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# Governance in Crisis. Examining the Role of TSOs in Asylum Seekers Reception in France and Italy

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**Abstract:** Although third sector organizations (TSOs) played a vital role in supporting public authorities during the European migration crisis, their involvement in governance structures remains underexplored. This paper examines the evolving relationships between TSOs and public authorities in this sector, focussing on the governance shifts triggered by the crisis. By comparing Italy and France – two countries with distinct roles and responses – the study reveals a convergence in their crisis management strategies and the resulting impact on TSOs. Despite initial differences, both nations experienced a marketization of relations, transforming service provision and governance models. This paper analyzes the mechanisms regulating the crisis and their effects on the roles and interactions of key actors. The comparative analysis underscores a broader trend toward the normalization of crisis response systems, providing critical insights into the future of governance models in migration management.

**Keywords:** crisis; migration; governance; international comparison; TSOs

## 1 Introduction

In 2015, hundreds of thousands of individuals fled across the Mediterranean Sea to escape war and persecution, marking what came to be known as Europe's migration crisis. While the political responses from national governments varied significantly regarding the entry and border management of migrants, the crucial part played by third sector organizations (TSOs) in supporting public authorities during this period is widely acknowledged (Calò, Montgomery, and Baglioni 2022; Galera, Giannetto, and Noya 2018). However their role in the planning and delivery of public services in the sector of reception of asylum seekers it is still poor explored (Strokosch and Osborne 2017).

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This paper seeks to investigate the influence of the European migration crisis on the inter-organizational relationships between TSOs and public authorities in the asylum seekers' reception sector. In the realm of other social services, an extensive literature indicates that in recent decades, traditional governmental functions in welfare systems have undergone changes, allowing for increased private sector involvement in delivering various public and social services (Casady et al. 2019; Hood 1991). Although a narrative of historical evolution from traditional public administration to more collaborative models, is often presented (Mazzei et al. 2020), various mixed configurations can be observed in practice, assigning different roles to TSOs with varying degrees of implication in terms of decision-making, service configuration and providing (Brandsen et al. 2018; Bode and Brandsen 2014; Pestoff et al. 2012). Furthermore, this paper focus on a period defined as 'crisis', when changes in governance tend to be observed, thus in turn determining a governance crisis (Sahin-Mencutek et al. 2022). Governance crisis is defined as 'a process that opened up the floor for policy change through the redefinition of institutional roles, the transformation of pre-existing rules and norms, as well as the emergence of new discursive frames' (Sahin-Mencutek et al. 2022, p. 2). This designation underscores the relevance of examining the evolution of inter-organizational relationships between public authorities and TSOs supporting migrants, this latter representing the organizations on the front lines of crisis response.

During the European migration crisis, the unprecedented influx of inward migration significantly intensified pressures on those countries across the Mediterranean (IOM 2015). For this reason, this paper focus on Italy and France. The two selected countries played different roles during the crisis for geographical, institutional and historical reasons. Italy, serving as a frontline EU Member State, faced disproportionately high migratory pressures, whereas France contributed to the implementation of temporary relocation schemes proposed by the European Commission. Despite the distinctiveness of the two case studies, a convergence has been observed, in terms of crisis management, and on the repercussion on the role played by TSOs. We can observe initial disparities. France is a country of immigration for a considerable time, equipped with a strong, rather centralised migrant assistance system. Conversely, Italy is traditionally a country of emigration, which only recently developed a national infrastructure of reception system defined as a multi actor network system. However, this paper shows that the inter-organisational configurations underwent similar changes. Through a longitudinal analysis the paper shows that one of the major consequences of the crisis is precisely a rapprochement of the two models, resulting in a pronounced marketization of relations. In turn, these changes, encompassing actors in the field, mechanisms, and instruments employed to regulate new governance models, had a profound impact on the quantity and quality of services offered by TSOs during the crisis.

This paper contributes significantly by addressing a literature gap. Where substantial attention has been dedicated to political responses to the crisis, yet limited exploration exists on the evolution of inter-organizational dynamics at that time. This aspect, however, is particularly relevant for understanding the transformation in the activities of TSOs in a crisis context. This article scrutinizes how reforms enacted during the migration crisis influenced the mechanisms to delegate services to TSOs. Focussing on whether the newly established governance configurations are better suited to the crisis and how they deviate from previous models, it shows that in the two countries the final role played by TSOs is downstream in the service production process (co-management) losing any decision-making role (co-governance).

This article is organised as follows. Firstly, the literature on inter-organisational arrangements is explored to define different types; secondly, to set the context, a clear overview of the European migration crisis in the Mediterranean area is offered; then the methodology is explained, followed by the analysis of the Italian and French system of reception, and the evolution of inter-organizational configurations before and during the migration crisis is deeply explored. Finally in the conclusion, the convergence of the governance structure's models in the two countries is discussed, while a normalization of the extraordinary system of reception implanted during the crisis, is observed in both the countries.

