. You can see them immediately in the street. In Castel Volturno, there are many. Let's say that those like that are burned back and forth. They are burned backwards because they have nothing left at home. And they are burned forward because they don't know what to do with their lives. They just survive (BInt-FIERI-GG-004-ITA).*

“Burning forward and backwards” can thus be said to represent the extreme effect of a form of time construction acting on migrants’ lives. It is possible to see these effects on emotional relationships, work, and self-image.

In this sense, the case of Tesfay is representative: He is an Eritrean in Rome who, despite having received refugee status, decided to wait for an unlikely family reunification in the United States with his wife, whom he has not seen for over ten years. He tried to go to Switzerland but was sent back; he tried to find a stable job but without success. He survived with some casual jobs and some basic income, spending his days in the Eritrean bars of Termini station (SsInt-FIERI-GG-001-ITA). Tesfay’s situation shows that the dynamic of waiting may affect migrants’ lives regardless of their legal and socio-economic status.

The inability to control one’s own lifetime can be seen especially in the workspace. This is a testimony from the agricultural enclave of Saluzzo, where the loss of agency that marks the social condition of migrants is immediately connected to the issue of residence permits:

*We African workers do not decide; others decide for us. The bosses decide when we can work and when we have to stop working. It may happen that in the evening they tell us: 'Tomorrow morning you come to the field an hour earlier because we have to finish'. It's like the documents [residence permit]. An asylum seeker is never sure when he will be called to go to the Commission [for the asylum interview]. A year after our arrival, all of my friends have been called, while I still have not. It could be that they are looking for you while you are working, and they tell you that you have to go back immediately for the Commission (SsInt-FIERI-PC-015-ITA).*



### Building agency in waiting

However, there are forms of agency in waiting, even though they strictly depend on one's legal status. It is common for those with a weaker legal status to totally reject the institutional system and begin careers in informality. Those with a stronger legal status may instead navigate time and space creatively. This is the example of an Eritrean refugee from Rome who found a way to bypass the European work visa system, which allows him to stay but not to work in a country other than Italy. He used to renew his three-month tourist visa from time to time by leaving the state where he decided to settle (Norway) for a few hours and re-entering soon after. As he told us: "I always have my ticket in my pocket. Every two and a half months I go to Sweden for two hours and then come back to Norway" (SsInt-FIERI-GG-007-ITA).

### Space control strategies

Many migrants, due to the governance regimes they are subjected to, do not have full control over their living spaces. We found many forms of spatial discipline: The spatial organisation of camps and reception centres for asylum seekers, their location in deprived urban neighbourhoods or in villages in remote and disconnected areas, the spatial organisation of pre-removal detention centres, the organisation and location of facilities or settlements where seasonal workers are housed. To escape these various forms of deprivation, migrants adopt strategies to regain control over their spaces.

#### The hyper-mobility strategy

Some migrants show forms of translocal and transnational hyper-mobility. Before arriving in Italy, they had been in other European countries for years. They lived in a situation of legal limbo, moving from one European country to another, repeatedly filing asylum applications and receiving denials. This is in the case of Alashama. He left Afghanistan in 2013, and that year, his fingerprints were recorded in Hungary. From Hungary, he moved to Austria, and there, he filed three successive asylum applications, all with negative results. In 2018, to avoid repatriation by plane to Afghanistan, he fled the identification centre where he had to live. He arrived in Italy at the end of 2019 because he had some acquaintances who suggested this solution. After submitting his asylum application in Torino, he left again for Spain to work as a seasonal worker in agriculture (SsInt-FIERI-PC-005-ITA). Over seven years, Alashama has lived in 20 different localities. He passed from one place to another without ever taking root in any of these places. Migrants like Alashama are installed into mobility.

The risk involved in this kind of strategy is to keep moving following work and legal opportunities, without, however, being in the right place when necessary. This risk is highlighted by Alpha, a Senegalese asylum seeker who condemns other migrants' choices:

*These people travel around Europe without documents to find a job. But if they move around then stay, they are forever undocumented. It is better to stay in one place and wait for the situation to be resolved. Because without documents, you will never be able to return to your country, which is the most important thing for me! (SsInt-FIERI-PC-021-ITA).*

#### The circular mobility strategy

A second strategy put in place by interviewed migrants is that of circular mobility. We observed this strategy mainly inside Italy. There are one or more places in Italy where migrants are rooted and return periodically every year. A classical pattern is circulation between localities in northern Italy and localities in southern Italy: Every year, thousands of West Africans arrive in Saluzzo in search of seasonal work. They consider Saluzzo a passage area. A place where they stay for shorter or longer periods because they can find a job even if undocumented or while waiting for the outcome of their asylum application. At the end of each harvest season, in autumn, they move to other locations in Italy, mainly in southern Italy, where they look for other jobs and accommodation. In spring, they travel again to Saluzzo. Year after year, they develop an ever more accurate spatial understanding of the places they live in.

Many migrants maintain this form of translocal organisation of their life in Italy even when their legal status becomes more stable. From circular mobility by necessity, they shift to circular mobility by choice. Khouma is a young Malian man. He lived in Brescia and obtained a residence permit there. Then he moved to Napoli, where he met a Senegalese woman and where his two children were born. Since 2016, his life has been divided between summer and autumn in Saluzzo, where he is employed as a seasonal agricultural worker, and winter and spring in Napoli, where he spends the money earned in the north, stays with his family and carries out other occasional jobs, e.g. as an informal street vendor in markets (BInt-FIERI-PC-008-ITA).

While this type of mobility has several advantages, there are also many risks. While moving from one place to another, migrants do not find the necessary material and social resources to overcome protracted displacement. They always remain strangers and therefore exposed to discrimination and various forms of exploitation.

#### The sedentary strategy

The third strategy is to find a place that offers relational and material resources and decide to stay in this place, sometimes irrespective of the possibility to obtain a legal status in that place. After living in other places in Italy or abroad, some migrants decide to stop, abandoning any further mobility project.

Castel Volturno has become a ‘safe place’ for those who live at the margins or outside legality and formal legal recognition. About half of the migrant population around Castel Volturno is undocumented, and most of our interviewees there had been expelled from the reception system. African migrants find dozens of informal commercial activities there: Community restaurants, places of worship and easy connections for informal jobs.

Bobo is a 40-year-old Ghanaian man. After obtaining a humanitarian residence permit in Italy, he moved to work in Malta and found an informal job in construction. After a bad work accident where he got seriously injured, he remained stuck for more than two years without any form of welfare assistance, as he was not a regular resident in Malta. Being unable to return to Italy to renew his humanitarian permit, he also lost his regular status in Italy. When he managed to return to Italy, he decided to stay in Castel Volturno. While there are some possibilities to get his residence permit back, he prefers the dense social network which ensures him a job and a home (SsInt-FIERI-GG-014-ITA). Although migrants show a certain level of autonomy and control over their living and working spaces, they can easily remain encapsulated in these places with no prospects for improvement.

### Control strategies over social relations

Social networks represent a key resource for migrants in protracted displacement to access some kind of informal welfare, gather information and navigate their new context of settlement. At the same time, these networks can be sources of obligations, disinformation and exclusion. These networks, moreover, can greatly vary: They can be transnational, translocal and local; they can be ethnic-based or mixed, based on political affinities or the result of common experiences—such as living in the same places or having faced a step of the journey together. Each migrant may belong to one or more different networks.

Throughout our research, we observed that co-ethnic social networks play a very important role in two ways: First, they facilitate geographic mobility, and second, they facilitate the integration of newcomers in different localities. Strong co-ethnic networks, for instance, are crucial for Eritreans who arrive in Italy. Most interviewees had been able to finance their journeys to Europe thanks to the support of family members and, less often, friends, who lived in the Middle East, Europe or Canada. These transnational networks are bound together by shared values of reciprocity and obligation to help each other in times of crisis. As much as they provide a huge resource for people stuck in displacement in Ethiopia and Sudan, they also represent a burden for those Eritreans (old settlers and newcomers) who feel obliged to support the journeys of those who are fleeing from Eritrea. One of our interviewees, who has lived in Rome for over 40 years, said that in the last ten years, he paid for about 12 of his nephews to come to Europe, amounting to an expense of about 200,000 euros. On top of that, he was sup-

porting other family members in Eritrea and Ethiopia. Interestingly, this man is now secretly living in the employer-provided accommodation of one of his nephews as he did not invest in a suitable house for himself (BInt-FIERI-MB-009-ITA).

In our research locations, many people with a regular legal status assist their co-nationals. Torino or Rome have become a reference point for newcomers who can find help there in staying or transiting elsewhere. Migrants who act as brokers occupy a privileged position. Some arrived in Europe already rich in social and economic terms and had to make fewer efforts to reach good and stable living conditions. They have been able to enter the occupational and social niches occupied by other minorities who arrived previously, and now they control various services, from informal intermediation to find work to networks of ethnic businesses and places of worship. In Torino, for instance, Pakistanis own restaurants and pizzerias, and they employ their co-nationals; in Castel Volturno, there are Nigerians who act as agricultural labour intermediaries with the Italian landowners; in Rome, some Eritrean refugees provide accommodation for their homeless co-nationals, increasing their social and economic status.

Co-ethnic networks are also crucial for providing basic accommodation to refugees and migrants when the asylum process ends, and they get out of the reception system. After months of waiting for the recognition of international protection, most Eritreans in Rome end up staying with friends in one of the squats in the city. In Rome, the occupied buildings are spread around the peripheries, each of them hosting 400 to 800 people. Some are characterised by a diverse population of migrants, locals, refugees, while others are almost exclusively inhabited by Eritreans or refugees from the Horn of Africa. Interestingly, newcomers live with old Eritrean women who, after years working irregularly as domestic workers, have no retirement benefits and no other safe place to go to.

