National report on the governance of the asylum reception system in Italy

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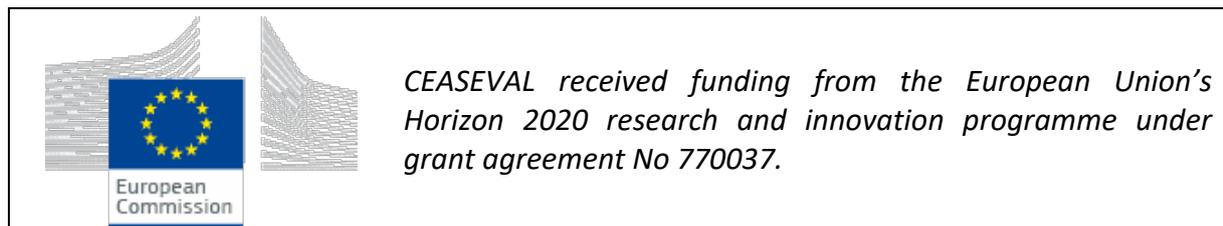
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Abstract

The report provides an overview of the Italian reception system. After describing the initial design of the national governance of asylum seekers' reception, it focuses on transformations of the reception system since 2011, when the Arab Spring started, paying specific attention to the decision-making process. After examining the formal organisation of reception policies in the country, the report explores the actual functioning of the reception system at the national and local levels (in the provinces of Turin and Treviso). Finally, policy outcomes are discussed with particular regard to trends of convergence and divergence in the implementation of reception policies and the contribution of monitoring activities to these processes. The report highlights the complexity of the Italian reception system, despite the repeated attempts of rationalisation and harmonisation. Concerning decision-making, three main periods are identified: 2011-2013, when an emergency approach prevailed; 2014-2016, when key actors of reception were significantly involved in the decision-making and major reforms to expand and improve the system were formulated and implemented; from 2017 to nowadays, when the dialogue among key actors has substantially declined. On paper the openness and the multi-level governance of reception policies appears rather high in Italy. Yet, being dependent on the contingent willingness of the actors involved to cooperate, and given the high concentration of decision power in the hands of the Ministry of Interior, these features may actually be much more limited.

Keywords: asylum seekers, reception, multi-level governance, Italy, decision-making, actors, convergence/divergence

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Glossary

AMIF	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
ANCI	*Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani* – National Association of Italian Municipalities
ARCI	*Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana* – Italian Recreational and Cultural Association
CARA	*Centri di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo* – Reception Centres for Asylum Seekers
CAS	*Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria* – Extraordinary Reception Centres
CDA	*Centri di Accoglienza* – Reception Centres
CIE	*Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione* – Identification and Expulsion Centres
CIS	*Consorzio Italiano di Solidarietà* – Italian Consortium for Solidarity
CPIA	*Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti* – Centres for Adult Education
CPSA	*Centri di Primo Soccorso e Accoglienza* – Centres of First Assistance and Reception
CPR	*Centri di Permanenza per il Rimpatrio* – Immigration Detention Centres for Return
ENA	*Emergenza Nord Africa* – North Africa Emergency
EU	European Union
	Fondo nazionale per le politiche e i servizi dell'asilo – National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
PNA	*Programma Nazionale Asilo* – National Asylum Programme
	Servizio centrale di informazione, promozione, consulenza, monitoraggio e supporto tecnico – Central Service for Information, Promotion, Consultancy, Monitoring and Technical Support
SIPROIMI	*Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati* – Protection System for beneficiaries of international protection and unaccompanied minors
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SPRAR	*Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati (nonché per stranieri destinatari di altre forme di protezione umanitaria)* – Protection system for asylum seekers and refugees (as well as for migrants with humanitarian status)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UPI	*Unione delle Province Italiane* – Union of Italian Provinces

Introduction

The national report on the governance of the reception system in Italy aims to provide an overview of the Italian reception system by focusing specifically on transformations that have affected the system since 2011, decision-making and implementation processes at the national and local levels, and trends of convergence and divergence in the implementation of reception policies.

The research is based on extensive qualitative fieldwork. A total of twenty-one semi-structured interviews, lasting on hour on average, were conducted with a range of actors directly involved in the Italian reception system, either at national or local level. These actors include: governmental actors, public administrators and officers, non-profit actors and civil society organisations (CSOs), and international organisations[1].

With respect to the selection of the local case studies, the agreed criteria required us to identify two localities that present similar features in terms of socio-economic conditions, ratio of asylum seekers to the resident population, and problem pressure (e.g. avoiding areas of first arrival), but are different under the political profile, i.e., in terms of majorities (traditionally) at government and political cultures. More precisely, in the case of Italy – a country where also the regional level play a role in the governance of reception –we tried to identify: one province/urban area governed by a progressive majority positively oriented towards migrants in a region with the same or a similar political orientation; and one province/urban area governed by a conservative majority less favourable towards migrants in a region with the same or a similar political orientation. The combination of these criteria led us to select the following case studies: the province of Turin in the Piedmont region as the "progressive" locality, traditionally (although not exclusively) governed by centre-left majorities; and the province of Treviso in the Veneto region as the "conservative" locality, traditionally (although not exclusively) governed by centre-right majorities.

The fieldwork at the national level was organised and carried out between July and December 2018; the fieldwork at the local level between September and December 2018. The fieldwork at the national level was impacted by the change in the central government occurred in May 2018; the turnover in Ministry of Interior's officers made it very difficult to schedule interviews in the following months. In addition, in order to reconstruct the decision-making process of the past we interviewed also former Ministry of Interior's officers. At the national level, seven interviews were conducted mostly in person (one via Skype) with two current and former representatives of the national government, two representatives of sub-national governments, and three national-level representatives of the main civil society and international organisations involved in the governance of reception.

The fieldwork carried out in the Piedmont region and in the province of Turin benefitted from a traditionally positive orientation towards asylum seekers reception. It consisted of eight interviews conducted in person with public administrators and members of relevant civil society and international organisations. Two additional requests for interview were forwarded but it was impossible to conduct the interviews. It must be noted that some of the stakeholders contacted changed job or position within their organisation at the beginning of 2018, period that marked the change of the national government.

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[1]   The full list of interviews is in Annex to the report.

The fieldwork in the Veneto region and in the province of Treviso consisted of six interviews conducted in person with four CSO representatives both at local and regional level and two former institutional representatives both at local and regional level. A total of fourteen stakeholders were actually contacted, but cooperation, especially from institutional actors, has been very limited[2]. This part of the fieldwork demonstrated that there is a widespread reticence among key stakeholders in Veneto in general, and in Treviso more specifically, to talk about asylum- and migration-related issues. This may be linked to the increasing sensitivity and politicisation of the issue in the public discourse, especially after the 2018 national elections. This attitude is probably linked also to the position of the (former Northern) League (traditionally the main ruling party at the regional level and at a local level, in the city of Treviso and in a majority of municipalities in the province) which has apparently decided to keep as much as possible an "outsider" role in the governance of reception at the local level (see section 3.2.2).

The report is organised in four sections. Section 1 provides some historical background on the reception of asylum seekers in Italy and describes the initial design of the Italian reception system and the main reforms occurred throughout the years 2000s. Section 2 examines the transformations occurred to the national reception system since 2011, when the Arab Spring started, focusing on the decision-making process and actors involved in it. After an analysis of the main revisions of the current reception system, this section provides an overview of its formal governance structure. Section 3 explores the actual functioning of the reception system, thus investigating the implementation of reception at the national and local levels. Finally, section 4 analyses policy outcomes with particular regard to trends of convergence and divergence in the implementation of reception policies, understood in terms of greater homogeneity and heterogeneity respectively. The contribution of monitoring activities to these processes is also considered.

1. The background: the initial design of the national governance of asylum seekers reception and main reforms

1.1 The initial governance design

Although formally provided for by Article 10 of the Italian Constitution, asylum in Italy has long been more a theoretical than a real right. With the elimination in 1990 of the so-called "geographical limitation" to the Geneva Convention – which allowed Italy to accept as refugees only citizens from Eastern European countries – the country became one of the European destinations of asylum seekers without, however, providing for their reception in any way. The only measure introduced by Law 39/1990 was a daily allowance of 17 euros circa (34,000 old liras) covering a period of maximum 45 days for those in need.

Reception policies would actually be developed in the following years in response to the ongoing humanitarian crises and pressures from the European Union (EU). More specifically, humanitarian crises have represented key moments in structuring reception measures around two types of interventions: emergency shelters at points of arrival, where reception has always been conceived in

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[2]   Representatives of the regional branch of ANCI, of the Prefectures of Treviso and Venice, of the main CSO managing the SPRAR of the Municipality of Treviso, and the current and former mayors of Treviso either refused to take part in the research (in four cases) or did not reply to our requests (in two cases). As concerns the regional government, while the competent officer declined, with the competent political representative we have not managed to schedule a meeting.

a logic of border control and securitisation; and protection measures for refugees and "legitimate" asylum seekers, aiming in the long run at integration (Marchetti 2016). Hence, the artificial distinction between economic migrants and asylum seekers characterised the genesis of the Italian reception policies throughout the 1990s migration crises (ANCI et al. 2016).

The first key "emergency" was that of mass arrivals from Albania in 1991. In March, a Special Commissioner for the crisis was appointed with the mandate of coordinating the redistribution of asylum seekers among the Italian regions. However, given the lack of collaboration on the part of regional authorities, the Special Commissioner (actually the then Ministry of Immigration) opted for a top-down solution: Prefects were assigned the task of setting up for accommodation abandoned state building, like hold military bases or schools. This top-down move led the Regions to collaborate, and in the end 24,000 Albanian migrants were distributed among the Italian regions. They could beneficiate also of a one-year special residence permit[3]. In August of that same year though, the arrival of 20,000 more Albanians on the *Vlora* boat was dealt with in a much more straightforward manner: migrants were temporarily accommodated in the football stadium of the city of Bari with the goal of identifying them and send them back immediately.

The Albanian emergency was immediately followed and actually overlapped with the arrivals of war refugees from former Yugoslavia. These arrivals were faced primarily by the grassroots mobilisation of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), parishes, individual families and spontaneous groups, a mobilisation that led to the setting up of the Italian Consortium for Solidarity (CIS – *Consorzio Italiano di Solidarietà*). In 1992 the Presidency of the Council of Ministers established the Coordination Roundtable on Measures to Help Former Yugoslavia. Even though primarily concerned with coordinating humanitarian assistance to the population in Yugoslavia, it was also in charge of promoting initiatives for the war refugees hosted in Italy.

Law 563/1995 (the so-called "*Legge Puglia*") introduced for the first time reception centres to provide first assistance to migrants in view of their identification and possibly repatriation. The implementation decree approved in 1996 (Decree of the Minister of the Interior 233/1996, para 2) established three reception centres of this kind in the Apulia region (in Brindisi, Lecce and Otranto) and assigned to the Prefects the task of establishing emergency shelters to host irregular migrants in need until they could be identified. Such shelters were to be run by local authorities, which could contract them out to NGOs, social cooperatives and the like.

Hence, vis-à-vis the arrivals of the early 1990s, a reception system gradually emerged based on emergency interventions either started from above, i.e., by the Ministry of Interior through the Prefects, or from below, i.e., by NGOs and grassroots organisations with whom the Ministry of Interior tried to play a role of coordination. Whereas the first type of interventions targeted primarily Albanian supposedly economic migrants, the latter focused on displaced persons from Yugoslavia. However, this emerging system revealed since the beginning considerable gaps, as highlighted by the lack of any intervention in favour of Somalian asylum seekers who also arrived throughout the 1990s[4], and the "new emergency" created by new mass arrivals of refugees from Kosovo at the end of the decade. To face this new humanitarian crisis in 1999 the European Union and the Ministry of Interior promoted the project "Shared Action" (*Azione Comune*), coordinated by the Italian Consortium for Solidarity (CIS)

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[3]   *Circolare* 19, 14 March 1991.
[4]   Some of them relied upon the support of fellow nationals already in Italy, while others squatted abandoned buildings. Many left Italy for other destinations like the UK or Canada (ANCI et al. 2014, 30-31).

and gathering together various NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) specialised in the field of refugee rights and humanitarian protection. The goal was to go beyond a food-and-shelter reception model and promote a more comprehensive mode of intervention, including health and psychological assistance, support to family reunification, legal advice, etc..

The Shared Action Project represented the first attempt to build a comprehensive reception system in Italy, based on a coordination among the measures on the ground. However, it was essentially based on horizontal cooperation; this implied difficulties in coordinating with the reception facilities established by the Prefects. The involvement of the municipalities was also extremely limited.