## **2 Literature Review. Different Types of Inter-Organisational Arrangements**

Public institutions play a pivotal role as driving factors in the development of TSOs (Trasciani et al. 2023). The relevance of the role of the State in the development of the TSOs is widely acknowledged by the literature (Bode and Brandsen 2014; Evers and Laville 2004), particularly in Europe, where TSOs are historically and politically embedded in the development of the different welfare systems (Kerlin 2013). As mentioned by Esposito et al. (2021), public authorities shape the institutional frameworks that embed TSOs, putting in place specific incentive structures and penalties that influence their organizational behaviour. This discussion is strictly linked to the shape of the inter-organizational relationship, and in turns it has multiple impacts on the roles and practices of TSOs. Brandsen and Pestoff (2006) classified these relationships into two categories: co-management and co-governance. Co-management refers to an arrangement where the third sector collaborates with public agencies and for-profit actors to deliver services in conjunction with other stakeholders. It pertains to the increasing diversity of welfare service providers, with various private actor

organizations participating in the provision of publicly financed services, within the framework commonly known as the welfare mix (Evers and Laville 2005). On the other hand, co-governance involves the participation of the third sector, along with public agencies and for-profit actors, in decision-making and the planning of public services. This form implies a deep involvement of TSOs in co-constructing activities, potentially playing an active role in the decision-making process and taking a proactive stance in defining the final service. A third configuration also exists, co-production, which involves citizens interacting with State actors in policy delivery (Bassoli and Campomori 2022; Steen, Brandsen, and Verschuere 2019).

In co-management system TSOs contribute to public service delivery, while the instrument used to regulate the relationship is the contract (Bode 2006; Tsukamoto and Nishimura 2006). The use of instruments such as contracts encourages marketization (Maier, Meyer, and Steinbereithner 2016). Marketization denotes the increasing shift of TSOs towards market-oriented relationships with stakeholders or, from a macro perspective, the gradual penetration of market-type relationships into the country's welfare system (Eikenberry and Kluver 2004; Maier and Meyer 2011; Maier, Meyer, and Steinbereithner 2016). Steen, Brandsen, and Verschuere (2019) noticed that marketization could lead to encouraging the entry of for-profit suppliers into sectors previously reserved or dominated by TSOs. However more broadly the term indicates 'government measures that authorize, support, or impose the introduction of markets, the creation of relationships between buyers and sellers, and the use of market mechanisms' for allocating services (Brennan et al. 2012, p. 379). The discussion of funding in the framework of marketization is not only related to the public-private dichotomy but also to the instrument used by the public sector to fund the organizations. Tchernonog's analysis (2013) pays attention to the distinction between public grants (or direct funding) and public procurement. In her view, grants ensure freedom of action for TSOs concerning the types of activities and actions to be carried out. On the other hand, public procurement is based on an action already defined by the public authority, leaving TSOs with little room for inventiveness, innovation, and differentiation. In this context, public procurement is considered a market-based instrument, being more stringent and requiring the introduction of elements of competition for subcontracting services. From 2005 to 2011, it has been observed a decline in the use of grants, while the use of public procurement increased by three times between 2005 and 2011.

Co-governance suggests that TSOs begin to be treated as equal partners with the State, playing an important role in setting priorities, designing services and delivering services that engage service users in co-governance (Pestoff et al. 2012). In these kinds of networks, decision-making capacity becomes increasingly dispersed across actors (Morison 2000), as consequences of bringing together expertise, knowledge and resources from across sectors as a way of tackling complex problems and

improving services (Brandsen and van Hout 2006; Strokosch and Osborne 2017). Literature shows that where TSOs operate in a collaborative environment, they perform better by achieving greater impact than in competitive one (Calò et al. 2018). Multi-actor approach promotes innovative solutions, including actors a different step of the decision-making process, and permit TSOs to absolve their typical role of link between the government and the people asking for services, particularly in case of minority (Guzmán et al. 2023; Trasciani, Petrella, and Richez-Battesti 2024). With particular attention to the sector of support for migrants, due to the complexity of their needs, the collaboration between literature highlights that in several cases a multi-agency participatory approach has been fundamental to supporting asylum seekers (Bassoli and Campomori 2022; Calò, Montgomery, and Baglioni 2022; Campomori and Caponio 2017). Strokosch and Osborne (2017) in the Scottish case, showed that historically no profit has played a leading role in supporting asylum seeker integration in Scotland, responding on an ad hoc basis to individual crises and establishing support programmes, providing specialist expertise and playing a role such as strategic partner. Collini (2022) showed TSOs' capacity of providing tailored services that can benefit from a cooperation among various stakeholders in accordance with the specific characteristic of the field in the context of integration of migrants in the labour market in Italy. Furthermore, the case of migrants is particularly sensitive: they need a different kind of support arriving in the new countries; on the other hand, they do not have any space to express their voice, not participating to the democratic system through voting. So, including the TSOs in the process of decision making also permit to include them in the play of the democratic system (Trasciani et al. 2019).