For some refugees, these kinds of ethnic squats represent an opportunity to feel at home again, as the business environment, the cohabitation rules, reciprocal trust, the smells and sounds recall a ‘Little Eritrea’. At the same time, these squats are an instance of cultural, socio-economic and spatial segregation and prevent migrants from building productive interaction with the local environment. Even the relationship with previous generations of the Eritrean diaspora is limited. A social worker supporting women and children in one of these squats argues that these buildings reproduce marginality and segregation. About the children who live there, she says:

*There are many children there that are destined to live like their parents... these are people who have never paid a bill in their lives... squatting forever does not help... it can be a temporary solution, but not the final one (EInt-FIERI-MB-005-ITA).*

Some of these children speak Italian with a local accent as they were born and raised in Rome. Others live in a sort of transnational space following the complex mobility patterns of their parents who travel between European countries, attempting to find an alternative legal pathway to their protection status in Italy. Others even travel between Italy and Ethiopia, where many family members wait for visas or other options of onward migration. While several studies have highlighted that maintaining transnational links may enable migrants' better inclusion in the new country of settlement from afar (for instance, by providing resources used for establishing a business or the emotional stability to reorient in the new society), this example seems to point at the existence of a transnational parallel reality, which prevents children from going to school and starting to build a new existence in the place they have reached.

Many migrants strengthen or reactivate relationships that already existed before migration. Imram is a young Afghan, the last of seven brothers who, after a failed attempt to migrate to France, decided to stay in Italy, because an uncle and some paternal cousins lived there (SsInt-FIERI-PC-001-ITA). Important people for him are not just blood relatives or in-laws, but also people to whom he is linked by assumed bonds of brotherhood. Several young Afghans told us that they have friends they consider blood brothers and whose help has been essential at different stages of migration.

In other cases, migrants build new relationships with travel companions. For example, the fact of having lived together in a certain reception facility is decisive. Bonds of friendship and solidarity can be useful in case of need, even when people are in faraway places. Babacar moved to southern Italy looking for work thanks to the support of and contacts with other African migrants he met in the first year he spent in a reception centre for asylum seekers. After a year in southern Italy, he reached a Senegalese friend in Spain whom he had also gotten to know in the reception centre. This friend helped him to find a job even though he was undocumented but could not solve his legal problems (BInt-FIERI-PC-004-ITA). The risk that these bonds entail is that they reproduce the conditions of protracted displacement rather than eliminate them. Being linked to people in similar conditions of socio-economic marginalisation is not necessarily a way out of protracted displacement.

## The gendered and socio-economic dimensions

It is important to highlight that how migrants in protracted displacement manage time, try to navigate different places and control social relationships depends on their gender, age, social class and the characteristics of their transnational communities. Here, however, we would like to briefly reflect on how gender, in particular, defines different strategies and how, at the same time, strategies affect the construction of gender identities.

The socio-economic and legal dimensions of precarity, which we identified as key to the definition of the experience of protracted displacement in Italy, have greatly affected our informants' sense of masculinity. Unable to fulfil the position of the breadwinner for their families, young men put their projects of getting married and having children on hold. This affects their possibility to reach 'manhood' in the eyes of their families back home. Delaying these steps towards manhood was one of the main strategies to cope with the uncertainty of their daily life. The idea of settling down with a girlfriend was temporally and geographically projected in an 'elsewhere', which they were trying to reach.

Although forced migration to Italy is overwhelmingly a male issue, Eritrean, Ethiopian and Nigerian women are numerous among the refugee population in the country. At times alone or with their partners, they undertake the risky journey to arrive in Italy, and from there, they often try to move onwards. While exploring the stories of the refugee women interviewed in Italy (eight out of 68 interviews with migrants in protracted displacement), it became clear that these women often face huge challenges related to reproductive health and conflict with their partners. Although it cannot be considered statistically significant, Eritrean women reported spontaneous abortions and other kinds of pre-natal health conditions connected to the stress experienced in refugee camps in Ethiopia and the journey of crossing the sea. Some women became single mothers following separation from their partner, and others reported conflicts in their households. Usually, these conflicts were attributed to the traditional expectations of male partners who were not ready for the independence that women sought in Europe. Most women we interviewed entered motherhood amidst precarious living conditions.

These anecdotal observations suggest that the subjective experience of protracted displacement greatly differs for women and men. While it seems that men tend to postpone the possibility of family life to a later moment in their lives, women enter motherhood—often following a heartfelt desire—and family regardless of their (precarious) living conditions. This exposes them to a high level of vulnerability derived from being a (single) mother, unable to work and take care of her children at the same time, and with little assistance by the Italian welfare system.

Along with the gendered dimension, many of the strategies presented above (in Sub-sections 4.2.1, 4.2.2, 4.2.3) also change according to the migrants' social (and economic) capital. Not all protractedly displaced migrants have the same capital and the same opportunities. Interviews have shown that once these differences were already present in the countries of departure, they were consolidated during the journey and reproduced in the places of arrival. Usually, if a migrant comes from a wealthy family with good social and cultural capital, it will be much

easier for him to cope with a situation of protracted displacement. This is the case of Sibiry, an asylum seeker from Afghanistan. His father was a wealthy businessman and paid more than 13,000 euros for his trip to Europe. Sibiry, after a few years in Germany, was able to open a mobile phone shop, improving his economic and social condition (BInt-FIERI-PC-007-ITA).

We observed profound differences between migrants from the same area and even from the same localities in Africa or in Asia. Migrants from richer families have been able to accumulate the resources needed for the trip or to pay off the loans faster. Once they arrived in Italy, in case of difficulty, some migrants received reverse remittances, i.e., financial help from family members in the country of origin. In some cases, these forms of help were fundamental to exit from a situation of protracted displacement.

Demidè is a Congolese migrant. In Congo, he was Professor of Marketing and Management at the University of Kinshasa, and he belonged to a wealthy family. He was forced to flee his country as a political opponent, leaving behind his four children. From 2010 to 2017, he lived in China, where he met and married a Chinese woman; in 2018 he arrived in Italy, where he applied for asylum. His Chinese wife regularly sent remittances to his children, still in Africa, and to him. This money allowed Demidè to face many expenses for his health needs and to pay a lawyer for his appeal procedure (BInt-FIERI-PC-002-ITA).

*context of settlement. At the same time, networks can be sources of obligations, disinformation and exclusion. Co-ethnic networks play a crucial role in facilitating geographic mobility and supporting the integration of newcomers in different localities. There is the risk that these bonds with people in a similar socio-economic condition reproduce the conditions of protracted displacement rather than eliminate them.*

- *Gender, age, social class, ethnic/racial characteristics and the specific features of one's transnational community have an impact on the strategies and possibilities of people in protracted displacement.*

#### Key findings

- *Due to the impact of governance regimes, displaced migrants in Italy live in a condition of precarity and marginalisation. They do, however, exercise their agency by adopting several strategies to regain control over time, space and social relations. Each strategy, however, entails risks.*
- *Time—Every interaction with governance regimes involves waiting; waiting marks the entire arc of protracted displacement and affects migrants' lives and opportunities. Waiting has a dual function: It limits migrants' possibilities but also fuels hope for a change. Migrants' forms of agency-in-waiting are strictly related to their stronger or weaker legal status.*
- *Space—Due to the governance regimes many migrants are subject to, they do not have full control over their living spaces. To escape these various forms of spatial discipline and regain control, migrants adopt different spatial strategies. These include hyper-mobility, circular mobility and a sedentary strategy.*
- *Social relations—Local, translocal and transnational networks represent a key resource for migrants in protracted displacement to access some kind of informal welfare, gather information and navigate their new*



## 5. Intergroup relations between forced migrants and hosts

In this section, we focus more specifically on how relationships are formed between migrants in protracted displacement and host populations in the research locations where fieldwork was conducted. Furthermore, we look into specific types of relations and discuss how these influence the mobility, connectivity and marginalisation of people in protracted displacement in Greece and Italy. Fieldwork in both countries highlighted several common factors that shape intergroup relations at the local and national levels (e.g., political discourse, migration governance, etc.). Moreover, in both countries, we observed different facets of intergroup relations—including dynamics of racism, conflict, exploitation, discrimination, segregation but also dynamics of cooperation and solidarity.

Here, we aim to present the factors that shape intergroup relations and some of the specific configurations of these relations to address the following question:

- How do intergroup relations between host communities and people in protracted displacement affect marginalisation, connectivity and mobility aspirations, opportunities, strategies and trajectories of people in protracted displacement situations? (RQ6)

### 5.1 Intergroup relations in Greece

#### Factors affecting intergroup relations

In Greece, fieldwork showed that intergroup relations between displaced people and locals (native Greeks, but also people of migrant background) take shape under the influence of several factors: Governance regimes at the national and EU level, broader discourses on nation and migration, the complexity of specific local contexts and lately the COVID-19 pandemic have played a significant role in shaping intergroup relations at large.