1.2 Main reforms throughout the 2000s

To fill these gaps, in October 2000 a new project was lunched, the so-called "National Asylum Programme" (PNA – *Programma Nazionale Asilo*), on the basis of a memorandum of understanding signed by the Ministry of Interior, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI – *Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani*). The programme pursued three main goals: to establish a network of reception services for asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants with a temporary protection or humanitarian status; to promote specific measures for the integration of refugees and beneficiaries of humanitarian protection; to support projects of voluntary return in the countries of origin together with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

PNA can be regarded as a clear instance of multi-level governance since it was based on the integration of actors on the vertical and horizontal dimensions of policy-making processes. On the vertical dimension, the coordination of the system was in the hands of the Ministry of Interior, representing the national level, which was in charge of coordinating the system together with an international organization, representing the supranational level, and an association of municipalities, which represented local level authorities. Municipalities were expected to mobilise bottom-up by participating in the annual calls for projects launched by PNA. On the horizontal dimension, the municipalities had the key role of ensuring coordination with NGOs and other public and non-public actors mobilised on the asylum issue. Hence, PNA pursued a model of decentralised multi-level governance: grassroots activation at a local level was compounded by a process of selection and coordination from above in order to ensure homogeneity in the services provided, as well as effective answers to the problems. In 2002 PNA was formally institutionalised by Law 189/2002 and became the official system of asylum seekers and refugees reception, renamed "Protection system for asylum seekers and refugees as well as for migrants with humanitarian status" (SPRAR – *Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati nonché per stranieri destinatari di altre forme di protezione umanitaria*).

Similarly to PNA, also SPRAR assigns a key role to the local level. ANCI is formally in charge of coordinating the system through the so-called "Central Service for Information, Promotion, Consultancy, Monitoring and Technical Support" (*Servizio centrale di informazione, promozione, consulenza, monitoraggio e supporto tecnico*). Furthermore, para 1-*septies* of Law 189/2002 established the National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services (*Fondo nazionale per le politiche e i servizi dell'asilo*), bringing together national funding from the Ministry of Interior, EU funding and private donations or other financial sources. The Fund supported SPRAR local projects up to the 80% of their cost. Projects are selected on the basis of a call which is launched every year by the Ministry of Interior (see section 2.2).

The starting of PNA and the development and institutionalisation processes leading to SPRAR took place in a context marked by the approval of the EU Reception and Asylum Procedures Directives. The national laws that transposed these directives have indeed contributed to the further strengthening of the system, yet they have also definitively sanctioned the emerging of a two-pronged reception system in Italy, i.e., the SPRAR centres run by the Municipalities and the emergency reception centres managed by the Prefectures (i.e., the local branches of the Ministry of Interior in each Province).

More specifically, the Reception Directive (2003/9/CE) was transposed in Italy with the Legislative Decree n. 140 of 30 May 2005, which specified the reception governance and identified the key actors and institutions involved in decision-making and implementation. Para 5 of Legislative Decree 140/2005 established that asylum seekers have to declare their lack of means in order to be hosted in the reception system. This declaration has to be done at the Police Headquarters (*Questura*) when the asylum application is lodged. The Prefecture is responsible for checking the availability of a place in the SPRAR system. Legislative Decree 140/2005 also established that migrants who entered Italy illegally and wanted to apply for asylum had to be hosted in the so-called "Reception Centres for Asylum Seekers" (CARA – *Centri di accoglienza per richiedenti asilo*). These centres are directly managed by the Ministry of Interior through the Prefectures, which usually outsource the provision of services to non-public organisations on the basis of calls for tender (among the main organisations running CARA in Italy: Italian Red Cross, *La Misericordia*, Caritas, etc.). CARA have to ensure basic services like board and lodging, as well as health services, legal and psychological assistance, linguistic interpreters.

In case no place is available in a SPRAR centre, according to para 6 of Legislative Decree 140/2005 accommodation should be provided in one of the centres directly managed by the Ministry of Interior, either a CARA or one of the temporary reception centres established by Law 563/1995, but only for the time necessary in order to find a suitable accommodation in a SPRAR centre. In case no place is available neither in the SPRAR nor in the governmental centres, the Prefecture has to provide an allowance to the asylum seeker.

Clearly, the national law transposing the EU Reception Directive has allowed for important exceptions to the SPRAR system, establishing *de facto* a two-pronged approach to reception. This approach is clearly highlighted by the Note of the Ministry of Interior of 17 October 2005, which provides the Prefectures with instructions on the implementation of Legislative Decree 140/2005. According to this note, "for the rest of 2005, reception will be provided most probably primarily in the governmental centres for organizational reasons"[5]. This statement shows that the Minister of Interior was conscious of the limits of the SPRAR, since the number of places available has always fallen short of actual necessities, as demonstrated by the number of asylum seekers in Italy in the first decade of the years 2000s (see Table 1).

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[5]   *Circolare* of the Ministry of Interior, 17 October 2005.

Table 1: Number of SPRAR reception places compared to asylum applications (2003-2009)

Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
SPRAR reception places	1,365	2,237	2,199	2,428	2,411	4,388	3,694
Asylum applications	13,982	9,850	9,377	10,348	14,053	31,723	19,090

Source: ANCI et al. 2014.

Hence, the transposition of the Reception Directive actually led to the institutionalisation of a two-pronged governance of reception. On the one hand there was the SPRAR system, presented on the paper as the most preferable solution for asylum seekers; on the other there were the emergency reception centres directly managed by the Prefectures, which were *de facto* perceived as the solution at hand, given the scarce availability of places in the SPRAR.

2. Recent processes of reconfiguration of the governance of the reception system

This section is organised into three main sub-sections. The first one explains the process of decision-making that has led to the reconfiguration of the system (section 2.1). The second one illustrates how the system works today given the recent revisions (section 2.2). The third one provides an overview of the formal governance structure of the reception system today (section 2.3).

2.1 Process of decision-making of the current reception system

This section is articulated into two sub-sections: the first one provides an overview of the main actors involved in the decision-making process in the field of reception in the last decade; the second one illustrates the main stages through which the decision-making process has developed from the Arab Spring to the present day.

2.1.1 The main actors and their positions

We can distinguish three main categories of actors involved in the decision-making on reception in the last decade: public actors, civil society organisations, international organisations.

As concerns **public actors**, the key actor is undoubtedly the **Ministry of Interior**. Its position has changed over the years since it depends to a certain extent on the political priorities of the Minister and, more generally, of the government in charge, as we will see below in section 2.1.2. As for the sub-national authorities, the main actors are ANCI and the Conference of the Regions, which has the role of representing regional interests and positions in national policy-making. Since the SPRAR system is managed by the municipalities, **ANCI** has always been against the two-pronged reception system consisting of governmental facilities and SPRAR, and has lobbied for a strengthening of the latter and for its recognition as the only reception system in Italy (the so-called "*reductio ad unum*" principle).

Differently from ANCI, the **Conference of the Regions** has faced difficulties in finding shared positions, given the strong political stances on migration and asylum prevailing at this level of government. Because of these divisions, **Italian Regions** have mainly played individually. Some regions have been highly proactive and collaborative in implementing national decisions, e.g., Piedmont, Emilia Romagna and Tuscany; others, although holding collaborative attitudes, have faced technical and organisational problems, e.g., Puglia, Campania and Calabria; others, such as Lombardy, have repeatedly spoken out

against the decisions of the central government while being in fact rather efficient in implementing its decisions; finally, few regions have opposed national plans, for instance by hampering the redistribution of asylum seekers across municipalities, with Veneto being the main example of this obstructionist stance (see section 3.2.2) (Interview 2).

The **non-profit sector** involved in asylum seekers reception is very fragmented and the organisations which operate across several regions are few. The main ones are gathered in the **Asylum Roundtable of CSOs**[6]. Among the latter, the two main actors in the decision-making on reception have been **Caritas** and **ARCI** (*Associazione Ricreativa e Culturale Italiana* – Italian Recreational and Cultural Association). Their centrality derives from the fact that they manage a large share of reception centres (together they manage around 20% of reception places across the country, with a larger role played by Caritas) and are politically relevant actors, being respectively the largest Catholic and centre-left organisations engaged in asylum seekers reception – and not only in this field. Furthermore, they manage both SPRAR and governmental centres so that they have a cross-cutting perspective and knowledge on the whole reception system. Although supporting the prioritisation of SPRAR, they appear keener than ANCI to maintain a two-pronged system, especially to face sudden increases of asylum seekers' inflows, and they advocate for a greater convergence between the functioning of SPRAR and governmental centres rather than for a total definitive suppression of the latter.

Despite their central role, Caritas and ARCI cannot be viewed as representatives of the large, fragmented and multifaceted Italian non-profit sector engaged in asylum seekers reception. The recent and rapid expansion of the system has attracted organisations operating in fields different from asylum and migration and has produced a high heterogeneity among the civil society organisations managing reception centres. As a consequence, they face difficulties in finding representative voices at central level – and at local level as well. Moreover, the entry into this field of organisations seeking opportunities to increase their budget with little real commitment for asylum seekers' rights and social inclusion, has produced a fracture within the non-profit sector itself. As we will see below, this cleavage has been mirrored by the requests from Caritas and ARCI to the government to increase selection standards and accountability of the organisations managing reception centres.

International organisations have been playing a key role too in the decision-making on reception. The Italian office of **UNHCR** has been regarded by the government as a valuable resource because of its expertise – even if, according to some interviewees, UNHCR has been also a source of legitimation for the state action in the field of asylum. As a consequence, UNHCR's role in Italy has been rather multi-sided, since it combines operational cooperation with the government together with advocacy: UNHCR defines this combination as "operational advocacy", which is also aimed at government's capacity building. In this perspective, UNHCR has always lobbied for a shift from an emergency to a structural approach to reception, and for enhancing planning and evaluating activities. At the same time, UNHCR, consistently with its mission and its intergovernmental nature, has supervised the respect of refugee rights under the Geneva Convention. In this regard, UNHCR's approach has been partially different from that of CSOs, namely less value-based and more legally-based with international and European legislation as a reference point of its advocacy activities. Finally, according to its mission, UNHCR has

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[6]   The organisations belonging to the Asylum Roundtable of CSOs are the following: A Buon Diritto, Acli, Amnesty International, Arci, Asgi, Caritas Italiana, Casa dei Diritti Sociali, Centro Astalli, Cir, Cnca, Comunità di Sant'Egidio, Fcei, Medu, Msf, Oxfam Italia, Save The Children, Senza Confine. UNHCR is a permanent invited member without right to vote.

been working for enhancing asylum seekers' and refugees' advocacy ability and active involvement in decision-making.

IOM and **Save the Children** have been involved in the decision-making on asylum and policy implementation with particular regard to specific sectoral issues or categories of beneficiaries, i.e., IOM on relocation and voluntary returns, and Save the Children on minors. These international organisations (UNHCR, IOM and Save the Children) have been also engaged in providing information at disembarkation and in monitoring the reception system (see section 4.2).

2.1.2 Process of decision-making

As pointed out above, before the recent increase of asylum seekers inflows, Italy had a well-functioning but extremely small and already undersized reception system managed by the municipalities under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior, namely the SPRAR (see section 1.2). The shift from there to the current situation cannot be framed as a mere expansion of the system: it has implied a partial reconfiguration of institutional competences, the setting up of new types of reception facilities, new procedures, new information systems, new mechanisms of coordination and governance, new monitoring schemes, the recruitment of new staff and organisations that have largely developed their expertise on the job.

According to interviewees, until the end of 2016, the rapid increase of asylum seekers' inflows has been the main **trigger** not only of the boost of the reception system but also of the main reforms, whose purpose has been to meet the increasing and diversified reception needs and achieve a balanced distribution of asylum seekers across the country. Since 2017, the concern for political consensus has seemingly prevailed as a driver of decisions on reception. Against this backdrop, the EU recast Reception Directive (Directive 2013/33/EU) has not been a major trigger of reforms. As the directive left large room for national adaptation, the Italian law that transposed it in 2015 mainly ratified key decisions taken in the previous years. Actually, the main change due to EU policies was the adoption of the so-called "hotspot approach", following the launch of the "European Agenda on Migration" and the ensuing "Italian Roadmap" (see section 2.2).

Along with triggers of policy reforms, it is relevant to focus on factors affecting decision-making and governance processes. In this respect, interviewees generally believe that the shape of governance and decision-making processes has been mainly influenced by the political will of the central government. They emphasised the importance not only of the overall orientation of the government – and especially of the Ministry of Interior – but also of the role of single key persons acting as political entrepreneurs.

The **main stages of the decision-making on reception** identified by interviewees are the following:

1. in 2011-2013 an emergency approach prevailed, with little room for shared decision-making and policy implementation;

2. 2014-2016 represented the "golden age" of the governance of reception, as an interviewee defined it (Interview 4); in this phase key actors of reception were involved in the decision-making and major reforms to expand and improve the system were formulated and implemented;

3. starting from 2017, the central governments' concern for political consensus started to prevail because of the frequent (local, national and European) elections; the emphasis on security and inflows' reduction has overshadowed the shared efforts to improve the quality of the reception system, and the dialogue among key actors has significantly declined.

From the emergency to the ordinary regime (2011-2013)

The increase in arrivals that started as early as 2011, following the fall of the Tunisian and Lybian regimes, brought into the public debate and agenda the issue of asylum seekers' reception. To manage the situation, the Minister of Interior of the then centre-right Berlusconi government, Roberto Maroni, declared the "state of emergency" – the so-called **"North Africa Emergency" (ENA)**[7]. This gave considerable powers initially to the Prefects and then to the Civil Protection Service (*Protezione Civile Nazionale*), which had coordinating tasks to set up emergency reception centres outside the SPRAR system.