### **3 Anatomy of the Crisis: Europeanization, Securitization and Emergency**

During 2015, more than 1.3 million people travel towards Europe to request asylum (OECD 2015). Most of the people who entered Europe have crossed the Mediterranean Sea (IOM 2015) in a very dangerous voyage, risking their lives and often losing relatives and loved ones on the way. The influx of refugees and migrants to Europe reached staggering new levels, dominating headlines, and prompting stormy political debate, about the Europe's refugee crisis. The responses to this catastrophic event of national governments varied greatly. However, many EU governments reacted by closing their borders, particularly in Central Europe, while other such as Germany decided to accept refugees, suspending temporarily the enforcement of the Dublin Regulation, that determines which EU Member State is responsible for the examination of an application for asylum.

The first aspect of the crisis is the Europeanization of the migration policies. This is a long process starting from 90s, when the need for a common framework became pressing with the entry into force of Schengen Agreement, which abolished internal borders among Member States and created a common external border for the EU. In the context of crisis, it has been observed an increased attempt to coordinate the answers from the member States. In this sense the European Commission published the European agenda on migration. The aim of the European agenda on migration was to improve the EU member States' capacity to manage migration flows as well as to address the challenges including setting fresh priorities for reception and integration policies and developing a stronger common asylum policy. As part of the European Agenda on Migration of April 2015, the hotspot approach was presented by the Commission, with the aim of setting up EU-wide relocation and resettlement common schemes, to reduce the pressure on the EU Member States located at the external EU border, such as Italy (Calarco 2024). Following the hotspot approach people in clear need of international protection would have been identified, and registered in the EU's asylum fingerprint database, Eurodac, in frontline EU Member States, such as Italy, for subsequent relocation to other EU Member States, such as France. Although this attempt to find a common solution to the migration crisis, each EU member States continued to organise the system of reception for asylum seekers in complete autonomy, while the redistribution never worked properly. The main impact of the implementation of the hotspot system was instead that the number of irregular migrants,<sup>1</sup> also called people under Dublin Procedure, whose application filed in one European country, may need to be examined in another European country, deeply augmented in countries such as France (Cimade web site, data 2017).

The second aspect involves the so-called process of securitization. The securitization of migration policy refers to the process through which migration issues are framed and addressed as matters of security (Derradji 2022). This approach involves portraying migration as a potential threat to the national security or societal stability of a country. It goes beyond conventional discussions of immigration and border control and incorporates security-related language, policies, and measures in addressing migration challenges. Securitization often involves framing migrants as risks, emphasizing the need for heightened border security, surveillance, and strict immigration controls to protect the state from perceived threats. This shift towards securitization can lead to the prioritization of security concerns over humanitarian or human rights considerations in the formulation and implementation of migration policies. Securitization approaches have not only altered the discourse but have also led to a shift in the entities responsible for handling migrant integration affairs.

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1 Author uses the terminology "irregular" reporting the wording used by the European Commission, in the EU migration Agenda, but distancing herself from it.

Numerous states have opted to transfer the responsibility for this matter from social policy ministries to interior ministries, known for their primary focus on security concerns. The crisis rhetoric has been invoked to justify various decisions, such as the administrative detention of irregular migrants, the establishment of international agreements with Turkey and subsequently with Libya to curb migrant flows and externalize EU boundaries, periodic suspensions of the Schengen arrangement, and the closure of borders between Italy and France. These actions have had profound consequences on the lives of migrants, tragically resulting in the loss of thousands of lives at Europe's external borders (Niemann and Blöser 2021), but also on the scope of action of the TSOs in charge of monitoring their integration paths.

The third component of the crisis response entails the establishment of emergency shelters. Throughout the crisis, the handling of internal flows and the reception of asylum seekers remained the responsibility of individual member states. At the national level, the crisis created space for the implementation of swift reforms, leading to modifications not only in the legislation governing the procedures for requesting international protection but also in the governance and system overseeing reception. Ideally the emergency shelters in the context of the migration crisis refer to temporary accommodations or facilities established to provide immediate refuge and basic amenities to individuals affected by the crisis. These shelters are set up in response to the urgent and unforeseen influx of migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers who may require immediate assistance, such as food, shelter, medical care, and other essential services. As well as the ordinary services, emergency services were also managed by TSOs, but also private actors.