The prevailing national political discourse is crucial for understanding intergroup relations. They form arguments and shape meanings, affecting public perceptions and attitudes. The steep rise of arrivals already since 2014 and particularly in 2015 was initially labelled as a ‘humanitarian crisis’. A pro-migrant political rhetoric was invoking solidarity and hospitality. Since then, however, we have observed growing xenophobia in the political discourse, especially after the New Democracy (centre-right) party came into power in July 2019, and a rhetoric of migration as a ‘security issue’ prevailed. The explicit political aim to curb migration and reduce the number of new arrivals through policies of deterrence and containment produced an anti-migrant climate in the country. Since 2015, the mainstream national (and in many cases local) media have also shifted discourse. The narrative about the ‘hospitable Greeks’ and the ‘dispossessed

and persecuted people’ (a narrative of care towards victims, see e.g. Papataxiarchis, 2016) was transformed. The newcomers have recently been portrayed as threats to Greece, whether symbolic (in terms of cultural features and their supposed demographic and social consequences) or material (in terms of alleged competition over scarce jobs or welfare provisions). Such xenophobic portrayals are enforced by the ongoing weaknesses of the national economy and fed by diplomatic tensions with Turkey in early 2020, exacerbated by a renewed crisis in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. All the above has created a climate of hostility that contributes to a polarisation of local perceptions towards displaced people.

The particular characteristics prevailing in specific local contexts also shape intergroup relations in certain localities. The image of the islands—especially Lesbos—has been transformed to that of ‘refugee islands’ or ‘gates to Europe’, generating mechanisms of ‘othering’ towards displaced people from the East and newcomers from the West, i.e., activists, volunteers, members of humanitarian organisations, students, journalists, researchers and celebrities. In Thessaloniki, according to local community members, particular political developments at the local level related to the naming of neighbouring North Macedonia<sup>37</sup> contributed to the rise of nationalism and reinforced conservative ideologies. Such events and broader figurational changes should also be considered when trying to understand the formation of public opinion towards migration and refugees.

The governance of migration after 2015 has significantly affected intergroup relations between locals and displaced people in the country. Our fieldwork revealed that the EU–Turkey Statement’s implementation and impact were the turning point that marked the shift from the solidarity wave of 2015/2016 to an increasingly hostile climate. Since March 2016, the onward movement of displaced people has been disrupted, effectively consolidating and accelerating what was originally assumed to be a passing crisis. Virtually overnight, Greece shifted from being a place of transit to a place of entrapment and containment for thousands of displaced people. Of course, each region was affected differently. For example, the geographical restriction imposed on the islands generated considerable demographic, socio-economic and spatial changes due to the entrapment of

<sup>37</sup> The country formerly known as the Republic of Macedonia officially changed its name to Republic of North Macedonia, with the Prespa Agreement of 2018 ending a 27-year long dispute with Greece, which also has a region called Macedonia. The agreement faced criticism in Greece, mostly among nationalists, especially in neighbouring parts of northern Greece, with massive rallies taking place in Thessaloniki.

thousands of displaced people and the array of state and non-state actors that were deployed on the islands to provide infrastructure, technology and humanitarian relief. However, local services, such as hospitals and health centres, did not receive any significant additional support despite increasing numbers of patients by hundreds or thousands. This failure of the Greek state to address the burden on local services and infrastructure provision—already drained after years of austerity—increasingly led to a shift of the perceptions of local populations toward displaced people as a rupture in their everyday life and a threat to their livelihoods.

Simultaneously, asylum policies and national governance regimes have promoted disconnections, keeping refugees not only apart from host communities but also in conflict with them. Antonia, a Greek nurse, refers to the hostility between Greeks and refugees and conveys one of the discourses expressed by members of the host society, according to which “refugees don’t do anything, they just sit and receive financial aid and they do not really want to integrate” (SsInt-AUTH-AS-225-GRC). From this perspective, the assistance provided by the asylum system becomes an object of dispute, as asylum seekers are not only rendered subjects in need but are also perceived as a burden on social welfare.

Similarly, the fieldwork revealed the crucial role of NGOs and other humanitarian actors in the configuration of intergroup relations. In engaging with displaced people, these bodies intervene in the relationship between asylum seekers and local communities and create new power hierarchies of dependence. Despite their indisputable role in humanitarian relief, acting as mediators often limits displaced people’s interactions and undermines their agency. In the context of offering assistance to refugees, humanitarian actors end up representing them in so many aspects of public life that they reduce displaced people’s potential contact with members of the host society. Moreover, the powerful role of humanitarian actors sidelines the local or regional authorities and creates a sense of alienation within local populations, as if these populations had neither voice nor agency to shape their own lives. This was particularly visible on the islands, where several locals noted that humanitarian actors decide on the micro-management of migration in the area, undermining the role of local authorities and do so at the expense of locals’ own rights. As phrased by an interviewee: “UNHCR and NGOs are the big boss, local municipality is ignored” (FGD-AUTH-FV-402-GRC).

The absence of integration policies puts displaced people in further marginalisation, which also affects intergroup relations. The example of international protection beneficiaries is revealing. As we saw, after receiving a positive decision, they are not entitled to housing or welfare provisions, and if they want to leave Greece, they have to wait for their travel docu-

ments and refugee ID cards to be issued. As a result, after a period of prolonged uncertainty (linked to the asylum process) and dependence on asylum welfare policies, they enter into a new period of protracted insecurity, with minimal opportunities for meaningful social interactions with the host population. Most of them can hardly afford a rented apartment, and in many cases, they return to live unregistered in camp facilities. Living in camps, however, prevents them from building a life within the local community.

Spatiality is crucial to understand intergroup relations between displaced people and locals. It affects especially how the temporary or permanent accommodation of the former in the country plays a role in the opportunities for meaningful and spontaneous interactions. Living in apartments facilitates intergroup interactions and increases opportunities for meaningful contacts on an everyday basis not only in neighbourhoods but also at the micro-level of the block of flats, as it allows for encounters, first acquaintances and social exchanges. The segregation of the camps and the imposed invisibility of camps’ residents, on the contrary, result in limited interaction with and social distance from locals, which may also lead to negative or xenophobic reactions by locals. Most of the camps are located in remote areas, in some cases without adequate transportation connecting them to nearby towns and villages, which hinders the visibility of displaced people, making it more difficult to reduce prejudices and stereotypes by way of interaction; as phrased by the President of the Board of Directors of the Greek Council for Refugees:

*People living in camps still feel that they are in a temporary situation. [...] I think that the integration model should be that of rented apartments and of inclusion inside the community. Because camps, even if they are close to the metro station, such as Elaionas camp, they function outside the community. They don’t permit contact... (EInt-AUTH-EP-102-GRC).*

The proximity of displaced people to local communities does not always lead to positive, meaningful relations. On the islands, the proximity of Hotspots to neighbouring villages seems to have created confrontational relations, such as fights and insults, as observed in ordinary public life, according to reports in the local press and as it emerged from the interviews. In towns and cities, on the one hand, proximity creates opportunities for co-presence and spontaneous interactions that unfold on a daily basis, e.g., in churches, parks and shops. On the other hand, spontaneous interactions rarely upscale to cooperation or other forms of meaningful contact, such as those that would have been possible in workspaces or schools, as employment opportunities are minimal and refugee children are largely excluded from formal education. This lack of (meaningful) relations between Greeks and refugees reproduces displaced people’s

socio-economic marginalisation as they become detached from the host community's daily life. At the same time, it contributes to refugees' introversion, as they develop intra- and inter-ethnic networks and alliances. Visibility may also entail ambiguities since it is avoided by those who stay unregistered and undocumented. For instance, those who consciously skipped identification and asylum procedures and want to leave the country rather sooner than later seek to avoid accidental encounters and interpersonal relationships with locals.

## Facets of intergroup relations

### Solidarity and support

As mentioned above, the steep rise of migrant arrivals in 2014-2015 was unprecedented. Many locals—together with people who came from abroad—reacted quickly and effectively, forming what became known as a (similarly unprecedented) solidarity movement. Six years on, the situation has changed. New arrivals have decreased and, after some years when international organisations had the primary role in various aspects of migration management, the state has largely taken over and reaffirmed its role. Yet, even in this context, fieldwork revealed many examples of relationships of mutual aid and respect between locals and displaced people that we may consider as positive intergroup relations. These relationships may be random and short-lived, as in the many cases of accidental encounters with local Greeks, taxi drivers, etc., who helped displaced people in their migration journey, for example after crossing borders at Evros. Displaced people tend not to forget and appreciate these encounters—however random and instantaneous.

Positive relationships initiated from acts of solidarity and support may also be more profound and resilient over time. For instance, since 2015, Makis, a Greek citizen in Chios, has cooked daily meals for displaced people as a show of solidarity. In an interview, he described the story of Ali, an Eritrean asylum seeker whom he met in Chios. Ali moved to Athens, then crossed the border, passed through Italy, France and now lives in Germany. In the summer of 2020, he visited Chios for his holidays, and during that time, Makis broke his leg and could not move. For the whole time Ali stayed on the island, he helped Makis every day, reversing the roles of the giver and the receiver.

*Ali came to Chios for his holidays. It was so nice because it was when I broke my leg and I was entrapped in bed, hardly able to move. He rented a car and every day he came to my place, drove me to work and came again in the evening to take me home. It was a two-way relationship. He succeeded in being able to offer me help. And this is so nice for both (SsInt-AUTH-FV-217-GRC).*

It is worth noting that even though COVID-related restrictions and lockdowns generally prevented intergroup relations at the city level, in some cases, positive dynamics, support and solidarity emerged at the micro-level of the neighbourhood. A number of solidarity activities were organised to support the most vulnerable neighbours, some of which led to the reframing of xenophobic perceptions of the displaced 'others' on the micro-level and the blossoming of respect and acceptance.

Relationships between newcomers and co-ethnics already settled in the country for years or even decades are also worth noting. Such relationships play a crucial role in reducing the marginalisation of newcomers as they help to familiarise displaced persons with local communities and everyday life in the city. Beyond the informal level of interpersonal relations, the role of established migrant communities, as well as of activist spaces such as the so-called migrants' schools is important, as they offer a stable and constant source of socialisation between different ethnic groups (both Greeks and migrants) and a wide range of support and integration activities (e.g. language courses, cultural activities, etc.).

