

## **Stuck and Exploited**

Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Italy Between Exclusion,  
Discrimination and Struggles

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# **Stuck and Exploited** Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Italy Between Exclusion, Discrimination and Struggles

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**Abstract** Refugees and asylum seekers in Italy are 'stuck' because they often end up caught in the legal and social limbo of the reception system. The effects of the pandemic and lockdown measures to avoid transmission have stacked on top of these conditions. This scenario, along with the Italian policy field increases the vulnerabilisation of refugees and asylum seekers for their labour exploitation, but also create a space for media struggle, where political forces and social entrepreneurs clash and manipulate the issue of "asylum seekers". This introductory chapter analyses these aspects, introducing the thematic lines of the volume and presenting its contribution.

**Keywords** Refugees and asylum seekers. Italian Reception System. Forced (im)mobility. Exploitation. Social exclusion. Racial discrimination. Struggles.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Reception or Exclusion? – 3 Stuck and Exploited: A Model for Europe. – 4 Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Storm of COVID-19 Pandemic. – 5 Structure of the Volume.

## **1 Introduction**

Representing the complexity of the Italian migration policies and reception system is a very challenging task. As the editors of this volume, we discussed on many occasions the risks and possible conse-



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quences of such a task. We decided to publish a volume that could offer an overall picture of the living conditions of the immigrants in Italy in the last ten years. We came to this decision after a period of study and research, often carried out jointly, always with these goals in mind: to dismantle the mainstream narrative, the effects of which inevitably affect the lives of migrants; to expose the serious foreigners' rights violations, in terms of law, administration, policy, economy, society and healthcare; to highlight the grey areas in the Italian migration and social policies; to point out the obstacles and limitations to the inclusion of immigrants in the society and at work; to present biography and geographical routes of whom, after reaching Italy, have access to the reception system or are left out of it and face ingrained racism, classism, patriarchy and paternalism of the institutions and their new communities.

But that is not all.

We have gathered in one volume many contributions coming from different areas of expertise because we wished to step outside the academic boundaries (or strictly socio-anthropological). This allows non-specialists to get familiar with these topics, often subject to academic and media polarization, where the former has a far too narrow and specific knowledge and the latter too superficial and simplistic. We believe more and more people should be informed about these topics.

For this purpose, along with the issues in migratory policies and in this multifaceted system, we wanted to include in the volume the statistical accounts, especially regarding health and social systems, as well as the most virtuous examples of the third sector and the people who support and assist immigrants. We also deemed it necessary to report the lives of those who countered the issues and struggles coming from short-sighted and racist policies in migration and economy by breaking the exclusion, harnessing and exploitation mechanisms typical in Italy.

Although not easy nor exempt from second thoughts and questioning, the editorial project you hold in your hands shows at least our will as editors: to collect and, most importantly, give back - to Italy and abroad - a general picture of migrations in Italy, and to observe how our country behaves and is able (or not) to react to very different migration projects that encompass different needs. For this reason, we wanted to deal with contemporary migrations from different areas of expertise and different stances, to open up a debate that could hold together the structural features with the complexity of each migration project, be it a woman or an unaccompanied minor, or one of the countless men in our country who end up caught in the informal economy as flexible, blackmailed, depreciated and zero-cost workforce.

## 2 Reception or Exclusion?

For over twenty years, Italy has faced the phenomenon of so-called 'forced' international migrations. By virtue of its geographic position in the Mediterranean, this country constitutes, in many cases, the first landing and the transit country for asylum seekers in their flight from wars, political crises, environmental catastrophes and depletion of resources (Ambrosini 2018; D'Angelo 2019; Hasselberg 2016; Queirolo Palmas 2020).