The ENA system exposed reception to criticism. Even though in March 2011 the Ministry of Interior tried to establish a collaboration with the Regions and set regional quotas based on the number of residents to achieve a fair redistribution of asylum seekers throughout the country (Department of Civil Protection – Presidency of the Council of Ministries, 12 April 2011), the distribution remained unbalanced because of both practical difficulties in finding adequate buildings and the pressure from regional and national politicians to avoid the setting up of reception facilities in their electoral constituencies. Furthermore, the centralised management of reception with the consequent possibility for the Civil Protection Service to set up reception facilities without consulting the Municipalities stirred protests from local authorities. Finally, local authorities and CSOs complained about the low quality of integration services, including language learning.

Paradoxically, this contingency turned out to be a window of opportunity in terms of multi-level governance. In the face of the above-mentioned difficulties, the Head of the Civil Protection Service, Franco Gabrielli, set up an **inter-institutional Working Group** where all institutional levels (i.e., central government, Regions and local authorities through ANCI and UPI – Union of Italian Provinces) were brought together to identify the best solutions to manage and overcome the emergency. At the same time, the Head of Civil Protection started informal consultations with the main CSOs working in the field of asylum. Because of this decision, he is regarded by almost all national-level interviewees as a key actor in the development of the multi-level governance of reception.

The "North Africa Emergency" ended in March 2013: people had to leave the reception facilities (with exceptions for vulnerable cases) and a significant part of them, being without housing and job, occupied abandoned buildings in the main cities, triggering further criticism on the failure of the ENA approach (see section 3.2.1.1).

Starting from that moment, the Ministry of Interior became the only competent institution for the coordination of reception. Right after the end of ENA, the government led by Mario Monti, which took over the Berlusconi government in November 2011, was replaced by a centre-left government led by Enrico Letta, who became Prime Minister in April 2013. The government was supported by the New Centre-Right led by Angelino Alfano, who was appointed Minister of Interior.

In the shift from the emergency regime to the ordinary management of reception, the new government and Minister of Interior did not dismiss the multi-level governance solutions developed

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[7]   Order of the Prime Minister, 12 February 2011, OPCM 3933/2011.

during the ENA, which were on the contrary reinforced[8]. The inter-institutional Working Group set up by Franco Gabrielli was moved from the Department of Civil Protection to the Ministry of Interior and integrated with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. The Undersecretary of State Domenico Manzione was put at its head. As Franco Gabrielli did before him, Domenico Manzione played a key role in keeping the shared decision-making alive within and outside the Working Group itself (Interviews 3, 4, 7). In fact, the Working Group was mainly conceived as a venue for discussion and exchange on the main issues concerning reception, and for political compromises among key actors, and had no real decision power. Therefore, the readiness of the Ministry of Interior's officers (like Domenico Manzione) to consider the perspectives of the other actors involved was key to give the Working Group a real weight in the decision-making process. Moreover, **Regional Working Groups on Asylum** were to be set up in each region, gathering different institutions (the Region, Provinces, Municipalities, local Prefectures, *Questure*, and ANCI's regional branch) with the purpose of coordinating and monitoring reception at the regional level[9].

In 2013, another event (besides the end of ENA) led to a greater responsibility for the Italian government in terms of reception: the **State-managed search and rescue operation "Mare Nostrum"** was started by the Prime Minister Enrico Letta in response to the tragic shipwreck of Lampedusa of 3 October 2013. According to some interviews, the fact that migrants started to be brought to the Italian shores by the Italian Coast Guard pushed all actors involved, both public and private, to conceive asylum seekers reception in more systematic terms rather than as a contingent answer to spontaneous arrivals (Interview 3).

At that time, however, a chaotic system was in place. There were **three types of first reception centres**: a) Centres of first assistance and reception (*Centri di primo soccorso e accoglienza* – CPSA) to be used in case of large inflows for providing first assistance and medical aid; b) Reception Centres (*Centri di accoglienza* – CDA) where migrants received first assistance, were identified and could express their will to claim asylum; c) Reception Centres for Asylum Seekers (*Centri di accoglienza per richiedenti asilo* – CARA) where asylum seekers stayed while waiting for a decision on their asylum application (which was supposed to come in 20-35 days, whereas it took much longer). People granted some form of international protection should then be transferred to the **SPRAR**, defined as "secondary reception". Since the SPRAR was still undersized compared to the number of arrivals, the Ministry of Interior started asking the Prefectures to set up temporary governmental reception centres, i.e., **Extraordinary Reception Centres** (**CAS** – *Centri di accoglienza straordinaria*), throughout the country. Their management was assigned by the Prefectures to a very heterogeneous assemblage of public entities, non-profit organisations and for-profit companies such as hotels[10] (see section 3.2.2). This **top-down management of reception** revived tensions between the central and local levels since the decision to establish CAS could be taken by the Prefectures without any obligation to previously consult local authorities. Clashes between levels of government as well as local communities' protests were related also to the increased heterogeneity of the reception system caused by the establishment of CAS (see section 4). While SPRAR centres usually fulfil high reception standards and are articulated in small facilities, CAS are much more heterogeneous in terms of size and quality of services (Corte dei Conti

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[8]   "Guidelines for overcoming the North Africa Emergency" (*Documento di indirizzo per il superamento dell'Emergenza Nord Africa*), ratified by the Unified Conference State-Regions-Local Authorities in September 2013.

[9]   "Guidelines for overcoming the North Africa Emergency".

[10]   Ministerial Decree, 21 November 2008.

2018). As further described in section 3.2, large and poorly managed CAS have negatively impacted on local communities with the consequent rise of protests and inter-institutional tensions (see in particular the case of Veneto, section 3.2.2.2).

The institutionalisation of shared principles and multi-level governance mechanisms of reception (2014-2016)

The period 2014-2016 is considered the "golden age" of the decision-making on reception because it was characterised by a sort of **convergence between the positions of the key actors**. The guiding principles of decision-making were **the improvement of the multi-level governance of reception** and the reception system's *reductio ad unum*, i.e. the reduction of the two-pronged reception system made up of SPRAR centres and CAS to a single system, namely the SPRAR.

The first signs of this convergence were the internal administrative regulations (*Circolari*) issued by the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of Interior in 2014 asking the Prefects to follow some of the key principles of SPRAR when setting up CAS centres[11], including the SPRAR Guidelines for service delivery[12]. However, the Prefectures complied with those directions to a very different extent, therefore the situation has remained rather heterogeneous across the country (see section 3.2).

A crucial turning point, at least symbolically, was **the Agreement signed by the Unified Conference State-Regions-Local Authorities on 10 July 2014** that ratified and rationalised the main principles and mechanisms of the reception system decided until then[13]. It institutionalised the inter-institutional Working Group headed by the Ministry of Interior relabelling it as **National Coordinating Group on Asylum** and expanding its composition to include CSOs and international organisations. The members became the following: the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, representatives of the Conference of the Regions, the National Association of Italian Municipalities – ANCI, the Union of Italian Provinces – UPI, the CSOs ARCI and Caritas, with UNHCR and the Ministry of Equal Opportunity as invited members. The National Coordinating Group became responsible for the coordination between European and national asylum policies with particular regard to the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), for identifying weaknesses and possible solutions, as well as for monitoring their implementation. Most importantly, it became responsible for drafting an annual National Operational Plan on Asylum aimed at estimating the need of reception places and their redistribution across the Italian regions[14].

Also the Regional Working Groups on Asylum mentioned above, now re-labelled as **Regional Coordinating Groups on Asylum**, were recognised as ordinary components of the multi-level

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[11]   *Circolare* 104, 8 January 2014; *Circolare* 14100/27/I, 2 May 2014; *Circolare* 0005484, 27 June 2014.
[12]   *Circolare* 14906, 27 December 2014.
[13]   "Agreement between the Government, Regions and Local Authorities on the Implementation of the National Plan to face the extraordinary inflow of third country nationals, adults, families and unaccompanied minors" (*Accordo tra Governo, Regioni ed Enti Locali sull'attuazione del Piano nazionale per fronteggiare il flusso straordinario di cittadini extracomunitari, adulti, famiglie e minori non accompagnati*).
[14]   The Agreement refined the redistribution criteria set in 2011 during the ENA: the regional quotas of asylum seekers had to be established on the basis of the regional quota of the National Fund for Social Policies and the number of asylum seekers and refugees actually present in the region (and not on the formal previously assigned quotas).

governance of reception. They became responsible for coordinating the implementation of the National Operational Plan at the local level, guaranteeing exchange of information and coordinating stakeholders' actions in the implementation of reception. They are headed by the Prefecture of the regional capital city and gathers all the Prefectures of the region, ANCI's regional branch and a representative of the Region.

Besides institutionalising the previous attempts to establish a multi-level governance of reception, the Agreement aimed to rationalise the reception system by identifying **three levels of reception**: a) First reception centres for identification and first aid; b) Regional or interregional hubs where asylum seekers had to pass through in order to be redistributed locally[15]; and c) SPRAR centres where asylum seekers should have stayed while waiting for the final decision on their asylum application. Furthermore, the main features of the SPRAR (small numbers of asylum seekers scattered across the municipalities, dispersed accommodation in small facilities or apartments and the asylum seekers' autonomy as a key goal of reception), advocated for by ANCI, ARCI and Caritas, were ratified as general guiding principles for the whole "secondary reception".

Based on the Agreement, also **unaccompanied minors** (both asylum seekers and not), after a maximum stay of 60 days in specialised governmental reception centres, had to be moved to SPRAR specialised facilities[16]. In order to implement this plan, in 2015 the National Fund for the Reception of Unaccompanied Minors was moved from the Ministry of Social Policies to the Ministry of Interior, and since 2016 part of the national quota of AMIF has been employed to expand reception services for this target group.

Hence, the Agreement **set the SPRAR at the core of the reception system**, while CAS were considered as a residual solution. As a consequence, the funding devoted to SPRAR was increased and in 2014 the reception places available in the SPRAR network rose from 3,000 to 10,000 (see Table 2). However, the CAS expanded more substantially both in absolute and relative terms covering about the 80% of the entire reception system. The main reason is that the SPRAR, based as it is on the voluntary adhesion of the Municipalities, was not able to keep pace with the increase in migrant arrivals. At the same time, some interviewees highlighted that it was not just a matter of Municipalities' resistance to join the SPRAR. Some Municipalities preferred to set up CAS because their bureaucratic burden was much lower and flexibility much higher, compared to SPRAR (Interview 7).

Table 2: Number of SPRAR reception places compared to asylum applications (2011-2017)

Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
SPRAR reception places	3,979	3,979	10,318	20,752	21,613	26,012	35,721
Asylum applications	40,315	17,335	26,620	64,625	83,540	122,960	128,850

Sources: Eurostat, SPRAR.

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[15] In fact, regional hubs were set up in very few regions and they have never become structural components of the reception system.
[16] Before the Agreement, unaccompanied minors were under the responsibility of the Municipalities, which were in charge of providing a proper accommodation.

The main provisions of the inter-institutional Agreement of 10 July 2014 were ratified by **Legislative Decree 142/2015**, which transposed the **EU recast Reception Directive** replacing the previous Legislative Decree 140/2005. In fact, since the EU directive left large room for manoeuver to national actors, its transposition was mainly regarded as an opportunity to rationalise and gathered in a single law the decisions made until then.

As mentioned above, the impact of the adoption of the European Agenda on Migration and the Italian Roadmap in September 2015 was greater. It led to the introduction of hotspots as key components of the Italian reception system, and to the implementation of the so-called **"hotspot approach"** (see section 2.2). The unbalanced implementation of the European Agenda on Migration and the Relocation Decisions[17], has been regarded by the Italian government as a sort of betrayal on the part of the EU (Interviews 1, 2). On the one hand Italy met the EU's requests to set up hotspots and, thanks to the systematic fingerprinting of newcomers, secondary movements to other EU Member States have been drastically reduced. On the other hand, the relocation of a (limited) part of asylum seekers aimed at alleviating the pressure on countries of first entry like Italy has been poorly implemented by other Member States. The result has been an unfair sharing of reception responsibilities and a further increase in asylum seekers hosted in the Italian reception system.

In 2016 arrivals reached the peak of 181,436 migrants. Despite the high pressure, during this year great **efforts were made to harmonise the accommodation system and prioritise the SPRAR over the extraordinary reception system**. ANCI, in collaboration with the Municipalities or Prefectures, organised meetings throughout the country to explain to the mayors the functioning and advantages of the SPRAR. Furthermore, key actors agreed on specific incentives in favour of SPRAR and a simplification of its bureaucratic procedures, as follows. ANCI's logistic support provided to Municipalities for setting up SPRAR centres was reinforced (ANCI et al. 2017); the procedure to apply for funds to start new SPRAR projects, extend the duration of existing ones, or expand their size was simplified and the co-funding from the Ministry of Interior was raised from 80% to 95%[18]; and Law 225/2016 introduced the so-called "gratitude bonus", i.e., an yearly economic incentive to Municipalities amounting to 700 euros for each person accommodated in a SPRAR centre and 500 euros for each person hosted in CAS[19].