### Racism and discrimination

At the same time, racism has been persistent in many parts of the country during the last years. Racism has taken various forms, including violent attacks in the north Aegean islands and facial, embodied or verbal expressions and everyday practices in urban spaces, on public transport, the streets, in public spaces, stores and restaurants. Fieldwork revealed multiple separations and boundaries, which are expressed in various ways, explicitly or implicitly. One such example is the issuance of only a limited number of tickets for migrants on the bus route from Thessaloniki to Polykastro, representing one of a variety of (informal) arrangements to maintain a native majority of passengers. This not only restricts displaced people's access to mobility but also protracts their precarity by suppressing their sense of security and freedom, and by consolidating hierarchies and exclusionary practices.

Mobility restrictions introduced with the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified displaced people's segregation, generally prevented intergroup relations at the city level and made displaced people look like a threat to public health. Moreover, the pandemic pushed the so-called refugee issue out of the headlines, whereas, in reality, enhanced containment and increasingly restrictive regulations have prolonged displaced people's state of protractedness and marginalisation, undermining interactions and relations between displaced people and locals.

### Key findings

- *Governance regimes at the national and EU level, broader political discourses on nation and migration, and the complexity of specific local contexts crucially shape intergroup relations.*
- *NGOs and other humanitarian actors intervene in the relationship between displaced people and local communities and, despite the important support some of them provide, their mediation often limits displaced people's interactions with local communities.*
- *The absence of integration policies marginalises recognised refugees further. They can hardly afford a rented apartment, and in many cases, they return to live unregistered in camp facilities. Living in camps, though, prevents them from interacting with the local community.*
- *Established migrant communities, as well as activist spaces, can reduce the marginalisation of newcomers, as they offer a stable and constant source of socialisation and support between/for different ethnic groups.*
- *Mobility restrictions introduced with the COVID-19 pandemic have intensified displaced people's segregation, generally prevented intergroup relations at the city level and made displaced people appear a threat to public health.*

## 5.2 Intergroup relations in Italy

### Factors affecting intergroup relations

Similar to the Greek case, our fieldwork in Italy highlighted several macro-factors that influence the relationship between locals and refugees. However, what emerged clearly is the significance of the local dimension in reproducing and modifying these macro-dynamics. National discourses, governance regimes, the provision of welfare services (or the lack of it) are key factors to understand why locals and refugees cooperate or are in conflict. Nevertheless, each locality showed that it is crucial to consider the typical socio-economic milieu and cultural and historical background of receiving communities to understand different kinds of interactions.

We observed a wide variation in the type of relationships that migrants in protracted displacement can build with locals. First, there are localities where a well-organised and active civil society mobilises support for migrants, and there are other localities where host communities are totally indifferent or openly hostile. Second, cooperative intergroup relations also depend on previous migrant stratification and/or a local tradition of mobility. Third, the possibility of building alliances also depends on infrastructural factors; there are interconnected localities (with good infrastructures and extended social and economic networks) and isolated localities (very peripheral,

with no links with urban areas). Fourth, intergroup relations also depend on the local policy structures: We found local authorities who were very supportive towards migrants in protracted displacement and others who were very hostile. Finally, local media also play a role as they usually portray the migrants' situation in very different ways, which may affect public perception of migrants' displacement.

In the following sub-section, we analyse different facets of intergroup relations, looking at situations where intergroup relations are totally absent, situations where they are intense and imbalanced, and situations where they are intense and balanced.

### Facets of intergroup relations

#### Absence of intergroup relations

In many localities, the number of migrants in protracted displacement has increased in recent years. Despite this, locals treat them with indifference. The reasons are manifold. In urban contexts, which are already characterised by a high degree of socio-cultural diversity, newcomers have gone unnoticed because locals are used to the presence of foreign people and ignore their precarious working and social conditions. This is the case, for instance, in the popular districts of Torino, where many asylum seekers and refugees live.

In other localities, the locals' indifference is linked to migrants' physical invisibility. In many rural areas in northern Italy during the harvest season, asylum seekers live dispersed in the countryside or are housed in the farms where they are employed. Except for their employers, local people are not aware of their presence and therefore take no action, neither for nor against them. Thus, where opportunities for meaningful contact between people are lacking, indifference is one of the most common behaviours. This is not only found among natives but also among some older migrants who want to avoid any contact with the newcomers.

Benik is a Congolese refugee who arrived in Italy twenty years ago. He has not made friends with any of the co-nationals in the reception facilities in the neighbourhood where he lives because he believes that they come from a totally different social and cultural background:

*I kept away from them because I wanted to respect myself. Many African asylum applicants do not have my cultural level, they do not have my goals, there are many who are completely illiterate (FGD-FIERI-PC-001-ITA).*

Also, newcomers have sometimes shown indifference towards their co-nationals with greater migratory seniority. Some of these co-nationals run ethnic associations, but many newly



displaced people do not perceive these community networks as a source of help. On the contrary, they consider them as an obstacle, as the Malian migrant Khouma recalls:

*There is the Malian community, but I personally have always preferred to avoid it. There is a lot of control on the part of some older people. These conflicts are everywhere, and we must not believe that we are more united because we are Africans (BInt-FIERI-PC-008-ITA).*

#### Imbalanced intergroup relations

The phenomenon of exploitation is inextricably linked to the migratory experience. Even though it affects people in different ways (based on legal status or social capital), exploitation is transversal and involves a very wide range of social actors and socio-economic structures.

#### Labour exploitation

In the chain of exploitation, a phenomenon framed by the term *caporalato* (informal intermediation), has become publicly relevant in Italy. An ad hoc law was passed in 2016, which modified Article 603-bis of the Italian Criminal Code<sup>38</sup> to tackle this phenomenon. Its aim is to punish exploiters with harsher penalties and protect victims of exploitation. Besides some rare cases, however, the implementation of this law proves to be hard in a context of normalised exploitation like that of migrants living in agricultural ghettos in Italy.

The agricultural space is one of the working contexts where exploitation is harsher. In the area of Castel Volturno, for instance, it is very common to find informal daily work at the roundabouts (which migrants refer to as ‘*kalifoo* ground’, derived from a term borrowed from Libya). Usually at five a.m., they position themselves at the roundabouts on the highways around the Castel Volturno area and wait for someone to pick them up by car and offer them a job. The pay is approximately 30 euros per day for about nine to ten working hours. The ‘employers’ are co-nationals but also private citizens of the area who need help in their micro-businesses or for personal needs. Those looking for jobs at the *kalifoo* ground are mainly undocumented people and asylum seekers. With the presence of asylum seekers, the daily pay has strongly decreased exacerbated by the fact that asylum seekers hosted in reception centres can accept lower wages for the same work since the state covers their basic needs.

Labour exploitation, however, also takes less visible forms: For instance, so-called grey work is very common, especially in agriculture. It covers the discrepancy between the hours actually worked by migrants and those marked on the payroll. This phenomenon may take different forms: From receiving part of the salary informally to having to return part of it to the employer.

#### Exploitation and the social/legal system

Exploitation not only occurs in the realm of work but affects migrants’ lives in many other spaces. For instance, migrants’ attempts to access the institutional provision of welfare benefits are marked by several episodes of exploitation. A striking example is the certificate of residence, a fundamental document for accessing a whole series of procedures and welfare benefits (from family reunification to universal basic income). The difficulty in obtaining regular rental contracts and the precarious housing conditions of many migrants in protracted displacement have led to a flourishing informal market, where people ‘sell’ residence certificates or documents required to obtain the certificate.

An additional example of how exploitation dynamics develop in the gaps of the legal system is the regularisation measure adopted by the Italian government during the pandemic (see Sub-section 3.2.2). The 2020 regularisation should have offered undocumented and exploited migrants an opportunity to get out of invisibility but, for many, it has only meant additional exploitation. Many people (Italians and co-nationals) have sold non-existent labour contracts in the economic fields in which it was possible to apply (agriculture, domestic and care work). Especially among caregivers, for whom the required documentation and procedure were less strict, there has been a proliferation of fake job contracts sold to undocumented migrants at up to 7,000 euros—a ploy often led by criminal organisations.

We met asylum seekers who had returned to Saluzzo from abroad hoping to get a residence permit through regularisation with the help of co-nationals and local employers. They paid their co-nationals for intermediation and covered all the costs of regularisation, even those formally foreseen for employers, but in the end, they are still waiting for the outcome of the bureaucratic procedure.

#### Conflict

The so-called refugee crisis and the increase in the number of arrivals of asylum seekers in the second part of the last decade have reinforced a climate of hostility between locals and newcomers in Italy. This phenomenon happened within a national framework where no structural action has ever been taken to rethink society within a multicultural frame. If today national dynamics have exacerbated the clash between locals and migrants, the seeds of the current socio-political situation were already visible in contexts where migration had been predominant in recent decades. As reported by a social worker, in the early 2000s, the Northern League, which was practically non-existent in southern Italy, reached nine per cent of the votes in Castel Volturno thanks to its anti-immigration rhetoric (SsInt-FIERI-GG-016-ITA). This conflictual framework materialises in discriminatory practices towards migrants.

38 Law No. 199 of 29 October 2016, OJ No. 257 of 03.11.2016.

### Normalising segregation

Besides cases of explicit racial violence, research participants told us of systemic exclusion in their relationship with public administrations and public services. Especially following the Salvini decree and over the period when the leader of the right-wing party was the Minister of the Interior, many interviewees were refused access or faced problems accessing public services (from opening a bank account to receiving healthcare) due to a general political atmosphere legitimising discrimination based on the motto ‘Italians first’.