Between the 1990s and the first part of the new millennium, the country recorded the arrival of people from Albania and Kosovo by sea. Fluctuating numbers of arrivals followed this first phase and were dictated principally by Italian policies aimed at counteracting migration. Citizens from the Horn of Africa and the Maghreb arrived in the years 2008 to 2013. From 2011 to 2013, the geography of the arrivals changed, and the numbers increased on account of the 'Arab springs' of the Libyan Civil War and the Syrian conflict. These conflicts and wars led to about 63,000 arrivals from across the Mediterranean in 2013. Subsequently, the period from 2014 to 2017 opened a new phase of arrivals into Europe, and the Italian coast received over 600,000 sub-Saharan immigrants from the Horn of Africa and Asia (Giovannetti 2018). Thus, in these years, marked by hundreds of deaths along the Mediterranean routes towards Southern Europe, the Sicilian Channel became one of the most important migration corridors in the world, certainly the most dangerous (Pinelli 2017).

Since we are dealing here with the so-called 'forced migrations', these numbers have to be read in the light of the political and legal framework which governs and regulates the right of asylum. While 120,000 requests for international protection were counted from 2001 to 2013, it is in 2014 that we see a qualitative leap: the requests for asylum doubled (from 63,000 to 123,600), arriving at over 130,000 in 2017. As regards the results of the procedure for granting protection, from 1997 to 2002, almost 74% were rejected; from 2002 to 2015, the percentage stands at around 30-40%, rising to 50% in 2015 and over 60% in 2017 (Giovannetti 2018).

As we have already pointed out elsewhere (Della Puppa, Sanò 2021), this growing number of 'rejections' - that is, asylum seekers to whom no form of protection was granted - are unlikely to return to their country of origin. A segment of them represents intense *international mobility* in Europe (Della Puppa, Sanò 2021; Fontanari 2019; Kofman 2019; Vianelli 2017). Another part of them remains in Italy, in situations of extreme vulnerability and social, residential and work marginalisation. In the vast majority of cases, those who decide to stay in the Peninsula live in precarious, informal and unhealthy housing situations (Bolzoni et al. 2015; Netto 2011) and work in conditions of extreme labour exploitation, particularly in the pri-

mary sector (Belloni 2016; Sanò 2017; Talani 2018). However, this also implies intense *internal mobility* (Della Puppa, Sanò 2021; Sanò, Della Puppa 2020), from the Northern regions to the Southern ones and, again, back to the Northern regions; from Eastern regions to the Western ones; and from the Alpine areas to the towns in the valleys; as well as daily cross-border mobility (Aris Escarcena 2018; Belloni 2016; D'Angelo 2019; Menghi 2018; Wyss 2019).

It is important to point out that such conditions affect not only migrants lacking regular residence permits but frequently extend even to those who have regular documents (Sanò et al. 2021; Schuster 2005; Sigona 2012; Storato et al. 2021; Wyss 2019). Administrative legitimacy hardly ever coincides with social, working, and housing inclusion for the refugees. On the contrary, the mechanisms of exploitation of migrant labour have intensified in recent years, and this is largely due to anomalies within the reception centres for refugees and asylum seekers. In many cases, these centres tend to be places for workforce informal recruitment (Sanò 2017).

### 3 Stuck and Exploited: A Model for Europe

Before continuing, we believe it appropriate to dwell on a crucial issue for our reasoning and for the entire volume. As the reader will have noticed, we have distanced ourselves from the expression 'forced migration', a concept that, from our point of view, should be problematised, deconstructed and subjected to criticism. Actually, in the same way, we distance ourselves from the ideological distinction between the so-called 'forced migration' and 'voluntary' or 'economic' migration. This definition - and distinction - of the dominant doxa, suitable for a science of state and a thought of state, is meaningless when compared with the harshness of material relations, as well as social and migration dynamics. To emigrate (and, therefore, to immigrate) is almost always a 'forced choice': a non-choice, determined by structural factors that shape, condition and determine decisions and individual trajectories. Just as it is a *forced* emigration (and, therefore, a *forced* immigration) because of wars, political instability and persecutions, therefore, so is the *emigration* dictated by the depletion of natural and social resources, lack of labour and economic prospects, liberalist policies, dismantling of welfarist protections, growing social polarization, environmental disasters, climate change.