The issue of the **redistribution of asylum seekers over the country** made another step forward. Although the Regional Coordinating Groups on Asylum were in charge of promoting a balanced redistribution within each region, in fact this did not always happen. The hypothesis of overcoming this obstacle by shifting from a regionally-based to a municipally-based redistribution system posed however a dilemma – which was lengthily discussed both within the National Coordinating Group and in informal consultations among key actors – between a mandatory system that obliged Municipalities to take in a specific quota of asylum seekers and a voluntary system like SPRAR. Whereas UNHCR advocated for asylum seekers' mandatory relocation, promoting a Germany-like model, the idea of making reception compulsory for Municipalities faced the opposition of local authorities and was considered as too politically risky by the central government. The compromise was the so-called **"Bari**

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[17]   Council Decision (EU) 2015/1523 of 14 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and of Greece; Council Decision (EU) 2015/1601 of 22 September 2015 establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece.
[18]   Decree of the Ministry of Interior, 10 August 2016.
[19]   The gratitude bonus can be spent for any kind of measures, not only in the field of migration and asylum, without particular constraints.

Agreement" which was signed by ANCI and the Ministry of Interior at the ANCI National Conference held in Bari in December 2016, and established a specific quota of refugees per municipality: a ratio of 2.5 hosted asylum seekers per 1,000 residents with adjustments for small municipalities under 2,000 residents (fixed quota of 6 reception places) and for the capital cities of metropolitan areas (2 places per 1,000 residents). Following the Bari Agreement, the annual National Operational Plan for the redistribution of asylum seekers has not been adopted anymore (despite the UNHCR pressures) because the government considered the Agreement as sufficient to provide the necessary criteria for redistribution (Interview 6).

Given that based on the Bari Agreement asylum seekers' redistribution was not mandatory, the Ministry of Interior and ANCI agreed upon an additional incentive, the so-called **"safeguard clause"** (*clausola di salvaguardia*)[20]: the Municipalities whose SPRAR reception places met the above ratio would be exempted from the setting up of any new CAS by the Prefectures and, if they already hosted one (or more), this/these would be downsized or converted into SPRAR. After this decision, the Ministry of Interior asked local Prefectures to improve the dialogue with local authorities to agree upon the number of asylum seekers to be hosted in each municipality and modes of reception. This has in fact become a rather usual practice in a large part of the country (ANCI et al. 2017).

All national-level interviewees agreed on the positive effects of the safeguard clause. Indeed, in 2016 SPRAR places grew by 20% and reached 26,000. However, once again this growth was not enough to keep pace with new arrivals. As a consequence, CAS grew even more and doubled in 2016. Moreover, the overall distribution of asylum seekers remained rather unbalanced, also due to the fact that the location and size of CAS depended on "market dynamics", i.e., the Prefectures set up CAS where they found facilities that could be rented for this purpose (Ministero dell'Interno 2017).

Finally, in 2016 some steps forward were taken **to centralise information collection** on the whole reception system and **to harmonise procedures after disembarkation**. As for the first point, the Department of Civil Liberties together with the Department of Public Security started a project to develop an integrated information system on reception (SGA) able to track the path of individual asylum seekers across different types of reception facilities in order to support reception planning both at national and local level[21]. As for the second point, a specific Working Group made up of the Department of Public Security, European Commission, Frontex, EASO, UNHCR and IOM under the coordination of the Department of Civil Liberties delivered a handbook on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)[22]. The same actors together with Save the Children elaborated also SOPs for unaccompanied minors.

The emerging concerns for political consensus and the re-centralisation of the decision-making process (from 2017 onwards)

According to interviewees, in 2017 the centre-left government led by Paolo Gentiloni increased its attempts to contrast its loss of consensus in view of national elections to be held in March 2018. The need to reassure a public opinion increasingly anxious over new migrant arrivals led to **reduce the dialogue and increase the divergences between the central government and other key actors**. In

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[20]   *Circolare* of the Ministry of Interior, 1 October 2016; Directive of the Minister of Interior Angelino Alfano, 11 October 2016.
[21]   However, when the SGA became fully operative in December 2017, only a part of asylum seekers hosted in the reception system were included in the database (60,407) (Ministero dell'Interno 2018).
[22]   *Circolare* of the Head of the Police and the Head of the Department of Civil Liberties, 5 December 2016.

particular, Marco Minniti, who replaced Angelino Alfano as Minister of Interior in December 2016, pursued the following **priorities with a greater personalisation** compared to his predecessors: to increase repatriations; to cut down inflows through agreements with countries of origin and transit; and to reinforce the fight against corruption within the Italian reception system.

The emphasis on returns translated into the reform of CIE (*Centri di Identificazione ed Espulsione* – Identification and Expulsion Centres), relabelled as **CPR (*Centri di Permanenza per il Rimpatrio* – Immigration Detention Centres for Return)**, meant to become smaller but more numerous and better distributed across the country[23]. The Ministry of Interior started a dialogue with the Regions to identify potential locations. However, the implementation of this reform was slow with the setting up of two new CPR in 2017 (but one was closed due to a fire), besides the already existing four former CIE, for a total of 521 detention places (Ministero dell'Interno 2018).

The government's **agreements with transit countries, and especially with Libya** – although largely criticized by civil society and international organisations for impeding the arrival of potential asylum seekers to the Italian border – achieved their objectives. Whereas in the first semester of 2017 arrivals kept growing (83,754, +19% compared to 2016), in the second semester they started to decrease (35,615, -68% compared to 2016). Still, the effects on the reception system were not immediate: at the end of 2017, people in the whole reception system were 183,681 – the low turnover being due to the long time needed for a decision on asylum applications. Therefore, the number of governmental centres grew by 20.6% in 2017 while the number of people hosted there increased by 4.55%. The different growth rate was due to the smaller size of the centres compared to the past, consistently with the goal of privileging dispersed accommodation and avoid large concentrations (Ministero dell'Interno 2018).

As concerns **the fight against corruption**, although all national-level interviews recognised the need to establish stricter procedures for the management of governmental centres, many of them highlighted that the emphasis on corruption has fed the ill-perceived identification between asylum seekers reception and crime. According to some CSOs, this emphasis on corruption – together with the government's request to sign the "Code of conduct for NGOs undertaking activities in migrants' search and rescue operations at sea" in July 2017 – has contributed to a de-legitimation of civil society organisations (Interview 7).

In 2017 **controls over governmental centres** were reinforced. The most relevant change was that starting from the end of 2017 the organisations managing CAS are requested to submit to the Prefectures balance checks together with supporting documents, while before they used to submit invoices only[24]. This measure has been asked for a long time by key stakeholders such as Caritas and ARCI, with the purpose of making all organisations more accountable, and was welcomed by all key actors (Interviews 3, 7). However, this has produced negative side-effects: CSOs managing CAS started to receive the payments from the Prefectures with months of delay, being the Prefectures understaffed to properly manage this additional financial checking task (Interviews 7, 16).

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[23]   Legislative Decree 13/2017 converted in Law 46/2017.
[24]   Inter-Ministerial Decree of the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Economy, 18 October 2017.

Following the reform of the national legislation on public bids[25], **a new bid scheme (*capitolato di gara d'appalto*) for governmental centres** (CPR, First reception centres and CAS) was adopted in March 2017[26], facing the criticism of a large part of the non-profit sector. Based on this bid scheme, CAS should provide reception and integration services similar to those provided in SPRAR centres, with the exception of legal support to prepare the interview with the Territorial Commissions for the Recognition of International Protection, vocational training and support for job seeking and housing seeking. CSOs criticised the lack of these services and some requirements that could privilege large centres over smaller ones[27]. In addition, the 2017 bid scheme did not answer the requests, coming especially from ARCI and Caritas, to set up a register of the organisations meeting specific quality and professional criteria, from which to pick up candidates for managing governmental centres, and to adopt a regulation on the professional profile of social workers involved in reception (Interviews 3, 7). Despite these limits, the 2017 bid scheme contributed to harmonise service provision in CAS and fostered the convergence between the latter and SPRAR centres.

Harmonisation has improved also in the reception of unaccompanied minors. A long dialogue between different Ministries, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNHCR and IOM led to the adoption in April 2017 of the **Law 47/2017 on unaccompanied minors**, meant to harmonise and reinforce the protection of this particular category. This is considered as a rather advanced piece of legislation, which follows several recommendations stemming, inter alia, from the European Commission. In this regard, interviewees agreed that consensus among different actors has always been particularly smooth on minors compared to other issues related to migration and asylum.

Indeed, with the exception of unaccompanied minors, the **involvement of different actors in the decision-making process has decreased**. For instance, between December 2016 and May 2018 the National Coordinating Group on Asylum gathered only a couple of times, only for information purposes and with no involvement in decision-making. According to governmental officers, this was due to the approaching political elections; in that period the search for political consensus prevailed over more technical concerns. According to other national-level interviewees, this was instead the result of Minister Minniti's more centralised approach to asylum in general, and reception specifically.

The **centralisation of the decision-making process on reception** and the **personalisation of decisions** were further enhanced by the newly appointed Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini, leader of the (former Northern) League, after the new government came to power at the end of May 2018 (thanks to a coalition agreement between the Five Stars Movement and the League). The room for consultation and involvement of different actors in the decision-making on asylum and reception has completely closed down. Since the new government is in power, the National Coordinating Group on Asylum has gathered only once to ratify a new bid scheme for governmental reception centres adopted in December 2018 (see below in this section). Besides that, none of the main actors involved in

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[25]   Legislative Decree 50/2016.
[26]   Ministerial Decree, 7 March 2017.
[27]   E.g., see the letter addressed to the Minister of Interior and signed by Gruppo Abele, ASGI, CNCA, Coordinamento EuropAsilo, Fondazione Migrantes, Servizio Tratta USMI (Unione Superiore Maggiori d'Italia), Emmaus Italia, Coordinamento Non Solo Asilo, On the Road, Liberazione e speranza, TAMPEP ONLUS, Comunità di San Benedetto al Porto e delle Discepole del Vangelo (15 February 2018).

decision-making on asylum, including institutional ones, have been consulted by the new Minister of Interior during the first months of his government, when our fieldwork was conducted.

Despite the lack of consultation with key actors, the newly elected government has **deeply reformed the reception system**. The so-called **Decree on Security and Migration** (Legislative Decree 113/2018 adopted on 5 October 2018 and converted into Law 132/2018) narrows the conditions to obtain a residence permit based on humanitarian grounds (so-called "humanitarian protection"[28]) and excludes its holders from reception services. It neatly distinguishes reception services for asylum seekers and for beneficiaries of international protection: the first ones should be accommodated in CAS and the second ones in SPRAR centres. As a consequence, SPRAR (Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees) has changed its name into **SIPROIMI** (*Sistema di protezione per titolari di protezione internazionale e per minori stranieri non accompagnati* - Protection System for beneficiaries of international protection and unaccompanied minors) since asylum seekers have been excluded.

Actually, the prioritisation of beneficiaries of international protection over asylum seekers in accessing SPRAR centres was already decided by the Ministry of Interior in 2016[29]. The main differences between that decision and the current reform is **the abandonment of the *reductio ad unum* principle**, i.e., the goal to reduce the two-pronged reception system to a single system, namely the SPRAR. Moreover, after years of expansion, this reform may lead to a reduction of the SPRAR's size, since beneficiaries of international protection represent only a small share of reception beneficiaries in Italy. In addition, the **public bid scheme for governmental centres**, including CAS, was revised in December 2018[30]: it suppresses integration services and drastically reduces the per capita daily expenditure limit from 35 euros to 19-26 euros. The outcome will be that asylum seekers will stay in governmental centres with no integration services, beneficiaries of humanitarian protection will lose the entitlement to reception services, and only beneficiaries of international protection will be able to enter SPRAR and enjoy integration services.

This reform has been largely criticised by CSOs and ANCI for several reasons. First, whereas the previous governments have tried to pursue asylum seekers' integration since their arrival on the national territory (although with partially disappointing results), the recent reform rejects this objective by granting integration services only to beneficiaries of international protection. Second, the two-pronged system made up of SPRAR and CAS has been institutionalised. Critics warn also about the risk that the drastic reduction of per capita daily expenditure for CAS may *de facto* privilege large reception centres (more capable of economies of scale). Finally, stricter guidelines for granting humanitarian protection are expected to produce a large basin of irregular homeless migrants[31]. In addition, the UNHCR raised concerns also on detention, identification and return procedures, and over the quality of reception in the governmental centres where asylum seekers have to stay until a decision on their application is taken.

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[28]   This is an additional national form of protection foreseen by Italian law (Legislative Decree 286/1998, art. 5.6). It is alternative and residual to the refugee status and subsidiary protection, provided for by EU law.
[29]   *Circolare* of the Ministry of Interior, 5 May 2016.
[30]   Decree of the Ministry of Interior, 21 November 2018.
[31]   The Territorial Commissions' decisions on asylum applications in 2017 were the following: 8% were granted refugee status, 9% subsidiary protection, 25% humanitarian protection, and 50% were rejected.