Our fieldwork showed that these discriminatory practices have become quite ‘normal’. An Eritrean refugee in Rome said that he had been the victim of discrimination on several occasions, both in public and by the police. He is generally afraid of finding himself in unpleasant situations because he fears being singled out as a culprit. For example, when a conductor in a bus is verifying tickets, he will go straight to him (SsInt-FIERI-GG-006-ITA). We carried out our research in Rome and Castel Volturno primarily within ethnic enclaves where relations with locals are limited to the bare minimum. In the occupied houses in Rome or the ghetto of Castel Volturno, however, interviewees tended to exclude discrimination and racism from the range of their daily problems—a fact that is in striking contrast with the evident overall discriminatory drift of the society.

The reasons for this disconnection clearly emerged in an interview with Sabir, a young man from Ivory Coast, whom we asked whether migrants in Castel Volturno considered racism a problem:

*No. Because they do not notice it. They see themselves forgotten by the state, so they do what they want. Nobody cares. They have developed this mentality. They have no relationship with Italians. Even Italians do not really give a shit. Because it was a difficult area even before. Racism was more in the trains and buses. Whites on one side and blacks on the other. This is really the reality of Castel Volturno. The more there is a relationship, the more there is racism. In Caserta, they notice it much more. In Castel Volturno, everyone keeps to themselves. They have their own places (BInt-FIERI-GG-004-ITA).*

Spatial segregation seems to be the most common strategy to reduce social conflict. Clashes, however, occur not only between migrants and natives: Conflicts between different migrant groups or communities are daily routine. In a focus group with the inhabitants of Cuneo, in the Piedmont region, the participants who expressed the greatest discomfort towards African asylum seekers were some of the Albanian and Turkish traders. An Ivorian cultural mediator pointed out: “It’s terrible to say, but racism also exists among people who have themselves been discriminated against in the past” (FGD-FIERI-PC-001-ITA).

### Balanced intergroup relations

Cooperation is a form of relationship based on mutual recognition and a strong desire for transformation. We found various cooperative practices, ranging from individual actions to collective interventions. All these practices have been fundamental in helping migrants in protracted displacement. In rural areas, grassroots social movements that support migrants are more fragmented than in large cities. However, some organisations try to help migrants out of protracted displacement, such as Catholic religious associations (e.g. Caritas) or anti-racist movements. In their civil commitment, these organisations follow the tradition of fighting for social change and anti-fascist ideals. For instance, in the Saluzzo area, we found that local communities with a shared memory of emigration and political fights demonstrate a positive attitude towards asylum seekers and refugees. In these communities, locals have organised themselves in informal associations that help newcomers in their fight to obtain the recognition and implementation of their rights.

We encountered different types of mixed networks of locals and migrants: Some are political movements that support workers’ rights (such as in Castel Volturno and Saluzzo), others fight for the right to decent housing (as the squatting groups in Rome), and others are organised around artistic activities (such as theatre in Rome or music and sport in the area of Castel Volturno). An example of these mixed networks is a group of refugees and Italians with the telling name of Kalifoo Grounds, who created an artistic laboratory in Castel Volturno and mix music, video-making, photography with social and political activism in the area. These are mostly bottom-up initiatives built around a common condition or shared needs, e.g., having children going to the same school, the need to find accommodation or to have fair employment.

In the Castel Volturno area (and beyond), the work of the community centre Ex-Canapificio has been fundamental, becoming the main catalyst of grassroots movements for migrants and refugees in the province of Caserta.<sup>39</sup> The Ex-Canapificio has been the reference point for migrants in the area since the early 1990s. Along with many different activities, the centre offers a legal help desk twice a week. On the one hand, volunteers assist migrants with their legal needs; on the other, they collect the most critical problems in the area to organise collective claims (BInt-FIERI-GG-004-ITA).

Civil society in Rome is also very active. There are creative projects that have allowed strong collaboration between Italians and refugees. One such collaboration is a theatre project initiated by an experienced director who cooperated with migrant women (but not only) and promoted the co-creation of shows on

39 See [http://www.csaexcanapificio.it/Sito\\_CSA/Homepage.html](http://www.csaexcanapificio.it/Sito_CSA/Homepage.html)

exile, travel or gender violence. Despite the many difficulties in establishing and maintaining non-professional theatre companies, these theatre experiences have forged real friendships and induced women to share some of their traumas with others. In other projects, volunteers create a safe place for migrants to share their stories and deal with the legal and bureaucratic challenges of their present condition (SsInt-FIERI-MB-008-ITA). For migrants, these bottom-up initiatives represent some of the main anchors, which led them to remain in the country and start to recreate a home in Italy.

An Eritrean woman interviewed in Rome was actively engaged with the political movement for housing rights: She participated in strikes and organised the rules of the mixed squat where she lived together with Italians, Moroccans and other nationalities. Through this engagement, she found decent accommodation (even if in a squat) and means to raise her two children. She also developed a sense of belonging and a goal, as she narrated to us, after several years of displacement across Europe (BInt-FIERI-MB-010-ITA).

Another informant found her main occupation in Rome as a minor actress in the Italian cinema industry through a theatre group organised among the mothers of children going to the same school. This group allowed her to refine her passion for acting. More importantly, this group has become a self-help group where women who went through traumatic experiences can safely narrate their stories to peers. During the pandemic, it also became a practical support group for families who did not have enough food on the table or enough computers for their children to follow online classes (SsInt-FIERI-MB-009-ITA).

These cooperative actions are grounded in various motivations. Some are more political: People see migrants as the new globally exploited underclass to be defended. Other motivations have to do with the desire to promote and defend a sense of common territorial belonging. Other people do so for ethical and religious reasons. The presence of newcomers not only activates already present organisations but induces locals to create new and unprecedented alliances between them. This is the case, for instance, of religious associations that cooperate with anarchist community centres and labour unions.

Intimate relations, such as friendship and love, with locals proved to be extremely important for migrants to move out of their situations of precarity. The practical dimension of friendship is highlighted by Assane, a migrant in Saluzzo, who observes:

*Friendships are for solving problems. Nothing is solved without an Italian friend. If I go alone with my CV to an employment agency, they do not listen to me. If I take it with an Italian, they listen to me. My friend has an Italian girlfriend, and in fact, even though he speaks Italian worse than me, he immediately found a job (SsInt-FIERI-PC-010-ITA).*

#### Key findings

- *National discourses, governance regimes and (the lack of) welfare services influence intergroup relations between migrants and host communities across Italy. But at each researched locality, it showed that the specific kinds of interactions strongly depend on the particular socio-economic milieu as well as cultural and historical background of the receiving communities.*
- *We observed different facets of intergroup relations. These include the absence of relations, namely (reciprocal) indifference; imbalanced intergroup relations culminating in dynamics of exploitation, conflict and segregation; but also balanced relations, based on cooperation, solidarity and friendship between locals and displaced migrants.*

## 6. Comparative considerations

To situate comparatively the cases of Greece and Italy examined in this *working paper*, it is important to highlight the position and role of southern Europe, and of these two countries in particular, within a transnational context of protracted displacement, building on the latter's conceptualisation in the TRAFIG project (Etzold et al., 2019), as sketched out in Section 1. Many of the interlocutors who shared their stories with us during field research, as well as many others facing similar conditions of immobilisation and marginalisation, may be seen as people on the move with dynamic stories of displacement. Many have reached the shores of Italy or Greece after long journeys, involving (for some) periods of being 'stuck' in other countries they have crossed, primarily Libya or Turkey. As shown in detail in Sections 3 and 4, many are aspiring to continue these journeys towards northern or western European destinations. Others are already engaging in such, sometimes circular, sometimes seasonal movements that can be precarious at times. Situating the figurations of displacement in southern Europe within a transnational framework unveils the regional geopolitical dynamics that not only shape governance regimes, but also condition the structure and composition of displaced populations in the two countries. In this section, we approach our country cases through a comparative lens, synthesising the findings of TRAFIG fieldwork discussed in the previous parts of the *working paper*. We do so by complementing—where relevant—our analysis with insights from key results of the TRAFIG survey. Therefore, we begin by describing comparatively basic features of the survey samples in Italy and Greece to highlight key differences within an otherwise common regional displacement landscape.

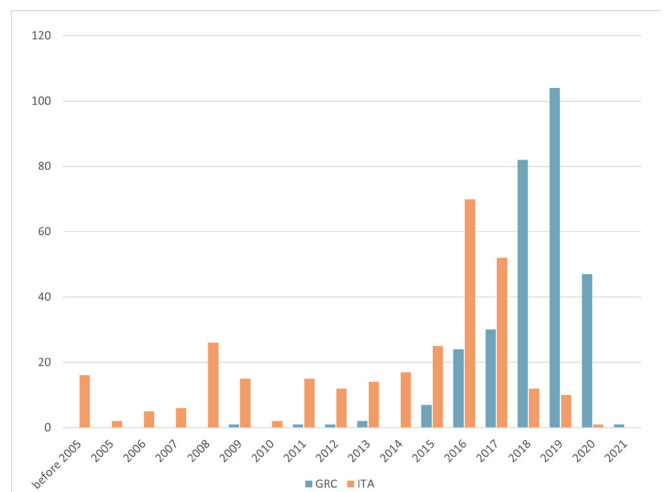
### 6.1 Displacement contexts and populations

As outlined in Section 2, even though mixed migration is the norm in both countries, a good number of migrants arriving in Greece originate from places in the Middle East or South Asia, including many families and children (especially among the former). A significant segment of newcomers in Italy, however, comes from various countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including many single men.