Labelling all kinds of migration as forced can also determine the risk, pointed out by Caroselli and Sempredon (ch. 7) that the "general tendency to consider forced migrants as a temporary population can result into the adoption of temporary policy solutions".

By questioning the possible and real meanings of the adjective 'forced', we realised that if forcing exists, it should rather be framed

within the processes of categorisation, labelling, infantilisation and cohabitation that are put in place when migrants arrive in destination countries. By reversing the point of observation, therefore, one can see that people are *forced* to play the role of the asylum seeker, as otherwise they would be left out of the system or deported; that they are *forced* to live with other people they do not know (forced cohabitation) within the reception centres; that they are *forced* to abide by the rules of the system and be dependent on the operators (relationships of dependency and infantilisation). Based on these elements, we believe that to be correctly understood, the definition of ‘forced’ must be applied to the context of arrival and not so much to the reasons for departure.

As for terminology, refugees and asylum seekers are described by some authors of this volume as ‘stuck’, due to the fact that often they end up caught in the legal and social limbo of the reception system, waiting to receive a status – and, therefore, a residence permit – for international protection, while enduring and adapting to very limited chances of mobility, work, integration and social life.

Similar in many aspects and circumstances to the “*forma campo*” (Dedlich, Pitzalis 2021), the Italian reception model includes physical and legal containment of refugee seekers. But asylum seekers and refugees are equally ‘stuck’ outside of the reception system, doomed to the uncertainty of social, housing and work conditions we mentioned earlier.

In the last year and a half, the effects of the pandemic and lockdown measures to avoid transmission have stacked on top of these conditions. Such measures applied in reception centres, as we will see later, have promoted the exacerbation of living conditions of its dwellers, exposing them to transmission and further rights limitations (Sanò, Tabar 2021). More in general, the effects of marginalisation, caused by virus containment measures, have affected also who lives out of the reception system. They have been cut out from public support measures and exposed to infection risk, as well as locked up – also without real need – inside repatriation centres indefinitely, in any case way beyond legal limits (Della Puppa et al. 2020; Della Puppa, Sanò 2020).

When the political devices that rule asylum overlap with the consequences of social and health crisis, they have, therefore, the effect of undermining the right to mobility and movement, but also the right to rooting and immobility (Sanò, Della Puppa 2020).

In this regard, it must be noted that the worsening of the living conditions of immigrants in Italy has to be traced back not exclusively to the pandemic, but to 2018, the year when Legislative Decree 113/2018 was approved.

With the implementation of this decree, the issues in the international protection framework in Italy gradually aggravated. Tearing down the second reception system (SPRAR), along with abolishing civil registration and ‘humanitarian protection’ – a status that would

cover a lot of situations and provided so many applicants with a regular residence permit (Della Puppa et al. 2020; Della Puppa, Sanò 2021; D'Angelo 2018; Felsen 2018; Perocco 2019) – have indeed accentuated housing and working vulnerability of immigrants.

Although we are not convinced by who assigns to SPRAR system (now SAI, Reception and Integration System) a crucial and fully positive role, as we are aware of the grey areas that have always characterised the second reception (Fabini et al. 2019), here we must perform some critical thinking on control and degradation mechanisms typical of the previous reception system, as well as on the present reconfiguration of the precarisation and marginalisation devices for refugees and asylum seekers, ever more victims of ‘vulnerabilisation’ by society and, above all, labour market (Di Cecco 2019; Dines, Rigo 2015).

As anticipated, the stubborn extraction and exploitation mechanism of workforce contributes heavily in defining the living conditions of refugees and asylum seekers. They turn into and ‘army – especially – of backup farmers’, even more exposed to blackmailing, flexibility and low cost labour.