2.2 Main revisions of the current reception system

In this section we describe how the reception system works today, following the revisions brought about by Legislative Decree 142/2015 (which transposed the 2013 Reception Directive) and the recent changes introduced by Legislative Decree 113/2018.

The provision of first assistance to migrants takes place, first of all, at **ports of disembarkation** and is regulated by the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Even though disembarkation mainly takes place where hotspots [32] are located (Lampedusa, Trapani, Pozzallo, Taranto, Messina), those procedures have to be adopted also where hotspots are absent. At ports of disembarkation migrants go through a medical screening and are pre-identified. After they have been informed about legislation concerning immigration and asylum, and the possibility to apply for international protection, they are fingerprinted. They receive information on the asylum procedure, the relocation programme and assisted voluntary return. The so-called **"hotspot approach"** employed at disembarkation ports may be described as a "method of teamwork" based on tight cooperation between Italian police forces responsible for migrants' identification and fingerprinting together with EU agencies – Frontex (which offers also a specific support for returns), EASO (working also on asylum seekers' relocation), EUROPOL (supporting activities against smuggling, trafficking, organised crime and terrorism) – and international organisations – IOM and UNHCR (providing legal support and information, and contributing to the identification of vulnerable people and minors).

Migrants who have to be returned to their countries of origin are immediately transferred to CPR, while migrants who want to lodge an asylum application are transferred to governmental **First Reception Centres (CDA and CARA)** where they stay until a decision on their application is taken [33]. In case of unavailability of places in First Reception Centres, asylum seekers should be hosted in **CAS**. According to the public bid scheme for governmental centres adopted in December 2018 (see section 2.1.2), First Reception Centres and CAS have to provide intercultural mediation, legal information, health assistance, socio-psychological assistance, and pocket money (besides board and lodging), while integration services are not granted. In CARA also language learning is provided. That said, in reality CDA, CARA and CAS are extremely heterogeneous both in terms of size and quality of services provided. People who are recognised international protection or "special permits" [34] should be transferred to **SPRAR** facilities, now relabelled **SIPROIMI**. People can stay in SPRAR/SIPROIMI centres for six months, which may be extended for further six months under certain circumstances to be assessed on a case by case basis [35]. SPRAR/SIPROIMI is generally articulated in small facilities or apartments in order to foster beneficiaries' self-reliance and integration in the local communities. The services provided there are: language learning, intercultural mediation, socio-psychological assistance, legal support, support for access to public services including healthcare, vocational training and

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[32]   Hotspots are regulated by a law passed two decades before the adoption of the Italian Roadmap, i.e., the so-called *Legge Puglia* (Law 563/1995, see section 1.1), recalled in Legislative Decree 142/2015, art. 9. Legislative Decree 13/2017 (converted in Law 46/2017) further regulates the procedures at hotspots and defines them as "crisis points" (*punti di crisi*). At the beginning of 2017, places available in hotspots were 1,850 (Ministero dell'Interno 2018).

[33]   *Circolare* of the Ministry of Interior, 18 December 2018.

[34]   "Special permits" include residence permits granted for medical treatment, environmental disasters in the country of origin, acts of civic value, social protection, victims of domestic violence and victims of labour exploitation.

[35]   Ministerial Decree 30 July 2013.

support for job seeking and housing seeking. However, the Decree on Security and Migration is still far from being fully implemented: asylum seekers, holders of a residence permit based on humanitarian grounds, and beneficiaries of international protection are still mixed in both CAS and SPRAR centres.

According to Legislative Decree 142/2015, specific reception services are to be delivered to vulnerable people and unaccompanied minors. Specific support has to be granted to **vulnerable people** both in governmental and SPRAR centres in collaboration with local Healthcare Units[36]. All **unaccompanied minors**, both asylum seekers and not, should go through a single specialised reception path articulated in two levels – i.e., governmental reception centres for minors (maximum stay of 60 days) and SPRAR centres for minors. In case of unavailability of places, Municipalities are responsible for the reception of minors. At the end of 2018 the large majority of minors fell under the latter case, as SPRAR centres for minors were insufficient. When neither SPRAR nor the Municipalities can provide the reception needed, minors can be temporarily hosted in facilities set up by the local Prefectures and should be transferred as soon as possible to SPRAR or municipal centres (Legislative Decree 113/2016). The costs for unaccompanied minors' reception are covered by the central government through the National Fund for the Reception of Unaccompanied Minors (see section 2.1.2) (ANCI et al. 2017).

General reception is funded through the National Fund for the Asylum Policies and Services (*Fondo nazionale per le politiche e i servizi dell'asilo*) set up by Law 189/2002, where national and EU financial resources devoted to reception are combined[37]. In 2017, the **overall expense** for the reception system was 2.5 billion euros (Ministero dell'Interno 2018). The Minister of Interior Matteo Salvini declared that, as a consequence of the recent reform, savings would be around 400 million euros in 2019, 500 million in 2020 and 650 million in 2021.

As for **integration**, in order to foster the asylum seekers' inclusion in the **labour market**, the time span during which asylum seekers are prevented from working has been reduced from six months to 60 days from the formal registration of the asylum application (Legislative Decree 142/2015). In fact, almost none finds a job in such a short time span given that learning the language and getting familiar with the Italian labour market takes more than a couple of months. Nevertheless, the possibility to register at Public Recruitment Centres allows asylum seekers to access employability services such as training on the functioning of the Italian labour market, CV drafting, etc..

That said, integration services provided in reception facilities have always been conceived as a sort of **parallel welfare for asylum seekers and refugees,** since they are not integrated within the general welfare and integration policies. The related economic resources are given to the organisations managing reception facilities, which may provide integration services directly or in cooperation with local public entities. Thus, synergies with general policies depend on the willingness and capacity of both the organisations managing reception centres and the public entities responsible for the delivery of welfare services to cooperate. The latter are mainly the Regions for vocational training and employment, and the Centres for Adult Education (CPIA – *Centri Provinciali per l'Istruzione degli Adulti*) depending on the Provinces for language learning. Furthermore, the Decree on Security and Migration **prevents asylum seekers from enrolling in municipal registers** and obtaining the "residence card" (or

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[36]   Vulnerable people are: minors, unaccompanied minors, disabled and elderly people, pregnant women, single parents, trafficked people, people with severe illness including mental illness, victims of torture, rape or severe violence, both physical or psychological, victims of genital mutilations.
[37]   The share of expenses covered by EU funds has been rather small: it was 3.6% in 2015 and 2.7% in 2016 (Corte di Conti 2018).

identity card) issued by Municipalities. Although on paper this should not impede the access to welfare services, in practice it makes it extremely troublesome.

Finally, in September 2017 the Italian government approved the **National Integration Plan for beneficiaries of international protection**, as foreseen by Legislative Decree 18/2014, which transposed the EU recast Qualification Directive (Directive 2011/95/EU). The Plan, to be funded by EU and national financial resources, set the priorities for 2017-2018: inter-religious dialogue, language learning, access to education and recognition of qualifications, access to healthcare services, employment and housing inclusion. However, the implementation process of the Plan has not been clearly defined and has been so far limited to pilot actions carried out in three regions (Piedmont, Emilia Romagna and Calabria) with the collaboration of UNHCR, which has co-drafted the Plan. The lack of integration measures specifically addressing beneficiaries of international protection, together with the weak Italian welfare provisions, increase the risk of social marginalisation.

2.3 The formal governance structure today

The governance structure is different for SPRAR and governmental facilities. **SPRAR** is under the authority of the Ministry of Interior but its coordination involves other actors at the supra-national and local level, i.e., UNHCR and ANCI. The latter is responsible for managing the Central Service for Information, Promotion, Consultancy, Monitoring and Technical Support (see section 1.2). SPRAR facilities are set up by Municipalities on a voluntary basis and funded up to 95% by the Ministry of Interior. The management of these reception centres is generally delegated to CSOs selected through public bids issued by the Municipalities.

The **governmental facilities** (i.e., hotspots, first reception centres, CAS and CPR) are under the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Interior. The management of governmental facilities can be assigned to public entities, non-profit or for-profit organisations through public bids. In the case of CAS, the bids are issued by the Prefectures, which are also responsible for overseeing those centres. For governmental facilities the involvement of supra-national and local actors should occur through the National and Regional Coordinating Groups on Asylum (Legislative Decree 142/2015, art. 16).

The composition and functions of the **National Coordinating Group on Asylum** are described above in section 2.1.2. Headed by the Ministry of the Interior (Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration), it includes representatives of national, regional and local authorities, UNHCR and CSOs. According to interviewees, the CSOs representatives at the National Group, Caritas and ARCI, have contributed not only to enhance the horizontal dimension of the governance of reception but also to reinforce its vertical dimension. Since they operate in several localities across the country, they have been able to bring to the attention of the National Group "what works and what does not work" in the implementation of reception, "highlighting the discrepancy between CAS and SPRAR in terms of quality of services, size of centres, degree of involvement of Municipalities" (Interview 4). In fact, the National Coordinating Group has been the only venue where the SPRAR and CAS systems have been dealt with together. Because of that, it has played a crucial role in reducing the differences between the two systems and in promoting the SPRAR. By law, the main task of the National Group is the identification of the measures needed to improve the reception system; however, it has a mere consultative role rather than actual decision power.

As explained above in section 2.1.2, the **Regional Coordinating Groups on Asylum** are headed by the Prefects of each Region's capital city and gathers all the Prefectures of the region, representatives of the Region and of ANCI's regional branch. CSOs are not involved in Regional Groups, despite the crucial

role they play in the reception system. However, informal consultations with CSOs often occur, although the situation varies substantially across the country. On paper, Regional Groups should play a crucial role in redistributing asylum seekers within each region and in deciding the location of governmental centres. Conversely, the SPRAR has represented a marginal issue within Regional Groups.

3. Concrete functioning of the governance of the reception system today

3.1 National governance

As highlighted in the previous sections, the actual functioning of both the National and Regional Coordinating Groups largely depends on the key actors' willingness, and therefore it has varied over time and across the country. The **National Coordinating Group**, as well as informal consultations between its members, have lost relevance since 2017 and have almost stopped under the new government that came into power in May 2018 (see section 2.1.2). As a consequence, the multi-level governance of the system has significantly declined; moreover, since 2017 SPRAR and CAS have been managed rather separately because of the lack of a venue to discuss the reception system as a whole.

The **Regional Coordinating Groups** have been formally established in each region. However, their actual functioning is rather heterogeneous (Commissione Parlamentare 2017): it has largely depended on the willingness to cooperate of the Prefectures and the Regions and has thus been significantly affected by both political positions and inter-institutional cooperation's path dependency. As a consequence, some Regional Groups have been gathered only once and the distribution of asylum seekers within each region (one of the main tasks of the Regional Groups) has not always been balanced (see section 3.2.2). To make up for this situation, at the end of 2016 ANCI and the Ministry of Interior signed the Bari Agreement, fixing the municipally-based ratio of asylum seekers and refugees on resident population (see section 2.1.2). That Agreement is generally considered as an attempt to bypass the Regional Coordinating Groups, which did not work properly everywhere. In fact, as a consequence of this Agreement and of decreased inflows, the role of the Regional Groups has significantly declined.

To conclude, on paper the openness and the multi-level governance of reception policies appears rather high in Italy. Yet, being dependent on the contingent willingness of the actors involved to cooperate, it can actually be much more limited. National government's consultations with non-public actors and lower levels of government are not biding; therefore, the decision power has always been highly centralised in the hands of the **Ministry of Interior**, which decides to what extent the positions of other key actors should be considered. The main evidence of this is the lack of consultations with regional and municipal authorities, international organisations and CSOs before adopting the 2018 reform, which has completely reshaped the reception system (see section 2.1.2).

Paradoxically, the implementation of the Ministry of Interior's decisions has faced the greatest obstacles in the actual functioning of the **Prefectures**. On the one hand, the Prefectures hold an high level of discretionary power, so that they do not always fully implement the decisions of the central government. This happened, for instance, with the Ministry's request to follow the SPRAR principles in setting up CAS facilities (see section 2.1.2), or with the provision to coordinate Prefectures' action with the Region and ANCI's regional branch through the Regional Coordinating Groups. On the other hand, while coordinating and monitoring reception facilities have been rather new activities for the Prefectures, their staff has not been expanded and trained to properly manage these new tasks. As a consequence, several central government's decisions have remained on paper due to the Prefectures'

lack of human resources to implement them. Nevertheless, since 2011 the central government has progressively increased the Prefectures' tasks and workload (see section 2.1.2).

3.2 Governance at local level: two case studies

3.2.1 Turin and the Piedmont Region

3.2.1.1 Evolution of the local reception system in the last decade: what changed and why?

The Piedmont region and the municipality of Turin in particular have experienced significant changes in their reception system over the last decade. According to all Piedmont interviewees, the changes in the organisation of the system were triggered for the most part by the rapid increase in numbers of refugees and asylum seekers hosted, and significantly less by changes in legislation, modes of funding and political views of the local governments.