## 4 Methodology

The decision to employ case studies as a research strategy for this qualitative analysis is inherently linked to the significance assigned to the contexts in our research. Yin explains that “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 2014, p. 13). The embedded case study method allows for the enhancement of contextual conditions highly relevant to the studied phenomenon, more so than other strategies. This is particularly valuable in cases like ours, where delineating the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context is challenging. Moreover, the embedded method, in contrast to the holistic approach, enables us to consider not only the “global nature” but also conceives phenomena as embedded across multiple sub-units of analysis. A total of 56 semi-structured interviews were conducted in France (27), Italy (18), and Belgium (9) (for the European level), as detailed in the table below. The interviews

took place between November 2017 and February 2019 and were recorded, with the exception of those with politicians who preferred not to be recorded. The transcription of these interviews results from the notes taken during the semi-structured interviews. The interviewees were selected as key actors in the field of the European migration regime at different levels. At the European level, the interviews primarily involved politicians, while at the national levels, various categories were interviewed, including politicians (covering a span before and after the migration crisis), civil servants, and members of TSOs. The interviews, structured as semi-structured, commenced with general open-ended questions and progressed towards seeking more detailed information. The interview grid focused on the experiences of the interviewees, probing for specific changes that occurred over the last decade within their organization and the broader context. Additionally, questions and opinions were sought to understand the actors' perspectives on events and interpretations of organizational changes. Finally, actors were asked to express their sentiments concerning specific events or statements, aiming to comprehend their ideal solutions to complex issues, such as the reception for asylum seekers.

## **5 Results: The Reception System Before and During the Migration Crisis**

### **5.1 The System in France**

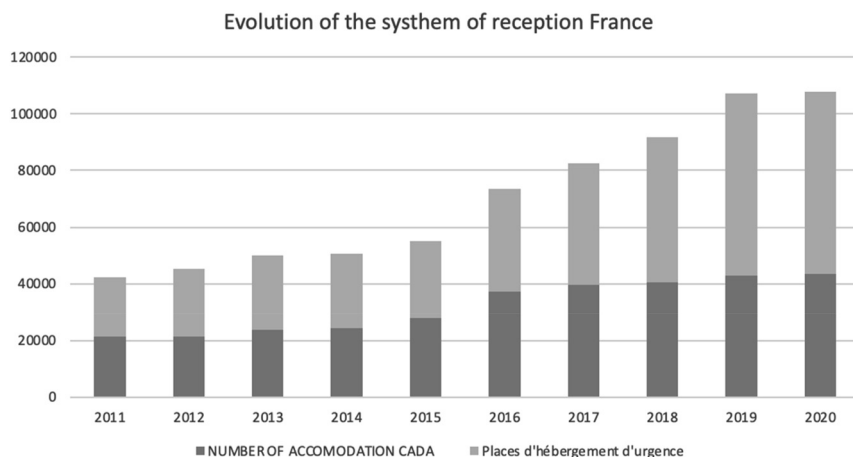
Departing from the beginning of 70s when the first structures for refugees have been created, the CPH 'Centres Provisoires d'Hébergement' – Temporary Centre of Reception, the State took in charge the cost of the reception, meanwhile the associations managed the service. Initially, in line with the French associative tradition and the 1975 law on 'Institutions Sociales et Médico-sociales', the distribution of tasks was characterized by a clear logic. Associations were envisioned to maintain a plurality of visions and values, facilitating project construction. The State served as the guarantor of the general interest. This structure facilitated a bottom-up approach: the flow of information from the local to the regional and ultimately governmental levels. A significant milestone in the French migration legal framework was reached with the enactment of the new Asylum Law in 1991. This legislation had the primary consequence of establishing the 'centres d'accueil pour demandeurs d'asile' – CADA, centre for asylum seekers. The CADA have been created as special temporary housing facilities where asylum seekers could reside while their asylum applications were being processed (19 December 1991). Prior to the creation of CADAs in 1991, there was no specific shelter in France exclusively designed for hosting asylum



seekers. Instead, they were integrated into the standard national system of support for individuals in need and with low income, known as CHRS. CADAs are managed by associations and thus by TSOs. The number of CADAs rapidly increased, and today, they are dispersed throughout the national territory, exhibiting considerable variation in living conditions and services offered to beneficiaries. They come in different sizes and may provide either collective reception in centres or scattered housing in private apartments. CADAs are managed by associations selected through a competitive process known as ‘appel à projet’, namely call for projects. It refers to a competitive process through which associations submit proposals in response to more or less specific requests, made by the government entity concerning the management of the CADA. The purpose of the call for projects is to identify and select the most suitable proposals that align with the goals, criteria, and priorities set by the government. During the 1990s, numerous local associations managed these structures. However, over time, the market witnessed a concentration in favour of a few large national or regional operators. In 2016, data reveals a market concentration. Together, four associations account for more than 50 % of the market (data for 2016, Cimade). With Adoma holding 59 CADA and a total capacity of 3,437 places, making it the leading public operator in this sector. While Adoma and Coallia traditionally provided such services and have recently repositioned themselves on the market, changing their beneficiaries but not the service offered, both France Terre d’ Asile and Forum Réfugiés started as associations with strong advocacy roots. In recent years, they have undergone a shift in their business model, becoming increasingly involved in the management of CADAs.