Most of the contributions here gathered revolve around the issues posed by Legislative Decree 132/2018, and it is highlighted how this decree have complicated the migration and inclusion processes for migrants. However, for a complete analysis of the right of asylum in Italy, ultimately we must mention the very recent Legislative Decree 130/2020, greeted by main Italian mass media as a “removal of Salvini’s decrees”.

If submitted to scientific scrutiny, it is clear that the new immigration regulations, approved by the so-called ‘Conte 2 Cabinet’ – controlled mainly by Five Star Movement and Democratic Party – do not erase anything essential in the previous Law Decrees 113/2018 and 53/2019, with just a few secondary adjustments and an overall validation of the repressive and criminalising stance towards the immigrants – and the social struggles (Della Puppa et al. 2020) – found in there. In other words, it has to be said that CAS, CIE, CPR (for which at most there is a reduction from 180 to 90 days of detention extendable for another 30 days), CARA, Hotspot, and the various detention structures for refugees, asylum seekers and illegal immigrants *have not been abolished* – and there is no plan of doing so. These are all places where, not rarely, systematic violations of human rights are reported. At the same time, the SPRAR system *has not been restored*, the only one that could guarantee minimum results in social inclusion by placing international protection seekers into small structures integrated within the local social fabric, into training courses and employability programs. Although, in our opinion, the SPRAR system does not represent a ‘glorious past’ to reclaim, as we pointed out in these first pages, it is not equally possible to deny that it was a more effective and embraceable system – despite the coexistence of very

different intervention modalities (Sanò 2018) – when compared to the present one, which is based on the conception of emergency and ‘extraordinary’ reception that requires to amass high numbers of asylum seekers in large centres separated from the local communities.

As of now, the “reception and integration system”, created to replace SPRAR and SIPROIMI, still has unknown and unclear features to allow a scientific validation of the improvement brought about by the new decree regarding second reception. However, we agree with the analysis offered by Giovannetti (2020) on the importance of wording, which stopped aiming at the reception of a specific target (asylum seekers and people entitled to protection) but more generally aims at reception and integration, as apparently shown by the wording SAI.

A further clarification that we deem appropriate, because of its relevance to the issues discussed in this volume, is that the humanitarian protection – which, up until the decrees of the previous Administration led by Lega Nord and Five Star Movement, was the form of protection through which asylum seekers could more frequently hope for a residence permit – *has not been restored*, but simply new instances of ‘special’ protection has been ‘added’.

Similarly, the link between temporary residence permit for asylum seekers and residence permit for workers *has not been abolished*. If an asylum seeker who obtained a regular job contract, thanks to the temporary residence permit, then sees their international protection denied, they will be without residence permit and without a regular job, becoming effectively ‘illegal’. It is a condition that affects tens of thousands of immigrants, who have been living and working in Italy even for years, waiting for their procedure to be concluded.

Incidentally, we add that the rule for withdrawal of the Italian citizenship, for the immigrants who obtained it and committed specific criminal offences, *has not been abolished*; the rules aimed at contrasting and discouraging any possible social opposition or revival of trade union struggle and most importantly aimed at striking grassroots syndicalism that organises mainly immigrant workers (Della Puppa et al. 2020) – firstly SI Cobas and ADL Cobas (Cillo, Pradel-la 2018); the second grade sentencing has not been restored for the asylum request, which the Law 46/2017 had abolished (Della Puppa et al. 2020), thus creating and not changing, again, a clear discrimination of immigrants.

The only slight improvements in the Legislative Decree are an expansion of the instances eligible for residence permits for “special protection”, but always subject to arbitrary decisions; the marginally broader *possibility* to convert work permits into residence permits released for other reasons; the restored civil registration of asylum seekers; the reduction of sanctions for NGOs. Regarding this last point, however, what remains implicit is the suspect of implications with ‘human trafficking’, as well as the criminalisation of rescue at

sea and the possibility that NGO's ships could be forced to obey the Libyan coast guard (Della Puppa, Sanò 2021; Perocco 2019).