Turin and some other small municipalities in the Piedmont region have been historically involved in the reception of refugees and asylum seekers. Since the 1990s, when people fleeing from the Yugoslav and Kosovo wars landed in Italy, Turin, together with other municipalities in the province, was at the forefront of the Italian cities making an effort to host and integrate people fleeing persecution. At that time, CSOs and NGOs were the first to mobilise and they rapidly managed to involve local public authorities in the management of asylum seekers reception. The experimentation of this model of cooperation between public actors and CSOs at the local level became a cornerstone for asylum seekers reception in Italy, as it gave birth to the *Programma Nazionale Asilo* (PNA), later renamed and reformed as SPRAR (see section 1.2).

Focusing on the last decade, changes were driven particularly by the sudden increase in numbers of asylum seekers, in line with the national trend. The first watershed was marked by the above-mentioned North Africa Emergency (see section 2.1.2) that in Piedmont was managed in a coordinated manner by regional authorities, the regional Civil Protection branch and the Prefectures. According to all local interviewees, even if ENA was generally managed in Piedmont with a short-sighted emergency approach, it compelled both public and private local actors to acquire skills and professional knowledge in asylum seekers reception, which proved essential for the management of the following (more significant) wave of arrivals. At that time, the province of Turin was the most affected by the arrival of asylum seekers in Piedmont, hosting slightly less than 1,000 people, while other provinces started to be involved in asylum and reception matters only from 2015. According to several local interviewees, this implied that Turin was more prepared to manage reception in the period 2014-2017 compared to other provinces, such as Cuneo, which have historically attracted mainly economic migrants and therefore experienced more problems in the reception of asylum seekers (Interviews 8, 9, 10, 12, 13).

At the end of the ENA period, Turin experienced a massive phenomenon of occupation of empty buildings, including the ones of the former Olympic village (i.e., MOI). In the meantime, in 2013, the Central Service of SPRAR asked the Municipality of Turin to increase the number of people hosted through SPRAR projects. According to interviewed partners of the Municipality of Turin, the Municipality gladly agreed and the **SPRAR places in Turin rose significantly**: approximately **from 50** in 2011 **to 400** for the 2014-2016 programme. This increase in SPRAR numbers was the consequence of the Municipality's need to ensure the continuity of funding for programmes in support of the integration of refugees formerly hosted with ENA. At the same time, the Prefecture of Turin decided that the SPRAR guidelines had to be adopted also for the new "temporary" governmental centres (CAS), in line with the national legislation which, until October 2018, aimed to unify first and second

reception standards (see section 2.1.2). According to a representative of the Prefecture, this decision was taken to ensure that the problems which emerged because of the sudden opening of poorly governed emergency reception centres after 2011 would not be repeated (Interview 10).

The second watershed was thus triggered by the 2014-2017 record arrivals of asylum seekers which impacted significantly not only on Turin, but also on the other provinces (and municipalities) of Piedmont. If the physical presence of asylum seekers started to become visible with ENA, especially in Turin, the new opening of asylum seekers reception facilities, both CAS and SPRAR, in often small and highly dispersed municipalities across the region made the phenomenon impossible to ignore for the local population (Openpolis and ActionAid, 2018). As a consequence, in the province of Turin, the Prefecture, together with the Piedmont Region and in coordination with the Municipalities of the province and the numerous non-profit organisations in charge of managing reception facilities created several networks and strong personal bonds in order to coordinate reception and to ensure that best practices were shared, also in terms of communication with local communities and hosted asylum seekers. Notwithstanding this general approach, according to representatives of CSOs and local public institutions alike, the paramount necessity of the Prefectures to find facilities that were immediately available, especially in the period 2015-2017, led also in Piedmont and in the Turin province to the opening of CAS either partially or completely unfit for the purpose, or managed by organisations with no prior experience in the social realm. However, since 2014 the Prefecture of Turin, after repeated controls, has closed only one CAS due to serious shortcomings.

At the regional level, the 2014-2017 increase in numbers of asylum seekers led to other significant changes. While at first several CAS were opened without the consent (or even the awareness) of Municipalities, mayors became increasingly weary of the phenomenon and started to either oppose strenuously or find alternatives to the proliferation of CAS facilities on their territories. The search for alternatives was often supported by the Prefectures. Thus, Prefectures advised Municipalities to either open SPRAR in place of CAS, also thanks to the introduction in 2016 of the "safeguard clause" (see section 2.1.2), or to sign innovative protocols among Prefectures (specifically the Prefecture of Turin) and groups of Municipalities to ensure control over the reception of asylum seekers in their territories[38]. As a consequence, the SPRAR has increased considerably and the practice of signing Protocols has become widespread in Piedmont and more specifically in the Turin province (InMigrazione, 2018).

It is worth mentioning that while **funding** increased according to the increase in numbers of asylum seekers, the main source of funding remained the Ministry of Interior together with some ad hoc funding provided by EU programmes (AMIF). In Turin, since 2008, SPRAR was in place together with a panoply of other projects: the first programme (2008-2018) for the reception of asylum seekers, migrants and vulnerable people more in general was called ISA (*Inserimento Socio-Abitativo*); ISA was complemented by RARU (*Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati Umanitari*) which was more specifically targeting

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[38]   Here is a list of Protocols signed between the Prefecture of Turin and groups of Municipalities to directly manage governmental centres (CAS): Protocol signed with the Avigliana Municipality in partnership with 21 neighbouring municipalities (Val di Susa); Protocol signed with Con.I.S.A. Valle di Susa involving 17 municipalities including Bardonecchia, Claviere and Sestriere (Alta Val di Susa); Protocol signed with Consorzio in Rete (51 municipalities); other Protocols were signed also in Val Pellice, with Consorzio del Chierese, and with CISSAC Caluso Strambino. In total, currently 134 Municipalities participate in protocols for the management of asylum seekers reception in the province of Turin (data provided by a representative of the Prefecture of Turin).

asylum seekers and refugees and was promoted by the Municipality of Turin with the cooperation of civil society organisations[39]. In addition, for the period 2009-2014, the Ministry of Interior provided specific funding (*Fondo Maroni*) for the metropolitan areas to face social and housing challenges. Since 2011, the SPRAR was also complemented by the ENA funds, then reallocated to the CAS system. Conversely, in Piedmont the reception of the "gratitude bonus" since 2016 (see section 2.1.2) did not appear to be an incentive for Municipalities to shift their approach towards an increase in asylum seekers reception.

Finally, according to all local interviewees, the **political position** of Municipalities in Piedmont affected their decision to host asylum seekers and refugees, thus adhering to the SPRAR, or not. Municipalities in the province of Novara, for example, decided not to adhere to the SPRAR even though they had the chance in 2016 to avail themselves of the "safeguard clause"[40]. Interestingly, however, in the city of Turin, where the municipal majority changed in Spring 2016, with the electoral victory of the Five Star Movement after more than a decade of centre-left governments, the governance of reception did not change in any significant way. According to some local interviewees, this is partly due to the longstanding presence, both in the Prefecture and in the Municipality, of people with great experience and with a shared vision, and partly to the historic presence of networks of public and non-profit actors that have always experimented innovative and effective ways to address other social challenges – e.g., mental disorder (Interviews 8, 14, 15).

In sum, in the last decade, in order to overcome the challenges posed by the significant arrival of people seeking international protection, first in 2011 and then in 2015, the province of Turin in particular, and Piedmont in general (even if with some notable exceptions), experienced a strong mobilisation, professionalisation and coordination of all local actors who had a stake in asylum seekers reception, including both public and non-profit actors. By October 2018, the Municipality of Turin counted 465 places ensured by SPRAR projects, with 16 extra places allocated for vulnerable asylum seekers, totalling 481 SPRAR places; in the whole province of Turin, instead, asylum seekers and refugees hosted in the SPRAR system are 1.024 while 3.970 are hosted in CAS. Overall, Piedmont hosts 1.987 refugees and asylum seekers in the SPRAR and 10.001 in CAS (30 October 2018)[41].

3.2.1.2 From decision making to implementation: how has the local level intervened?

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

Piedmont regional hubs are the first entry points in the regional reception system for asylum seekers coming either from hotspots or from reception facilities located in other regions. The Piedmont region

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[39]   Additional information available at: http://www.comune.torino.it/ucstampa/2008/article_304.shtml.
[40]   There are currently 893 asylum seekers hosted in CAS in the Novara province and none in the SPRAR.
[41]   Source: Regional Observatory on Immigration and Asylum – *Osservatorio regionale sull'immigrazione e sul diritto d'asilo*. Available at:
http://www.piemonteimmigrazione.it/images/dati/richidenti_asilo_rifugiati_CAS_SPRAR.xlsx. (Accessed: 3 January 2019).

has two of the very few working regional hubs in Italy – i.e., *Centro Fenoglio*, Settimo Torinese (TO)[42] and Castello d'Annone (AT) both run by the Red Cross – which ensure that the distribution of asylum seekers across the region proceeds in an orderly fashion. The transfer of asylum seekers from the hubs, where they are usually hosted for a couple of days, is coordinated by the Region and the Prefectures in cooperation with the Red Cross. Civil society organisations managing reception centres are alerted by the Prefecture and go to the regional hub to accompany the asylum seekers to their centres, either CAS or SPRAR. In the province of Turin, as foreseen by the national legislation[43], it is more common for asylum seekers to be hosted first in a CAS (after a short permanence in the hub) and to be moved to a SPRAR centre following the positive decision of the Territorial Commission on their international protection status. In Turin there are also reception projects and networks aiming to support those who have to stop relying on reception measures but still have not become autonomous coordinated and financed by the office specialised in migration and asylum issues of the Diocese of Turin (*Ufficio Pastorale Migranti*).

Prefectures are in charge of writing and managing the tenders for CAS and monitoring the activities of these centres. It must be noted that while the territorially competent Prefectures are the main reference for Municipalities, the Municipality of Turin became instead the reference for other municipalities in its urban area. Turin has become a model of efficiently managing the SPRAR and, more interestingly, also the CAS system, which has been managed since 2014 following the same guidelines of the SPRAR. Civil society organisations have been described by all local interviewees as crucial actors in the reception system, both in the CAS system and SPRAR[44]. Indeed, in Piedmont, CSOs have experimented innovative reception methods in coordination with local public authorities, thus inspiring through a bottom-up process the development of SPRAR. At the same time, CSOs became crucial sponsors and managers of SPRAR in Piedmont and supported Prefectures in finding and managing reception facilities in the CAS system. In addition, an NGO (i.e., Italian Red Cross) has a role in managing the regional hubs. Finally, the government of the Piedmont Region attends the Regional Coordinating Group on Asylum and manages the AMIF regional funding. These funds helped creating and maintaining new networks among CSOs and public institutions active in the reception and the socio-economic integration of asylum seekers and refugees (e.g., "Petrarca" project).

The coordination among these actors is quite patchy and *ad hoc*, with the exception of few coordinating groups, which during the last decade have facilitated exchanges among the local actors involved in the reception system, especially on operational matters, even though these have generally not been acknowledged as decision-making *loci*. The redistribution of asylum seekers across the territory of Piedmont is discussed and arranged at the **Regional Coordinating Group on Asylum**, which is summoned by the Prefecture of Turin and gathers together representatives from the Piedmont Region, all the Prefectures of Piedmont and representatives from ANCI's local branch. According to an ANCI Piedmont representative, this coordinating group has been particularly useful in Piedmont to raise awareness among Prefectures on the reception challenges and to discuss the redistribution of asylum seekers among provinces (Interview 11). However, Prefectures in Piedmont did not take a

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[42] *Centro Fenoglio* started to be used as a hub already during the ENA period even though it became officially a regional hub only in 2014. In 2015-2016 this regional hub hosted up to 800 asylum seekers, who used to remain there from one day to two weeks maximum when arrivals were peaking.

[43] See *Circolare* of the Ministry of Interior 5 May 2016, mentioned in section 2.1.2 above.

[44] There are more than one hundred civil society organisations which manage CAS in the province of Turin only. Among the most active ones, there are: Liberitutti, Acmos, CrescereInsieme, Babel, Diaconia Valdese, Orso, Mary Poppins, Casa della Carità.

common approach over the years on reception issues, notwithstanding the opportunity of coordination offered by the Regional Coordinating Group on Asylum.

Another **Roundtable on Asylum**, summoned at the city level once a month since the years 2000s and then formalised in 2011 by the Municipality of Turin, had more success in terms of coordinating the work of CSOs managing SPRAR centres in the Province of Turin, but also the work of other NGOs and international organisations involved in the delivery of integration services to asylum seekers and refugees. According to a representative of the Municipality of Turin, this remained over time a very operative venue. Nonetheless, the Turin Roundtable on Asylum was also a venue where consensus was built among public institutions and CSOs, and proposals on the organisation of the delivery of reception services proposed by both sides were discussed (Interview 13). This implied the possibility for the people working in the local reception system in Turin to have a channel through which to communicate to the higher levels of governance their main problems and claims. Moreover, the Prefecture of Turin has adopted an open-door policy towards all CSOs managing CAS in the Province and multiple meetings have been held, not only in Turin but also in the centres and with the local population living in the nearby areas. However, a coordination among organisations managing CAS never became a reality, except for *ad hoc* collaborations and personal ties.