## 5.2 Europeanization, Securization and Emergency in France

In France, the governmental body responsible for overseeing the national reception system is the OFII – “Office français de l’immigration et de l’intégration,” which translates to the French Office for Immigration and Assimilation. It is a public institution tasked with implementing policies related to integration and monitoring foreigners living in France. The OFII is responsible for the initial reception of asylum seekers and manages the national hosting system, which includes accommodation in CADA. Additionally, it oversees the opening of calls for projects for associations involved in asylum seeker reception. The OFII was initially under the supervision of the “Ministère de l’Immigration, de l’Intégration, de l’Identité Nationale et du Développement Solidaire,” namely, the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity, and Solidarity Development. However, it is currently under the Ministry of the Interior. This in line with the process of securization and framing migrants as risks, perceived as a threat of public order.



**Figure 1:** Evolution of reception service in France, 2011–2020 (source OFII).

It is worth noting that nearly 1,500 TSOs contribute to the implementation of reception and integration policies for first-time foreigners across various territories, as reported by the Ministry of Interior. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of reception structures dedicated to hosting asylum seekers and migrants, as illustrated in Figure 1. The different types of accommodations, including emergency facilities, receive funding and coordination from the Ministry of Interior. De facto there has been the creation of a dual reception system: the so-called ordinary and the emergency system. The existence of this dual system can be attributed to the urgent nature of emergency. Due to the insufficient capacity of regular reception centres for asylum seekers, state authorities have implemented emergency schemes. Several types of structures have been created in the framework of the emergency reception scheme. Some of them refer to their character temporary or urgency related already in their name. Such as the CAO ‘dispositif d’hébergement d’urgence’ or emergency accommodation device, One of these structures is the AT-SA – ‘Accueil Temporaire – Service de l’Asile’, Temporary Reception – Asylum Office. Another structure introduced in 2015 is the so-called HUDA ‘Hébergement d’Urgence Dédié aux Demandeurs d’Asile’ or emergency accommodation for asylum seekers.

Another notable emergency reception instrument is the PRAHDA, which stands for ‘Programme d’Accueil et d’Hébergement des Demandeurs d’Asile’, Reception and Accommodation Program for Asylum Seekers. The PRAHDA aims to cater to non-eligible audiences of CADA, basically the so called ‘Dublinés’, or migrants under Dublin procedure. The Dublinés are ineligible to apply for asylum in France, and they wait for the notification of transfer in the first EU country of arrival, following the

European regulation. However, very often it also accommodates asylum seekers following the normal proceedings. Since number of people under the Dublin procedure has grown fast and dramatically in the last years the number of the PRAHDA increased rapidly. Since the beginning, associations and activists have observed an alarming situation in the PRAHDA. The living conditions in these places, often old Formula 1 Hotels, are substandard, seriously compromising the rights of asylum seekers, particularly in legal matters. Moreover, these facilities are situated far from cities, challenging to reach, and almost invisible to the rest of the citizens. The price per person day is lower than the CADAs, while the minimum staff-to-migrant ratio imposed by contracts passes by 1:15 to 1:20, often the staff is not adequately trained as social workers, and therefore the assistance they can provide, in addition to having to manage a very large number of people, remains limited.

### 5.3 The System of Reception in Italy

Different critical aspects emerge concerning the governance of asylum seekers' reception in Italy and its dispersive multilevel approach (Campomori and Ambrosini 2020; Campomori, Casula, and Kazepov 2023). In Italy, in 1999, it was for the first time tested a decentralized and networked reception service, developed by TSOs. Then in 2001, the Ministry of the Interior (Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration), the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of a National Asylum Program. Thus, the first public system for the reception of asylum seekers and refugees was born, spread throughout Italy, with the involvement of central and local institutions, according to a shared responsibility between the Ministry of the Interior and local authorities.

For some years, the Italian Red Cross has been the main private organisation mandated to work in the CARA 'reception' centres for asylum seekers and CIEs, the centre for administrative detention for irregular migrants. The charity provides a range of services, including catering, health, accommodation, psychosocial support, cultural and linguistic assistance and logistics. After a number of serious incidents (in particular fires and deaths in the centres) and while the Red Cross criticised the lack of human resources, the Italian government decided to bring more civil society organisations into migrant detention centres.

In the system of assistance called SPRAR 'Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati' – Protection system for asylum seekers and refugees-local authorities, with the support of the TSOs, guarantee interventions through integrated assistance approach: lodging, but also providing complementary information measures, accompaniment, assistance and guidance through the construction of

individual pathways to socio-economic integration. Based on a multi-level governance approach, SPRAR relies on the political responsibility of the Ministry of Interior and entails the voluntary participation of local authorities (municipalities, regions etc.) in hospitality projects networks. The decentralization of the so called 'integrated assistance' promotes local networks of TSOs, private and public bodies, involving a wide array of stakeholders. The most part of 'management bodies' (*enti gestori*) are TSOs.