Similarly, the normative categories of the 'refugee' and 'labour migrant' appear to dominate regulatory regimes and policy frameworks in Greece and Italy. Even though the TRAFIG survey sought a targeted sample in all countries under study, in terms of overall size and national origins (see infographic on page 12), the profile of respondents in the Greek and Italian surveys broadly reflect key features as well as differences in the demographics and trajectories of displaced populations in the two countries.

Accordingly, as illustrated in Figure 4, while the share of females is low in both samples, women appear to be even less represented in the Italian survey (less than 20 per cent) than the Greek one (nearly 30 per cent). In both countries, according to the sample, respondents are generally young; about 80 per cent are between 20 and 39 years old. However, younger people between 20 and 29 years of age comprise a higher share in Italy (about half) compared to Greece (one-third), whilst the opposite is the case for the cohort of those between 30 to 39-years. Additionally, while children and minors are slightly more represented in Greece, the Italian sample comprises more people between 40 and 49-years of age. As far as family status is concerned, about half of the respondents in Greece are married, compared to nearly 30 per cent in Italy—where there are more single men (over half, compared to below 40 per cent in Greece). Furthermore, as regards education, survey respondents in Italy appear to be better qualified, with more than 15 per cent holding a university degree and over one-third having a secondary education. In Greece, the respective shares are less than five per cent and 20 per cent, with far more people declaring that they are "illiterate" (nearly 30 per cent, compared to 10 per cent in Italy).

**Figure 3: Year of respondents' arrival at current place of living**

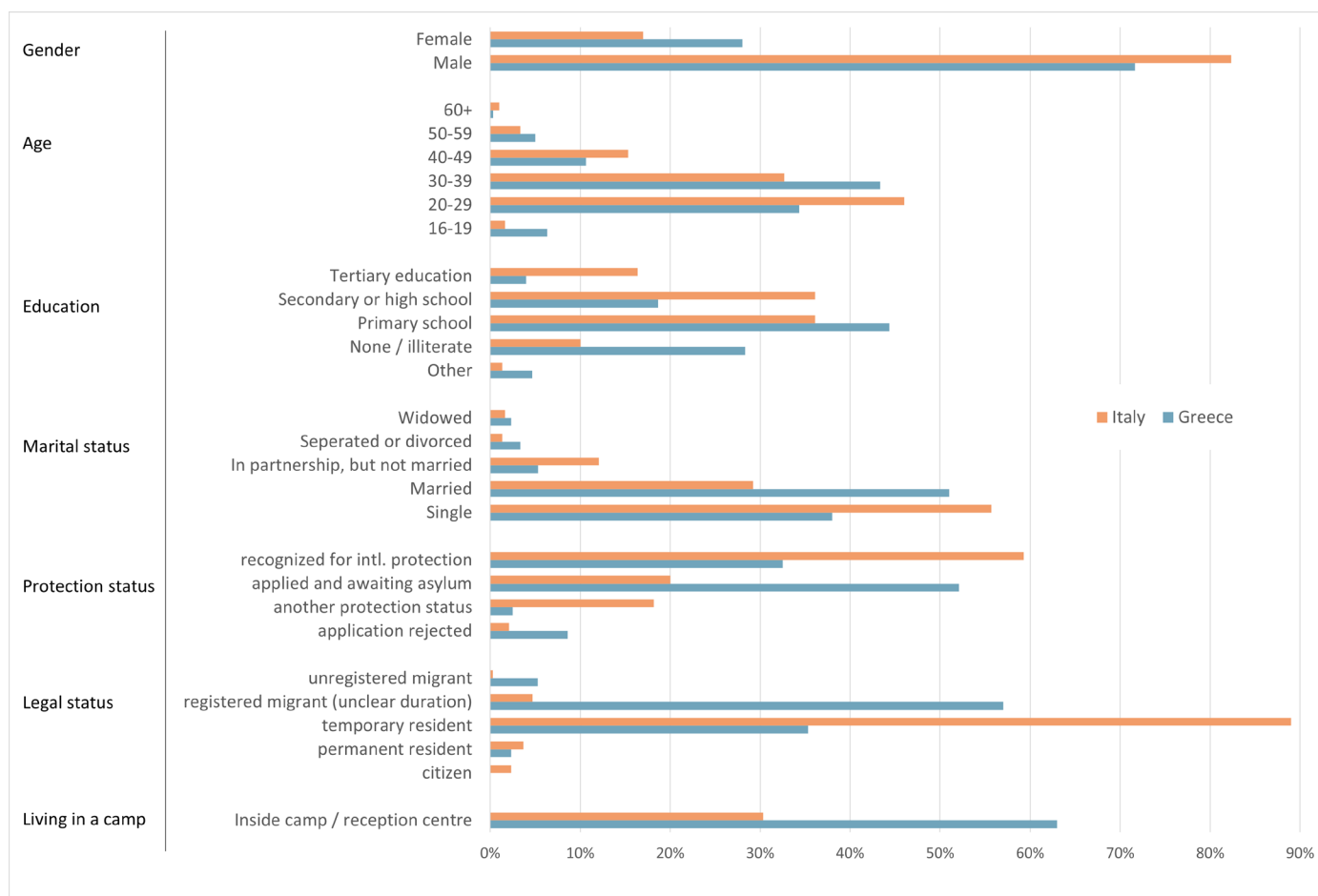


Source: TRAFIG survey (n = 300 in GRC, n = 299 in ITA)

Moreover, survey evidence (Figure 3) suggests that displacement in Greece mainly started after 2015. In Italy, even though 2016/2017 arrivals have deeply shaped the landscape of displacement there too, data point to longer histories of displacement. This is reflected in differences in displaced people's protection status in the two countries, illustrated in Figure 4, with more than half of the Greek survey respondents seeking asylum (compared to one-fifth in the Italian sample). In Italy, almost 80 per cent of respondents have some form of



Figure 4: Profile of survey respondents in Greece and Italy



Source: TRAFIG survey (n = 600)

protection status (international or national-based complementary protection) compared to one-third in Greece. Finally, as is also shown in Figure 4, it is important to underline that while 30 per cent of the Italian sample resided in a camp or reception centre at the time of the survey, this was the case for over 60 per cent of respondents in Greece. This reflects the differences in governance and the actual experiences of displacement, as well as the degree and extent of displaced people’s immobilisation. We further discuss aspects of this in the next section and offer several comparative conclusions based on our analysis.

## 6.2 Governance, (im)mobilities and social (dis)connections

### Modes and degrees of immobilisation

In both countries, governance regimes at European Union and national levels produce immobilising and irregularising effects on vast numbers of forced migrants, thus reinforcing the probability that they end up in situations of protracted displacement. Field research in both countries revealed several instances of how this may affect the lived experiences of specific persons. Restrictive policies in both countries, combined with long

waiting times causing prolonged uncertainty and the structural lack of integration policies particularly focusing on labour market inclusion and especially targeting asylum seekers and protection beneficiaries, lead migrants to increased precarity and irregularity. However, there are substantial differences between the regimes governing mobility/immobility of non-EU migrants in the two countries and the impact these have not only on their livelihoods but also their mobility opportunities and aspirations.

Overall, the Greek regime is stricter and produces more severe immobilising effects at the intra-national and international levels. On the one hand, this is due to the practice of confining asylum seekers on Aegean islands labelled as Hotspots following the EU–Turkey deal of March 2016. On the other, the more profound immobilising effects of EU governance in the Greek case are also due to geopolitical configurations: While Italy has three land borders with other Schengen countries, which allow for some unauthorised secondary mobility towards other preferred destinations in western and northern Europe (although at high risk and often at a high personal cost), Greece has no Schengen land border, and this makes migrants’ onward mobility more difficult and costly, and less frequent and circular.

Survey data broadly indicate how such differences in the governance of migration and asylum in Greece and Italy appear to condition displaced people’s mobility capabilities and prospects in the two countries, as analysed in Sub-sections 3.1.1 and 3.2.1 respectively. As far as intra-European mobility is concerned (Figure 5), slightly more than half (54 per cent) of survey respondents in Italy tried at least once to move to another country (most notably to Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden and France), and almost all of them (97 per cent) reached their intended destination and returned to Italy later. By contrast, a much lower share of respondents in Greece (24 per cent) tried at least once to move to another country (most notably to Germany, Italy, Sweden), and a tiny portion of them (seven per cent) succeeded and returned later. As regards internal mobility, according to the TRAFIG survey, 58 per cent of respondents in Greece reported barriers to mobility within the country, compared to 42 per cent of respondents in Italy. Interestingly, in Greece, these barriers are exclusively due to legal restrictions (100 per cent, compared to only 26 per cent in Italy); by contrast, in Italy, the most important immobilising factor is considered the lack of financial means (61 per cent, compared to 22 per cent in Greece).