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

3.2.2 Treviso and the Veneto Region

3.2.2.1 Evolution of the local reception system in the last decade: what changed and why?

The issue of asylum seekers reception emerged in Veneto in the 1990s, with the first significant refugee flows from former Yugoslavia (Serbians first and Kosovars later). In those years, Caritas was among the few actors to provide first assistance and reception. The first key moment in the evolution of the local reception system in Veneto – as in the whole country (see section 2.1.2) – was 2011. In Veneto, Caritas (together with some smaller locally-based cooperatives) was the main actor involved in the emergency management of reception under the ENA. However, according to the director of Caritas Treviso, in the years 2011-2013 the number of asylum seekers was manageable and had a limited impact on the local community (Interview 16). A second key moment coincided with the increase in maritime arrivals that started in 2014 and lasted until the first half of 2017; this challenged in an unprecedented way the Italian reception system at all levels. According to interviewees in Veneto, it is mainly (although not exclusively) under the variable pressure of this flow that the Italian reception system has developed.

In this period, two elements have characterised the evolution of the local reception system in Veneto: the **proliferation of CAS established in hotel facilities** and the **set-up of regional hubs and large CAS**

in abandoned military facilities[45]. According to local interviewees, these two reception measures took root in Veneto more than in other regions, and are both to be linked to the **political attitude of a majority of municipal administrations, who decided to back out of any reception responsibility** (Interviews 17, 18, 21). As a consequence, differently from other regions, Veneto proved to be **an infertile ground for the development of SPRAR projects** and of a reception model based on "dispersed accommodation". Indeed, in 2017 in Veneto the percentage of asylum seekers hosted in SPRAR was 4% (Interview 21) (see also Pettrachin 2018).

The adverse attitude of a majority of mayors, not only towards their own direct engagement in the governance of reception, but also towards the mere presence of asylum seekers on their territory (although hosted in the Prefectures' centres) was publicly demonstrated – and was presented to their electorate as a "political victory" against the central government. On several occasions the Prefectures have called meetings with the Municipalities with the purpose to promote the creation of SPRAR projects, but their efforts were in most cases useless[46]. As stressed by an interviewee, "Prefectures have desperately tried to obtain the Municipalities' help, and to force them to take up the institutional task of managing reception directly through the SPRAR" (Interview 17); but they had no instrument to impose such a decision on mayors.

The consequence of this widespread refusal was the concentration of migrants in the few municipalities where abandoned military bases were located. These were transformed by the Prefectures in large reception centres or regional hubs. Having a limited negotiating power, these small municipalities were forced to accept the presence of a disproportionate number of asylum seekers (compared to their population), who were hosted in inadequate facilities, thus generating an explosive situation. A case in point was the centre established in Conetta (VE), an hamlet counting 170 inhabitants in the village of Cona (less than 3,000 inhabitants), which became the second biggest hub in Italy, hosting up to 1,500-1,800 people in 2017. Secondly, lacking municipality-led alternatives, former hotels or hotels facing a decline in guests and economic difficulties, were transformed in CAS. In most cases the owners of these hotels considered asylum seekers reception merely as a business activity, and this affected the quality of services provided. An anonymous former institutional interviewee confirmed that the negative consequence of having few Municipalities implementing reception through SPRAR projects or accepting CAS on their territory was that Prefectures were forced to establish large reception centres and hubs, and to involve in the management of CAS also for-profit actors, even though they were aware that these solutions could not work (Interview 21) (see also Calesso and Chaibi 2017).

As concerns more in particular the province of Treviso, in a five-year period the local reception system has evolved from a situation of "serious emergency" (Interview 16) due to its limited reception capacity compared to the number of arrivals (2014-2015), to a gradual normalisation thanks to the opening of two hubs and several CAS (2016-2017), to a reversed situation where, due to a sharp decrease in arrivals, the reception system has now more places than necessary (2018). In the first period Caritas

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[45]   Regional hubs were formally first reception centres were asylum seekers had to stay for a short time before being redistributed across the region. However, in Veneto this dispersal mechanism has never worked properly and hubs ended up hosting permanently (i.e., until the asylum application was examined by the Territorial Commission) several hundred (and in some cases thousands) asylum seekers.
[46]   At the first meeting convened in March 2014 by the Prefecture of Treviso with the mayors of the province, all the mayors left the room in protest (Interview 16). In another case, the Prefecture of Venice and the then Minister of Interior Marco Minniti called a meeting with the Municipalities of the province, but only 12 out of 44 mayors participated in the gathering (Interview 18).

Treviso played a crucial role as one of the few actors with an expertise in reception, together with few local cooperatives (*Cooperativa Una Casa Per l'Uomo*). As explained by the director of Caritas Treviso, "while in 2015 only 15 Municipalities in the whole province were hosting asylum seekers on their territory, nowadays they are about 50; this shows that there has been a gradual development, if not of reception, at least of a more tolerant attitude towards the presence of asylum seekers" (Interview 16).

Until 2015 in the whole province there were no SPRAR centres. The local reception system was based on a number of CAS and two larger hubs located in abandoned military facilities (*Caserma Serena* opened in Treviso in 2014, and *Caserma Zanusso* opened in Oderzo in 2015) hosting hundreds of asylum seekers. In 2015 two SPRAR projects were established by the Municipality of Treviso (together with other ten smaller Municipalities) and the Municipality of Asolo (together with the Municipality of Possagno). **Treviso SPRAR counts 50 places** in small accommodations located mainly in the city of Treviso; it is managed by two cooperatives organised in a "temporary association of enterprises" (*Associazione Temporanea di Imprese* – ATI) – *Cooperativa La Esse* (with a leading role) and *Cooperativa Una Casa Per l'Uomo*. **Asolo SPRAR counts 15 places** in apartments located in the municipalities of Asolo and Possagno; it is managed by *Cooperativa Una Casa Per l'Uomo*.

When considering the factors that led to the creation of these two SPRAR projects, local interviewees mentioned: the political willingness of some (centre-left) municipal administrations to finally endow also the province of Treviso of its SPRAR [47]; the Prefecture's pressures; and the advantages Municipalities could derive from a more functional integration of asylum seekers reception within the local welfare system. While the economic incentives introduced by the national government in 2016 (i.e., the "gratitude bonus"; see section 2.1.2) were not considered a key factor, the "safeguard clause" was a welcome development in particular for the Municipality of Treviso, which hosted the highest number of asylum seekers in the province (Interviews 19, 20). However, as reported by a representative of the former centre-left municipal administration, the Municipality has never managed to benefit from the clause in practice (i.e., no reduction of the number of asylum seekers hosted in CAS) (Interview 19).

3.2.2.2 From decision-making to implementation: how has the local level intervened?

All interviewees in Veneto considered the **Prefectures** as the main actor involved in decision-making and implementation of asylum seekers reception at the local level. The Prefecture of Venice is in charge of the redistribution across the region of the quota of asylum seekers assigned by the Ministry of Interior. Each Prefecture of the region (Belluno, Padova, Rovigo, Treviso, Venezia, Verona, Vicenza) is then in charge of distributing the assigned asylum seekers across the province of competence, i.e., in the various municipalities. In light of the local administrations' attitude described above, the Prefectures (upon the Ministry's request) had to establish numerous CAS in order to accommodate the increasing number of asylum seekers. The management of CAS was assigned through a public bid to **non-institutional actors** (both for-profit and non-profit), who have become the Prefectures' main interlocutors. Prefectures are also responsible for monitoring the compliance of reception services' providers with the requirements foreseen by the bid, with regard not only to board and lodging but also to services provided.

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[47]   In particular, in the case of Treviso, the establishment of a SPRAR project was included in the political programme of the centre-left coalition that won the local elections in 2013 and governed the city until June 2018, when a League-led coalition went back to power (Interview 19).

Therefore, in Veneto decision-making and implementation in the field of reception are largely in the hands of Prefectures. According to local interviewees, even decisions concerning the number of asylum seekers and the place where to accommodate them were taken by Prefects without any consultation with municipal authorities. "In some cases mayors were not even informed by the Prefecture about the arrival of buses of asylum seekers; these episodes have fuelled tensions and protests" (Interview 19). Only a minority of **Municipalities** have decided to engage in the implementation of reception, either by supporting the establishment of CAS on their territory (often upon the proposal of an NGO) or by directly establishing SPRAR projects. In some cases Municipalities have started a cooperation with non-profit organisations involved in running CAS aimed at encouraging social inclusion, for instance through cultural events and symbolic initiatives, or by involving asylum seekers in voluntary "socially useful" activities[48].

As concerns the **Region**, most interviewees in Veneto affirmed that it has entirely stepped away from the local governance of reception, with the excuse that asylum seekers reception management is not among its competences, but it is under the exclusive competence of Prefectures. The regional government has always maintained that its competence on migration is limited to regular labour migration flows, while it has no competence on emergency reception management. As noted by the regional coordinator of Caritas, "if on the one hand the regional government might have a good point when affirming this, on the other hand it is also true that other Italian Regions have decided to engage in the governance of reception, playing a proactive role both at the national level within the Conference of the Regions, and at the local level within formal and informal roundtables with other local actors" (Interview 18). Furthermore, an anonymous institutional interviewee stressed that the Region has always opposed the decisions of the national government in the field of reception and was also against the inter-institutional Agreement of 10 July 2014 (see section 2.1.2) (Interview 21).

As concerns **non-profit actors**, religious charities – and Caritas in particular – have traditionally played a key role in the local governance of reception in the province of Treviso. Among smaller locally-based cooperatives, only *Cooperativa Una Casa Per l'Uomo* has a longstanding experience in the field of reception[49]; the other ones have been recently established, or have recently introduced asylum seekers reception among their activities. Some local interviewees observed that, generally-speaking, in Veneto there is a lack of coordination among non-profit actors and limited efforts are made in order to create alliances and pursue common strategies. Nonetheless, a positive example of a **network among non-profit actors** comes precisely from the province of Treviso, where in 2016 the **"Dispersed Accommodation Network"** (*Rete Accoglienza Diffusa – RAD*) was established. This is an open network that includes a number of religious and non-profit actors involved in the governance of reception, who share common values, principles and standards, and aim to promote a reception model based on dispersed accommodation[50]. The network allows its members to develop good practices, share resources, and speak with one voice vis-à-vis institutional actors[51].

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[48] In the Veneto region many of the Municipalities hosting CAS on their territory have involved asylum seekers in voluntary "socially useful" activities to be performed for the benefit of the local community. This local policy was first adopted in Veneto in 2015 and was later adopted throughout the country (Pettrachin 2018).

[49] For additional information, see: https://www.unacasaperluomo.it/.

[50] Currently RAD members are: Caritas Treviso, Caritas Vittorio Veneto, *Discepole del Vangelo*, *Domus Nostra*, *Consorzio Restituire*, *Consorzio Intesa*, and the cooperatives *La Esse*, *Una Casa Per l'Uomo*, *Alternativa*, and *Gea*.

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

According to the director of Caritas Treviso, this experience is very promising; "conversely, what is sometimes missing is the necessary support of public institutions; the problem is establishing synergies also with institutional actors" (Interview 16). This is a crucial element, indeed, as the daily implementation of reception is based not only on the interactions between CAS managing entities and the Prefecture, but on a network of relationships involving several institutional actors, e.g., the local *Questura* for residence permits; the local public hospital (ASL) for health issues; the Centre for Adult Education (CPIA) for language classes; the Public Recruitment Centre for job opportunities, training and courses. Cooperation on work inclusion is also established with non-institutional actors, e.g., *Confindustria* and *Confartigianato*.

The actors identified so far may interact also within formal and informal roundtables and coordinating groups. As concerns the **Regional Coordinating Group on Asylum** (see sections 2.2 and 3.1), in the case of Veneto the potential of this inter-institutional coordination body was not exploited at all. As reported by a contact person from the regional administration, the Coordinating Group was gathered only once in January 2017 and saw the participation of the competent Regional Council member[52]. This information was double-checked with an anonymous former institutional actor; he could not remember if the Group was gathered only once, but he confirmed the presence of the regional government representative, the Prefectures of the region, the president of ANCI Veneto, and representatives of some Municipalities, while civil society representatives were not invited (but their inclusion is not foreseen by law) (Interview 21). In his view the main purpose of this meeting was to push mayors to establish more SPRAR centres, but he also confirmed that the feedback was not positive.

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

Interviewees in Veneto described these roundtables as the only assemblies where the daily functioning of reception is discussed and coordinated among actors directly involved in its implementation; therefore, they have played a crucial function in making the reception system work. Roundtable meetings are convened regularly, approximately every 2-3 months. In most cases the issues discussed concern the practical management of reception (i.e., practicalities and bureaucratic issues) rather than substantial issues (e.g., dispersed accommodation and socio-economic inclusion). According to both institutional and non-institutional interviewees, relations between CAS managing organisations, Prefectures and *Questure* within the roundtables are in most cases smooth and conflicts are limited (Interviews 16, 18, 21).