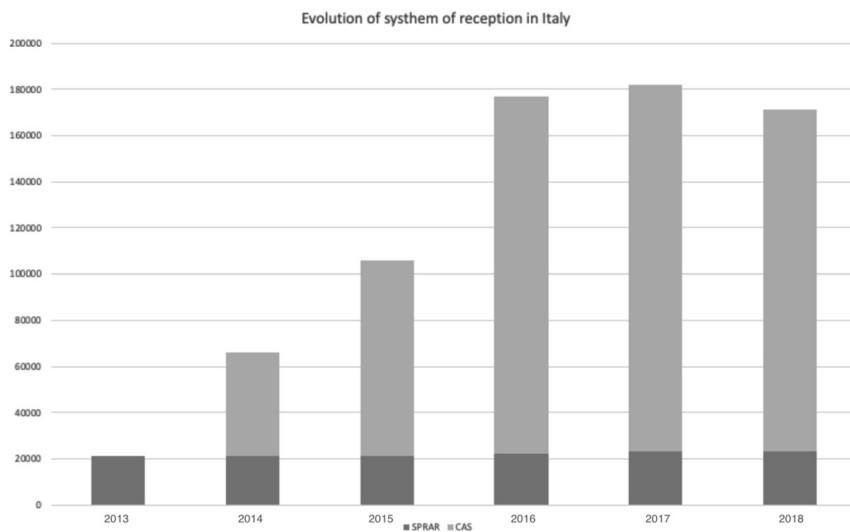
In addition to the already mentioned actors, various other bodies are engaged in addressing migration issues. Among them the international organisations such as UNHCR branch office has been operational in Italy since 1953, with its representatives actively participating in both the National Commission for Asylum Rights and the Territorial Committee for Immigration. To execute its diverse operational programs, the Italian Government collaborates very actively with the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Among others, we can mention the Italian Council for Refugees (CIR), Arci, Migrantes Foundation, alongside other ecclesiastical organizations Caritas, and the Jesuit Centro Astalli Foundation; among the trade unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL, and UGL), and Workers' Patronages (tasked by the Ministry of Interior with providing assistance for necessary procedures related to the granting or renewal of residence permits). Furthermore, there exists a substantial network of NGOs, humanitarian associations and informal network addressing various aspects of the migration phenomenon (Trasciani and Petrella 2021). Some organizations are responsible for initial reception, including legal and administrative assistance, while others focus on integration measures such as social insertion, socio-economic cohesion, and socio-cultural integration.

## 5.4 Europeanization, Securitization and Emergency in Italy

Italy serves as a transit country where individuals frequently arrive from areas outside Europe. In line with the program of a more coordinated European answer to the migration crisis in 2015 in Italy have been established the Hotspots (Calarco 2024). Hotspots are specifically designed to enhance the control over those arriving for the first time in Europe. The Hotspot approach centres around a single location for processing asylum applications, implementing return decisions, and prosecuting smuggling organizations. In theory, individuals are not intended to remain at these facilities for an extended period; rather, they should only be present for the duration necessary for pre-identification, registration, and the completion of photograph and fingerprinting procedures. However, NGOs, including Amnesty International, have observed instances where people are detained without any court order, compelled to undergo fingerprinting, and categorized as either asylum seekers or economic

migrants based on a summary assessment, primarily conducted through questionnaires filled out by migrants upon disembarkation (Amnesty International 2016). In Italy, owing to the delayed institutionalization of public migration reception service, the Ministry of the Interior assumed a pivotal role from the outset. Initially collaborating with the Ministry of Social Affairs in the sphere of reception and integration, the Ministry of Social Affairs gradually lost its centrality, while the Ministry of the Interior's significance increased. This was evident not only in regulating migration flows but also in managing reception centres. Additionally, during the migration crisis, various political parties capitalized on the wave of populism by propagating a strong political rhetoric of invasion. The Ministry of the Interior emerged as the most delegated public authority to handle the situation (Trasciani and Petrella 2021). During a first crisis in 2013, alongside the permanent reception centres known as SPRAR, emergency shelters called CAS – ‘Centri di accoglienza straordinari’ (Extraordinary reception centres) were established. As mentioned before, the SPRAR (later renamed SIPROMI, and nowadays SAI) operates through a network of local bodies in collaboration with private social entities and TSOs. This network offers a range of services to migrants in reception facilities, providing not only basic material assistance like food and shelter but also services aimed at facilitating social inclusion pathways, crucial for fostering individual autonomy. However, the adhesion to the SPRAR is on the voluntary based for public local bodies (municipalities, provinces, regions) is voluntary. On the other hand, CAS establishments are mandated by the Prefecture, representing the local interior ministry.