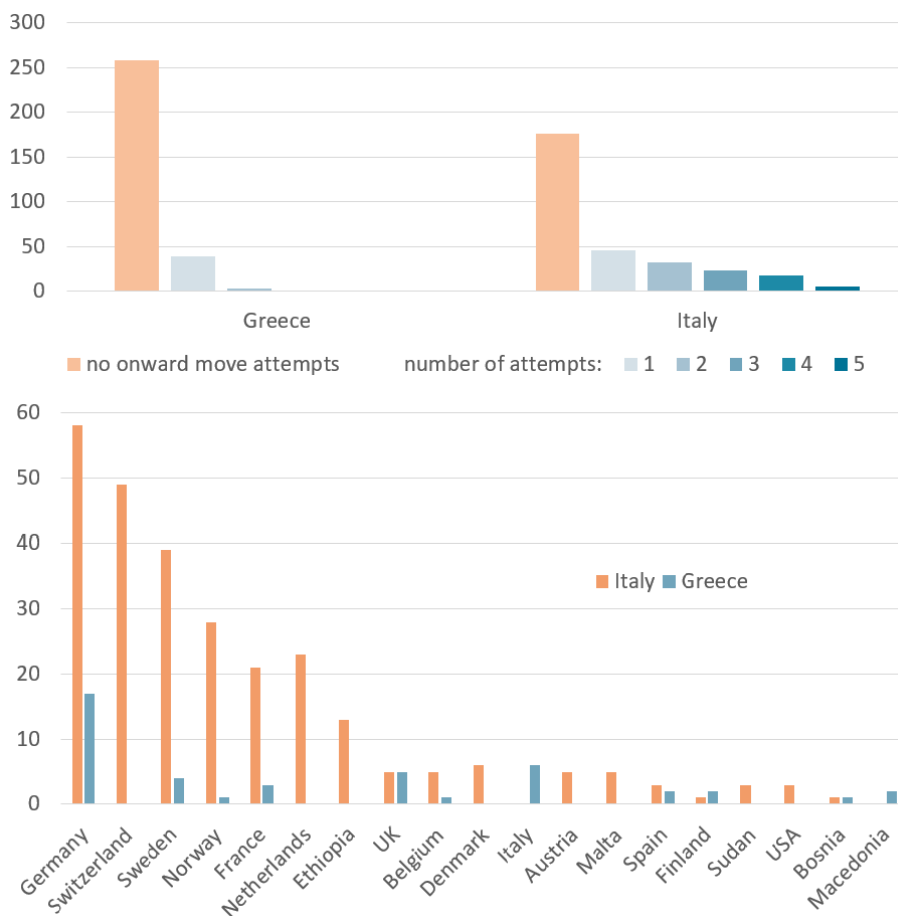
### Different trajectories of politicisation

Within the context of ever-more restrictive policy frameworks in the European Union, trends in national migration politics have a crucial role to play in both countries. From this point of view, fieldwork took place in a period of almost reverse developments in the two countries. While a change in government from Centre-Right to Centre-Left in Italy in September 2019 has brought some degree of ‘relaxation’ in legislation and the political discourse, Greece experienced a shift towards stricter legislative initiatives and a rhetoric explicitly focusing on deterrence and law enforcement over the same period.

In Italy, unlike in Greece, the issue of mass irregularity climbed the policy agenda during the pandemic, not out of fundamental rights considerations but rather of economic concerns about labour shortages in the care and agricultural sectors due to COVID-related international mobility restrictions. This led to the adoption of a regularisation procedure in summer 2020, as illustrated in Sub-section 3.2.2. However, after having raised hope among an estimated 500,000 to 600,000 migrants with an irregular status, the regularisation procedure turned into a blatant implementation failure—200,000 applications were much less than expected. Furthermore, the pandemic and a lack of political will led to administrative paralysis in the processing of applications. Only very small numbers of permits were granted in the first year. This is reflected in the fact that very few of our research participants presented the regularisation as a game-changer for their condition of marginality and protracted displacement—only four per cent of the 300 survey participants in Italy applied for regularisation.

In any case, the salience of (ir)regularity in the Italian case sharply contrasts with the much lower salience of the issue in the Greek case. Regularisation has been long abandoned as a policy option, while labour market considerations are almost entirely absent from recent policy discourses and measures. Instead, since 2015, asylum has practically emerged as the only pathway for regular migration, even for people whose primary motive is to improve their livelihoods and do not have substantive claims to international protection. What is more, the largely inefficient and highly problematic asylum

Figure 5: Respondents’ onward mobility: Attempts and countries



Source: TRAFIG survey (n = 300 in GRC, n = 299 in ITA)

system of 10 years ago has now been replaced by a full-blown and tightly regulated reception and protection system, which ties asylum seekers to procedures resulting in dependency from services provided by the state and humanitarian actors.

Such differences in policies, politics and governance regimes reflect or have an impact on displaced people’s livelihoods. As evidenced in various sections of the *working paper*, we observed varying facets and experiences of marginalisation in the two countries. However, two distinctive patterns appear to prevail: One relates to the role and position of migrant labour in Italian productive structures, while the other has to do with the livelihood dependency reproduced by the Greek protection regime. This also emerged in the TRAFIG survey and is indicatively illustrated in Figure 6. While similar shares of respondents (about one out of ten) in both countries receive financial or other material support from their local or transnational networks, 60 per cent in Greece are dependent on the support of the state or other organisations. This is the case for one-fourth of respondents in Italy, where half of the respondents gain their livelihoods through paid labour, compared to 23 per cent in Greece.

### Displaced peoples’ agency and social connections: Between survival and resistance

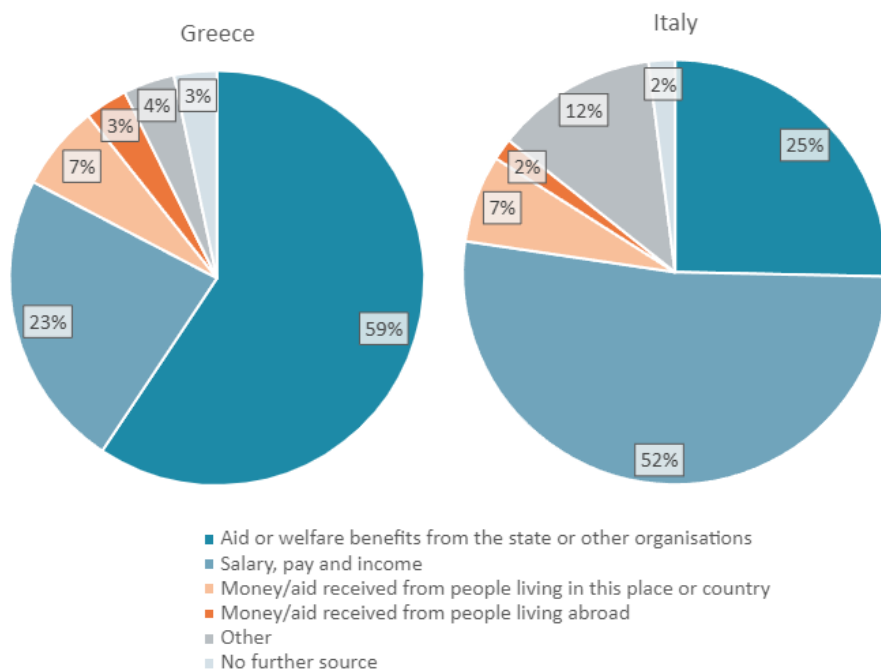
Notwithstanding these important regulatory differences, we have documented proactive behaviours in both countries challenging regulatory restrictions and the complex web of immobilising and marginalising forces these (re)produce. Displaced people develop a variety of strategies, temporal, spatial or social, to cope with the situation they face, meet their needs, seek means to survive, regain control over their lives, attempt to improve their livelihoods or continue their migration projects. These strategies are indicative of forms of agency through which migrants navigate restrictive governance regimes; they negotiate, contest, and sometimes resist the immobilising and marginalising forces, and they may transcend, circumvent or even subvert them. Migrants’ strategies may include mundane daily practices of survival or carefully calculated tactics to escape immobilisation and precarity. They sometimes appear to be desperate as well as creative; they often bypass regulatory frameworks or conform and adapt to gain the most out of them, even if they take place at the margins of legality. With respect to the approach of making strategic use of the opportunities provided by governance regimes, for example, the tightly regulated restrictions on movement in the Greek case, combined

with the stratification of reception provisions linked to layers of vulnerability, shape strategies of constructing and performing ‘vulnerability’ that (some) asylum seekers may attempt to be able to negotiate mobility (leave the islands) and/or obtain (or remain in) more ‘privileged’ forms of accommodation. Another example is that of requirements of the recent regularisation measure in Italy, which led many to withdraw their asylum claims or seek fake job contracts to be eligible.

Fieldwork in both countries highlighted multiple forms of agency, in which mobility and connectivity play a crucial role and are intrinsically interconnected. On the one hand, migrants’ networks may provide information, resources and support that facilitate intra-national mobilities (for instance,

in search of work or improved conditions) as well as further migratory journeys. On the other, the desire or need to be close to family or co-ethnic networks sometimes drives both internal and international movements. In the Italian study, cross-border and inter-regional mobilities, often of a circular nature, appear

Figure 6: Livelihood portfolio of survey participants



Source: TRAFIG survey (n = 600)

to be linked to survival strategies of finding employment and generating an income. In Greece, fieldwork findings point to mobilities seeking to reunite with family members and/or improve living conditions. Notwithstanding the differences, in both cases, mobility appears to be both a means and a resource, helping displaced people not only to move through physical space but also move socially by generating means of subsistence and social capital. Importantly, being mobile and socially connected—especially at the local level—is not just about mere survival: Findings in Greece and Italy suggest that displaced people attempt to be ‘emplaced’ by leading ‘normal’ everyday lives, socialise, get educated, engage with the arts, or simply have fun.

TRAFIG research in southern Europe provided evidence that reinstates the importance of social connections for forced migrants and the multiplicity of types of interpersonal relationships and their role in people’s lives. Social networks, whether preexisting or newly formed, transnational or (trans-)local, family-related, ethnic-based or creating connections with members of local communities, represent a key resource as they help displaced people to gather information, access informal welfare or navigate their new context of settlement and possibly move on in their lives or journeys. Migrants’ networks play a significant role in facilitating geographic mobility and smoothening the integration pathways of newcomers in different localities. In large cities such as Torino, Rome or Athens, established ethnic communities of previously settled migrants (e.g., associations, businesses, places of worship, social spaces, cafés, etc.) become points of reference for newcomers and provide opportunities of socialisation and a sense of familiarity in an otherwise alienating or even hostile environment. They also provide guidance and support displaced people in finding accommodation, employment, or the means to transit elsewhere in Italy or Greece and beyond. However, it should be noted that while the role of locally established co-ethnic networks is very significant for some collectivities (e.g. Eritreans in Rome), it is much more limited, especially for integration purposes, in the case of more recent and atomised migration systems (e.g. West Africans in Piedmont).