The former regional coordinator of Caritas expressed a certain dissatisfaction for the merely technical focus of the Prefectures' Roundtables he had participated in (Venezia and Rovigo): "we ended up meeting to discuss whether the pocket money was to be given every week, every two weeks or every

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[52]   Email conversation, 27.09.2018.

day […]; we ended up discussing on the management of light bulbs! I don't want to trivialise, but things actually went this way. […] How much have we talked about school inclusion and work? Only on very rare occasions" (Interview 18). Conversely, based on information provided by the director of Caritas Treviso, the roundtable convened by the Prefecture of Treviso had a broader focus. Topics discussed included not only practical management issues (e.g., the Prefecture's delayed payments) but also how to reduce the impact of CAS on the local community; work inclusion (e.g., planning of internships, vocational trainings and educational initiatives with the CPIA); the Protocol on voluntary activities (Interview 16)[53]. To sum up, if operational coordination (functional to the practical management of reception) at the provincial level has been ensured by the Prefectures, what has lacked in Veneto is a broader policy coordination at the regional level involving all the stakeholders, including representatives of the Region and Municipalities.

When reflecting on the main flaws of the local reception system in Veneto, local interviewees focused on the **dysfunctionality of the institutional setting**. Prefectures were not prepared and equipped for bearing the main responsibility in the field of reception and for managing the largest part of the reception system. Therefore, according to most Veneto interviewees, Prefectures should not be blamed for the way they managed decision-making processes concerning asylum seekers reception and its implementation. In Veneto, they were not put in the conditions to interact and cooperate with other institutional actors that have a stronger planning capacity and proper policy-making competence, i.e., the Municipalities and the Region. According to interviewees, this was mainly due to **political factors**. The regional and local governments, which share for the most part the same political orientation, seem to have established a common front by stepping away from the governance of reception. According to Caritas representatives, local political parties in Veneto have either publicly expressed their anti-immigrant position and strongly opposed the establishment of CAS on their territory (the League and other minor far right parties, but also centre-right parties like *Forza Italia*, and in part the Five Stars Movement) or have remained silent and for the most part have backed out of the governance of reception, because they feared losing electoral consensus (Democratic Party and centre-left administrations) (Interviews 16, 18).

As regards the response of **local communities**, local interviewees maintained that in Veneto a particularly dysfunctional governance of reception (based on CAS managed by for-profit actors and large reception centres in abandoned military facilities) has affected local communities' perceptions and attitudes towards asylum seekers, producing a "culture of refusal" (Interview 18). In particular, the concentration of a high number of asylum seekers within a small community was identified as the main factor negatively affecting the perceptions of local populations. As a result, in 2016 Veneto was the region with the highest number of anti-immigrant protests in Italy (Pettrachin 2018, on *Lunaria*'s figures). "Local communities perceived the arrival of asylum seekers on their territory as a destabilising event; every time there were new arrivals, local newspapers talked about the citizens' anti-migrant protests" (Interview 18). **Local media** also played a role in mediatising political contestation around asylum issues, thus fuelling the local population's fears and prejudices. "If there had not been that level of mediatisation, the local community would have reacted normally, with a mix of solidarity and

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[53]   Besides these two institutional roundtables, there are other roundtables, both at the regional and provincial level, among non-profit actors involved in the governance of reception (e.g., Veneto Coordinating Group on Immigration, *Confcooperative*, etc.) which represent useful venues for sharing good practices, discuss common problems and elaborate common standards. Another relevant venue for exchange is the Regional Coordinating Group of SPRAR projects, currently coordinated by the cooperative *Una Casa per l'Uomo*.

suspicion" (Interview 20). An interviewee highlighted the opposite role played by religious actors in Veneto: "Local religious authorities and religious charities like Caritas were extremely helpful not only in the concrete management of reception, but also in mitigating the reactions of local communities" (Interview 21).

All interviewees in Veneto stressed that it is not the number of arrivals but the way the local reception system works that plays a key role in shaping the local population's perceptions and reactions towards asylum seekers; they agreed that **a more functional system might have contributed to change people's perceptions and attitudes**. Local interviewees reported that good practices and positive reception experiences, although limited in number, have a positive impact in terms of fostering a different cultural attitude towards asylum seekers. This is for instance the case of the Caritas project "*Refugee at my home – Rifugiato a casa mia*" (Caritas Tarvisina 2018), which proved to be particularly successful in the province of Treviso and contributed to foster a certain awareness and sensitivity towards refugees.

4. Policy outcomes. Mechanisms of convergence and divergence in policy implementation

4.1 Homogeneity and heterogeneity of reception services

The question whether the reception system has become more or less homogenous over time was answered in different ways by national-level interviewees; generally, the answer depended on the time span considered.

On the one hand, compared to the situation before the 2011 North Africa Emergency when the SPRAR largely prevailed, the reception system has become much **more heterogeneous** since other types of governmental reception facilities have been set up alongside the SPRAR – with CAS playing a major role (even larger than the SPRAR's role). While SPRAR centres usually fulfil high reception standards and consist of small facilities or apartments, CAS are much more heterogeneous in terms of size and quality of services provided, given the diversity among the organisations responsible for their management, with potentially disappointing outcomes in terms of integration and cooperation with local authorities (Corte dei Conti 2018). In practice, the quality of reception and integration services enjoyed by asylum seekers and refugees has largely depended on chance, being their distribution across the different types of centres made on the basis of reception places available.

On the other hand, since 2011 the reception system has gradually become **more homogenous** since the governmental reception centres have been increasingly regulated and monitored (see section 2.1.2 and 4.2). Besides that, the central government underlined that a process of "normalisation" of the reception system has occurred: after the North Africa Emergency, no further emergency procedure has been launched (not even in 2016, when a peak of 180,000 arrivals was reached), showing the increasing state capacity to manage asylum seekers' inflows and reception (Interview 2). Despite these efforts towards convergence, the political positions, the degree of efficiency of the actors involved in reception (especially Regions, Municipalities and Prefectures) and the level of collaboration between the Prefectures and each Region have strongly affected the implementation of the reception system, constraining homogeneity. Moreover, national-level planning efforts aimed at increasing the homogeneity of reception policies across the country have been actually focused on the asylum seekers' redistribution while other aspects have been disregarded (e.g., creating a register of organisations fulfilling specific quality standards; professional requirements for managing reception centres; etc.).

The reception systems in Piedmont and Veneto, for instance, were described by local interviewees as fragmented systems with significant differences not only among provinces but also among reception centres located at a short distance. Local interviewees identified several causes for this differentiation.

Firstly, representatives of CSOs underlined that the main structural problems in the governance of asylum seekers reception were introduced with the establishment of CAS (and ENA centres before them). SPRAR centres and CAS retained their differences in terms quality of services provided, while different CAS did not have the same standards of reception, thus creating tensions among beneficiaries living in different types of structures.

Secondly, at the peak of the crisis, the emergency situation itself pushed Prefectures to accept in some cases significant waivers in the quality of services and conditions of access, because the priority was to find a place (any place) to accommodate people.

Thirdly, differentiation is also linked to the inexperience of many organisations, which were newcomers in the field of reception. In particular, many (profit and non-profit) actors running CAS lacked both the skills and resources to provide adequate services (and in the worst cases, they also lacked the willingness).

Finally, Municipalities' and Regions' political positions and key actors' willingness to cooperate with the central government (e.g., the Province of Turin) or, on the contrary, to undermine its approach (e.g., the Veneto Region) have been crucial factors in producing receptions' heterogeneity across the country

However, according to interviewees, over the last five years the local reception systems have been **gradually evolving towards increased homogeneity**. This process has been encouraged by the numerous opportunities of dialogue and exchange at the Prefectures' Roundtables and within networks of non-profit actors. This has allowed services providers to improve their skills, elaborate common good practices, and improve cooperation with Prefectures (at least at the provincial level). The reform introduced by Legislative Decree 113/2018 is regarded by interviewees as an abrupt interruption of this gradual process and questions the outcomes achieved so far (Interviews 16, 20).

4.2 Monitoring

The quality of monitoring varies substantially between SPRAR and governmental centres. The monitoring of SPRAR (managed by ANCI and the Ministry of Interior) is systematic, rich and detailed. On the contrary, the monitoring of governmental facilities (managed by the Prefectures), although greatly improved over the last years, is still lacking and focused on checking if rules are respected rather than on assessing outcomes. However, since 2016 more ambitious monitoring activities have been started, also thanks to the AMIF, which allowed the central government to outsource monitoring tasks to external organisations, including international organisations.

In Italy international organisations have always played a key role in the monitoring of governmental facilities. For instance, the project **"Praesidium"**, started in 2006 by the Ministry of Interior in cooperation with UNHCR, IOM, Italian Red Cross and Save the Children with the purpose of providing assistance and information to migrants at arrival points, was expanded in 2013 with the involvement of Prefectures and *Questure* with the purpose of monitoring governmental reception centres.

More recently, two monitoring projects were funded through AMIF. The project "**Reception: reinforcement of monitoring mechanisms and evaluation standards**" managed by UNHCR focused on First reception centres and CAS, while the project "**Monitoring Action 2**" run by IOM focused on

hotspots and immigration detention centres (1 July 2015 - 31 December 2016). The goal of both projects was to systematise and improve monitoring procedures and evaluation standards, also through the definition of specific guidelines.

In 2016, thanks to AMIF, the Ministry of Interior outsourced to external organisations the management of the "scientific secretariat" of the project **MIRECO – Monitoring and Improvement of Reception COnditions**. The project started operationally in May 2017 and will last until August 2019. It is aimed at enhancing the monitoring system over governmental centres through inspection visits, drafting of monitoring guidelines, development of new monitoring tools and evaluation indicators, setting up of a permanent observatory on the reception system. The visits are carried out by experts from the selected external organisations, representatives of the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration, UNHCR and IOM, together with local Prefectures.

Given the project-based nature of a large part of the monitoring activities and the partial coverage of reception facilities (at least before MIRECO started), their contribution to the convergence of reception practices and measures on the ground appears positive but not decisive. Moreover, as for the general decision-making process, the impact of monitoring activities on actual decisions and policies largely depends on the willingness of the national government and local Prefectures to take into consideration the monitoring outcomes.

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Annex: List of interviews

Inter view No.	Name of interviewee(s)	Position of interviewee(s)	Date	Place	Level of governance
1	-	Governmental representative	11/10/18	Rome	National
2	Mario Morcone	Former Head of Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration, Ministry of Interior & Former Head of Cabinet, Ministry of Interior	12/10/18	Rome	National
3	Oliviero Forti	Head of Immigration Office of religious NGO – *Caritas Italia*	11/12/18	Skype interview	National
4	Daniela Di Capua	Director of the Central Service for Information, Promotion, Consultancy, Monitoring and Technical Support of SPRAR	17/07/18	Turin	National
5	Monica Cerutti	Deputy Delegate of the Regions' Committee at the National Coordinating Group on Asylum	11/07/18	Turin	National & Regional - Piedmont
6	-	Representative of international organisation	11/10/18	Rome	National
7	Walter Massa	Responsible for the reception system of asylum seekers and refugees of a national NGO - *ARCI*	04/11/18	Genoa	National
8	-	-	28/09/18	Turin	Regional - Piedmont
9	Sara Negarville	Former Director *Progetto Tenda* (NGO)	10/10/18	Turin	Local - Turin
10	-	Officer at the Prefecture of Turin	31/10/18	Turin	Local - Turin
11	Elide Tisi	Former Deputy Mayor for Social Policies – Municipality of Turin & Current Vice President of ANCI Piedmont	20/12/18	Turin	Regional - Piedmont

12	Andrea Porcellana	Managing Director of Cooperative *LiberiTutti*	14/11/18	Turin	Local - Turin
13	-	Officer at the Foreign Office - Municipality of Turin	19/10/18	Turin	Local - Turin
14	Sergio Durando	Director of *Ufficio Pastorale Migranti – Caritas Migrantes* (religious NGO)	16/10/18	Turin	Local - Turin
15	-	Senior researcher at research institution - *IRES Piemonte*	10/10/18	Turin	Regional - Piedmont
16	Davide Schiavon	Director of local branch of religious NGO - *Caritas Treviso*	04/10/18	Treviso	Local - Treviso
17	Matteo Danese Carlo Melegari Maurizio Carbognin	Director Former director Collaborator of research institution - *Centro Studi Immigrazione* (CESTIM)	19/10/18	Verona	Regional - Veneto
18	Marino Callegari	Former regional coordinator of religious NGO - *Caritas North-East*	31/10/18	Chioggia (VE)	Regional - Veneto
19	Said Chaibi	Representative of former municipal government - Municipality of Treviso	19/11/18	Treviso	Local - Treviso
20	Giorgio Gallina	President of local NGO - Cooperative *Una casa per l'uomo*	30/11/18	Montebelluna (TV)	Local - Treviso
21	-	Former institutional representative	17/12/18	Venezia	Regional - Veneto