The Prefecture, representing the Ministry of Interior, also oversees reception and integration at the local level. In each Italian Prefecture, there is a “territorial council for immigration” (CTI), responsible for monitoring immigrant presence and the area's capacity to absorb migratory flows. Prefectures typically, in conjunction with mayors, determine the number and modalities of accommodations provided at the local level. However, mayors often have limited knowledge about Prefecture operations. They are intended, as their name suggests, to be established in response to perceived emergencies. This typically occurs when municipalities do not participate in the SPRAR network. CAS accommodations are managed by both profit and non-profit private actors. As shown in Figure 2, in 2015, 70 % of asylum seekers were hosted in CAS (70,910 accommodations compared to 21,814 in the SPRAR network), and in 2016, there were 137,000 CAS accommodations versus 26,000 in the SPRAR network (15 %) (data from the annual *Rapporto Sprar* 2016). There is minimal oversight of these structures, and data and information are often classified as sensitive and not accessible to the public. Reports have surfaced of substandard living conditions in some CAS facilities, including overcrowding, inadequate sanitation facilities, and insufficient access to healthcare (Borrelli, Mavin, and Trasciani 2019; Trasciani et al. 2019). Furthermore, migrants residing in CAS facilities may be



**Figure 2:** Evolution of the reception service in Italy (2013–2018). Source MEF ministry of economy and finance.

vulnerable to exploitation, including labour exploitation, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation (Avallone 2017).

## 6 The Role of the Third Sector in the Provision of Reception Services During the Crisis

Crises can be defined as events that challenge the survival of an institutional arrangement, thus highlighting its weaknesses and sometimes leading to institutional change. As mentioned by Collier and Collier (1991) crises can constitute opportunity windows for change, moments of critical junctures and structural breaks in the development of economic and political institutions. This article shows how governments play an important role enable or discouraging the TSOs' activities, through legislation and the use of policy tools. The migration crisis has served as a catalyst for significant changes. On one hand, the unprecedented influx of migrants has placed immense pressure on existing systems and resources, necessitating urgent responses. On the other hand, governments have been compelled to reevaluate their relationships with TSOs and explore new approaches to address the evolving challenges posed by migration. In both Italy and France, the system of governance and the services offered by TSOs underwent significant changes during and after the migration crisis.

In both countries, the migration crisis prompted a surge in the number of reception structures, leading to a distinction between ordinary and emergency reception systems. While the ordinary system involves multiple stakeholders and local acceptance, emergency services are managed centrally by the Ministry of the Interior and prefectures, bypassing local authorities. One significant evolution has been the transition from grant-based funding for TSOs to competitive public tenders. This shift towards contracting-out has resulted in a marketization of the reception system, where services are managed by the contracted organization rather than by public authorities. This approach diminishes public oversight and control over service quality, transferring responsibility to the contracted entity. The marketization of reception services has impacted both the activities and structures of organizations involved. TSOs and private businesses now compete for contracts based on their ability to deliver services efficiently and cost-effectively. This competition has led to changes in organizational structures, with a focus on maximizing efficiency and meeting contractual obligations. Overall, the evolution of the reception market in Italy and France reflects a broader trend towards market-oriented approaches in public service provision. While this shift has introduced elements of competition and efficiency, it also raises questions about accountability, quality control, and the role of public authorities in ensuring the well-being of asylum seekers.

The transition in the nature of services offered in ordinary reception is discernible through the analysis of tender documents and interviews. In France, these structures previously emphasized integration, offering services like French language learning, recreational activities, and initiatives to foster interaction with the local community. However, over time, there has been a noticeable reduction in these services. For example, French language classes, among other services, were removed from the list of funded activities. Consequently, some TSOs opted to continue offering these classes, using internal resources, while others delegated the responsibility to volunteers, and some organizations chose to discontinue them altogether. A clear transition towards a more control-oriented approach is observed. In Italy, TSOs are now required to impose curfews on beneficiaries, a measure taken as a precaution for public order. This represents a significant departure from previous practices and underscores a shift towards a more restrictive and security-focused approach to asylum seeker reception. These measures reflect broader changes in policy and attitudes towards migration, with governments increasingly prioritizing security over integration and support services for asylum seekers. However, these also have an impact at organisational level, where the TSOs' social workers are in charge to control the absence or presence of migrants and to signal their delays to the police. Driven by national and European legislations, many centres are becoming 'no-places' in several reported cases. For example, the PRAHDA in France predominantly hosts individuals awaiting return to Italy under the Dublin

Regulation. These individuals are waiting for their administrative procedures to be processed, with management bodies lacking support for integration tasks. The beneficiaries of these structures are awaiting the processing of their administrative procedures. The management bodies' specifications – 'cahier des charges', lacking any support for integration tasks, reflecting a lack of genuine desire to integrate the beneficiaries.