### Irregularity as freedom? The mobility paradox and (other) inequalities

Nevertheless, the mobility strategies observed are clearly responding to situations of multiple constraints and take place within a restricted environment, often at the fringes or entirely out of legality. Hence our common finding of what we may term ‘the mobility paradox’: Situations and choices whereby ‘regularity’ restricts mobility whilst ‘irregularity’ allows for it. As we have documented in both countries, the constrained mobility strategies displaced people follow may help them to satisfy immediate needs or overcome grim conditions ‘here

and now’. Yet, in some cases, they may lead them to new forms of precariousness, such as exploitative conditions related to illegal behaviour and criminal networks, or when facing punitive legal consequences. The resource of mobility as a form of agency under conditions of multiple constraints may, thus, turn into a ‘mobility trap’, as migrants engage in desperate moves and movements, which may further endanger their lives and freedom and reproduce and protract their displacement. Similarly, some forms of connectivity may lead to migrants’ entrapment in situations of limbo, as social networks can also be sources of obligations, disinformation, introversion and exclusion, reproducing conditions of protracted displacement rather than eliminating them. The COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdown measures appear to have affected displaced people disproportionately compared to the general population (not being able to move for work or having to stay for prolonged periods in the isolation of a camp), depriving them of these vital resources of mobility and connectivity.

Notwithstanding the overarching common experiences of displacement, not all migrants have the same means and resources to develop such proactive strategies, be mobile, ‘productively’ mobilise their social networks or form new ones. Our findings in both countries not only confirm the rather obvious differences deriving from the stratification of legal statuses produced by governance regimes but also uncover how these may interact with the inequalities linked to ethnic and national origins, gendered and age-related perceptions and roles, as well as class and social status. Displaced people of specific national or ethnic origins (e.g. Eritreans in Rome, Kurds in Athens) may find support in established migrant communities in specific localities, whilst others may not. Negotiations of masculinities and femininities, perceptions and practices of motherhood (or fatherhood) may hinder or facilitate mobility (e.g. young men or single mothers). People with financial and cultural capital (e.g. university education, knowledge of a different language) may stand more privileged in finding ways to navigate their new context of settlement and take steps towards integration. Experiences of displacement and migration may dissolve or reinforce such inequalities or lead to the emergence of new ones. Sometimes, however, mere coincidence and accidental encounters may also help specific individuals to overcome displacement and limbo.

### Indifference, solidarity, rejection: The many faces of the ‘host society’

Finally, displaced people’s connectivity also entails relationships and bonds with members of local communities beyond ethnic or family-based networks. Building alliances with/in local communities depends to some extent on structural factors shaping inter-ethnic relations at large. What we referred to above regarding reverse trends in policy and politics in Greece and Italy is relevant here too. They shape public discourse



and hence affect public opinion and dominate ‘host–stranger’ relations. Migration and asylum are heavily politicised in both countries, yet in different forms and ways, with recent shifts towards a more moderate rhetoric in (post-Salvini) Italy vis-à-vis a more xenophobic one in (New Democracy) Greece. In the latter case, a resurgence of nationalism related to diplomatic tensions with Turkey or the naming of North Macedonia appears to have an adverse impact on how migrants and refugees are perceived. Yet, with the COVID-19 pandemic dominating the media headlines, migration is no longer on the public agenda. By contrast, in Italy, the question of migrants’ irregularity climbed the policy agenda during the pandemic in light of economic concerns about labour shortages in specific economic sectors. The pandemic has also given rise to new fears and concerns over public health that may eventually feed renewed scapegoating of displaced people in both countries. Looking at the structure and role of civil society in a broader political context, we found that in Italy, the tradition of Catholic and left-wing organisations’ role in migrant support and advocacy is stronger vis-à-vis a fairly recently developed civic culture in Greece. Here, however, we have observed an important informal and spontaneous component linked to social movements, which (partly) intermingles with humanitarian relief.

In both countries, we have seen that local authorities and the media often play a decisive role. The overarching anti-immigrant climate is reflected in overt hostility, conflict and, sometimes, violent racism (e.g., as in Castel Volturno or Lesvos), as well as in discriminatory and exclusionary practices, both institutional and in everyday local encounters (in public services, buses, shops, etc.). We have also heard stories of exploitative relations, whether in the labour market or other arrangements (e.g., accessing housing, fulfilling administrative requirements, seeking means for further mobility), often resulting from or fed by the conditions of displacement themselves (irregularity, informality, limbo). Even more so, these very conditions—of constantly moving in search of informal employment, living in an isolated camp, becoming invisible to avoid meaningful encounters with native Greeks or Italians—tend to normalise segregation and social distance and hinder the building of social bonds. Nevertheless, although indifference is perhaps the natives’ dominant stance towards migrants and refugees in everyday contexts, field research in Italy and Greece has identified several cases of positive reciprocal relations. These range from accidental encounters revealing the ‘kindness of strangers’, ethically inspired philanthropy or politically motivated solidarity and cooperative interactions, even to intimate relationships and friendships. Beyond offering practical help to ‘people in need’, friendships are crucial for socialisation in a new context and developing a sense of belonging, which is essential to overcome marginalisation and sets the ground for integration.

## Conclusions

At the twilight of the 20th century, the role and position of southern Europe in the European and global map of migration was reshuffled; all countries in the region sooner or later became new destinations for international migrants, while the Mediterranean emerged as “Europe’s Rio Grande” (King, 2000). Already in the third decade of the 21st century, a somehow different picture seems to be taking shape. Southern Europe continues as a destination for people of diverse origins and trajectories but is also home to numerous long-established migrants and their offspring. At the same time, however, it remains a space of transit, a gateway to other European destinations and necessary stopover along risky journeys, and sometimes a place where displaced people are stuck, neither able to move either forward or backwards nor settle down where they are. For many, especially forced migrants who reached Greece or Italy like those interviewed in the context of the TRAFIG project, the dream of finding a safe haven—peace, security, protection and better life prospects—may dissolve, as entering ‘Europe’ does not end displacement but protracts and continues it.

In this context, we studied numerous overlapping and intersecting figurations of displacement in Italy and Greece at different layers and scales. These figurations connect migrants whose journeys have been interrupted who meet in reception facilities or detention centres, camps or squats, NGO premises or unfamiliar streets, agricultural fields or construction sites. They all are faced with complex and ever-restrictive governance regimes and find themselves between mobility and stasis. The complexity of the governance of reception and asylum may produce confusion and disillusionment, whilst its over-regulation and bureaucratic apparatus appears to be unsuitable to address the challenges and meet the needs of migrants or local communities.

Conflicting interests in the Middle East and beyond, the Arab Spring and the war in Syria, poverty and conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa, among others, are major examples of a shifting geopolitical context producing new displacement trends or reshuffling preexisting ones, while the 2015 ‘long summer of migration’ has marked a decisive turning point in the EU’s approach to asylum and external(ised) border controls. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has initiated a new phase of uncertainty as regards the possibilities and modes of human mobility. Alongside diplomatic relations with neighbouring states (Libya, Turkey) and relevant domestic developments in the two countries under study (economic crisis, political change), such shifts are indicative of major figurational changes that most often have an adverse impact on the livelihoods of displaced people and their potential for lasting restitution.

And yet, displaced migrants’ everyday agency and mundane strategies, as well as their mobilisation of social resources and forging of new relationships in the southern European localities where they are found, may allow them to intervene in these figurations, navigate through them and possibly reshape them. As we have shown, displaced people’s connections and attempts to resume their journeys may sometimes lead them to some form of settlement, while often, they place them into new forms of precariousness. Such knowledge emphatically invites decision-makers and ordinary citizens alike to face present-day challenges realistically and humanely by rethinking policy and practice in Italy, Greece and the European Union as a whole through easing connectivity channels and facilitating mobility pathways.

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AMKA</b>	<b>National Insurance Number (Greece)</b>
<b>AVRR</b>	<b>IOM-assisted Voluntary Returns and Reintegration scheme</b>
<b>COVID-19</b>	<b>Coronavirus disease 2019</b>
<b>EASO</b>	<b>European Asylum Support Office</b>
<b>ESTIA</b>	<b>Emergency Support To Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) programme (Greece)</b>
<b>EU</b>	<b>European Union</b>
<b>HELIOS</b>	<b>Hellenic Integration Support for Beneficiaries of International Protection (HELIOS) project (Greece)</b>
<b>IO</b>	<b>International Organisation</b>
<b>IOM</b>	<b>International Organization for Migration</b>
<b>NGO</b>	<b>Non-governmental organisation</b>
<b>PAAYPA</b>	<b>Foreigner’s Temporary Insurance and Health Coverage Number (Greece)</b>
<b>RIC</b>	<b>Reception and Integration Centre (Greece)</b>
<b>SAI</b>	<b>Reception and Integration System (Italy)</b>
<b>TRAFIG</b>	<b>Transnational Figurations of Displacement project</b>
<b>UNHCR</b>	<b>United Nations Commissioner for Refugees</b>

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TRAFIG provides academic evidence on refugee movements and protracted displacement; analyses which conditions could help to improve displaced people's everyday lives and informs policymakers on how to develop solutions to protracted displacement.

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