In both France and Italy, numerous instances of mismanagement within asylum seeker reception structures have come to light. Since the onset of the emergency around 2013, there has been a notable shift in the oversight of these services (Trasciani and Petrella 2021). The social movement has stepped in to take on the role of quality control, effectively replacing public authorities in many cases. Volunteers and civil society organizations across Europe have banded together to form a solidarity network dedicated to supporting asylum seekers. This grassroots movement has emerged in response to the perceived failures of governmental institutions to adequately address the needs of asylum seekers. Volunteers and activists have mobilized to provide essential services, such as shelter, food, and medical care, filling gaps left by bureaucratic inefficiencies and inadequate support systems. Moreover, this solidarity network serves as a watchdog, monitoring the treatment of asylum seekers within reception structures and advocating for their rights and welfare. Through grassroots initiatives and collective action, volunteers and civil society organizations strive to ensure that asylum seekers receive the dignity and support they deserve during their journey towards safety and resettlement.

As we showed, during the crisis, in Italy the number of CAS, significantly increased. The quality of CAS services garnered attention at both national and international levels. Internationally, several rulings deemed the system insufficiently equipped to host and support asylum seekers. For instance, on July 15, 2012, a judge in Stuttgart, Germany, ruled that Italy was unable to guarantee minimum reception standards. Consequently, the judge refused to apply the Dublin system to the case of an asylum seeker and declined to send them back to Italy, citing treatment that was deemed "inhuman and humiliating" (Romano 2012). At the national level, a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry was established in 2014 to examine the accommodation system, identification and expulsion procedures, and the conditions of detention for migrants. This commission was tasked with analysing the use of public resources by organizations involved in the sector and reporting its findings to the chamber of deputies. The commission criticized the management philosophy of CAS, noting the frequent use of direct assignments, often justified as responses to emergencies, as well as the prevalence of monopoly situations facilitated by the overlap between the managing body and the structure's owner (Atti Parlamentari XVII Legislatura Doc. XXII-bis N. 21, p. 109).



## 7 Conclusions

The article has provided a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of migration reception systems in Italy and France during and after the period of crisis. It has demonstrated how the nature of services and instruments of governance has changed in response to the challenges posed by the migration crisis, highlighting shifts towards both co-management and co-governance models.

One notable change observed during the crisis and its aftermath is the transformation in the nature of services offered to asylum seekers. In France, for example, there has been a reduction in integration-focused services, such as French language classes, and a shift towards more control-oriented functions within reception structures. Similarly, in Italy, third sector organizations (TSOs) are now mandated to impose curfews on beneficiaries, reflecting a broader trend towards security-focused approaches to asylum seeker reception. These changes underscore the impact of securitization narratives and the prioritization of border control measures in response to the migration crisis. Furthermore, the instruments of governance have evolved, with a notable increase in the use of emergency structures directly managed by the Ministry of Interior, particularly in Italy. These emergency structures, such as CAS are established in response to perceived emergencies and often bypass local authorities, reflecting a centralized and securitized approach to migration management.

This article also highlights the persistence of forms of collaboration and co-construction of services in the ordinary reception system, both in France and Italy. This system involves multiple stakeholders, including government agencies, local authorities, and civil society organizations, working together to plan and implement reception programs. This collaborative approach is aligned with the theoretical model of co-governance, emphasizing partnership, shared decision-making, and community engagement. One reason for the prevalence of collaborative governance in the ordinary reception system is its adaptability and responsiveness to local contexts and needs. By involving diverse actors in the planning and delivery of services, the system can better address the complex and multifaceted challenges of migration. Moreover, collaboration fosters a sense of accountability among stakeholders, enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of reception programs. However, the ordinary system represents nowadays a decreasing share of the reception system.

In contrast, the establishment of emergency structures and the marketization of reception services reflect a shift towards co-management and market-oriented relations. The use of competitive public tenders and contracting-out arrangements

introduces market mechanisms into the provision of services, emphasizing efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and performance indicators. For example, in Italy, the transition from grant-based funding to competitive public tenders has led to a proliferation of reception centres operated by both TSOs and for-profit organizations, driven by incentives to compete for contracts. However, while market-oriented approaches may enhance efficiency and resource allocation, they also raise concerns about accountability, transparency, and service quality. The reliance on market mechanisms may prioritize cost savings over the welfare and rights of asylum seekers, leading to potential gaps in service provision and exploitation of vulnerable populations.

The migration crisis and its aftermath have reshaped the landscape of migration reception systems in Italy and France, leading to a coexistence of both co-management and co-governance models. While securitization and centralization have characterized emergency structures, collaboration and co-construction remain prevalent in the ordinary reception system. However, the intent to make more efficient the system using market instrument and in the meanwhile centralised the decision in the hand of public authorities also create a number of challenges, in particular concerning the quality, the transparency and the accountability of the system. While not the primary focus of this article, it is crucial to acknowledge the role of civil society, both organized and individual, during the migration crisis. Many citizens took action by opening their homes or establishing monitoring and support systems within reception centres to assist migrants. These efforts stood in direct opposition to the security and centralization policies implemented by their respective governments. Moving forward, it is essential to strike a balance between efficiency and accountability to ensure the well-being and dignity of asylum seekers.

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