So this is how the whole security-based, discriminatory and racist stance of the Italian migration policies, past and recent, is basically reiterated (Basso 2010; Basso, Perocco 2003; Della Puppa et al. 2020; Ferrero, Perocco 2011; Perocco 2012).

If, from one side, the new laws – introduced first by Legislative Decree 113/2018 and then by Legislative Decree 130/2020 – became and are becoming an example of migration and asylum policy for the other EU member states, on the other hand the EU, through Italy, is also relocating and outsourcing its external border, making agreements with adjacent peripheral countries and 'institutions', such as Libya and Turkey. A reinforcement of the system of physical and social borders located outside and within the EU is taking and took place. It is no coincidence that the European Agenda on Migration was launched, in May 2015, to better regulate migration movements, between 2015 and 2020, and defined as "the European response which conjugates internal and external European policy for better managing migration in all its aspects", by the Italian Ministry of the Interior, in 2015. Therefore, for migration policies, Italy proves, once again, to be "a model for Europe" (Basso, Perocco 2003; Della Puppa, Sanò 2021; Perocco 2019).

The policy field, however, is not 'just' one of economic tensions, resulting in the vulnerabilisation of refugees and asylum seekers for their labour *exploitation*, but also a space for *media* struggle, where political forces and social entrepreneurs clash and manipulate the issue of migrants and asylum seekers ideologically to impose a speech hegemony in the national, and increasingly international, political scenario. Refugees and asylum seekers, therefore, are 'exploited' also symbolically, politically and by the media.

It is no coincidence, then, that in this volume are told also the stories of who arrives in Italy by land; stories that generally do not find space within media narrations and representations, which prefer to sensationalise borders that to be reached require sea crossing.

Appointed with the role of modern *aidos*, the media display indeed a great interest for stories and pictures of people who cross the sea, creating a literary connection, more than historical or emotional, with the epic genre and, particularly, with the idea that the greatest dangers always come from the sea.

Some authors in this volume compensate for the missing interest shown by media for whoever comes to Italy by land, and point out – on many occasions – that it is necessary to observe the stubborn exclusion, marginalisation and invisibilisation mechanisms that affect people reaching national borders through routes that do not include the sea (Caroselli and Semperebon, ch. 7).

These people are legally labelled as 'Dublinati' or 'out of quota'; the latter definition speaks volumes about the exclusion (or expulsion, as

argues Pontiggia in ch. 3) that they are facing and that, in its complete application - from the access procedures to the reception system to the services for the individual - determines effectively the production of subjectivities doubly excluded and certainly more invisible than others.

Apparently, however, this invisibility does not preclude the possibility, for these people, to enact practices of subjectification, respondent to life forms that perceive invisibility as a potential and not just an obstacle to self-determination (Queirolo Palmas, Rahola 2020).

In contrast, in many cases, for example for those who live inside informal camps, invisibility can become a guarantee; it can safeguard a life economy that would be persecuted and criminalised if brought out in the open.

In the description of the grey areas (Avallone, ch. 1) that cross reception and inclusion policies in Italy, the authors of this volume do not forget, however, to clarify the multiple and multiform tactics used by who, immobilised and exploited, tries anyway to overcome and face administrative, legal, economic and social obstacles that punctuate their existence. Therefore, the presence of networks (formal and informal) turns out to be decisive for people without papers, in that it provides them with a social capital that, as in emergency and regularisation measures (Dal Zotto, Lo Cascio, Piro, ch. 14), can sometimes be crucial and decisive. However, from the reports of the authors in this volume that describe the role played by the migration third-sector actors, it is evident that there has been a stark change in the functioning of social nets. Undoubtedly, the institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of reception have contributed to this change, and therefore the routes and migration projects of the individuals also changed. If in the past the migration chains could rely mainly on the aid and support of informal networks, consisting mostly of religious entities, compatriots, friends and relatives already in the country, now who is responsible for facilitating social and working access of immigrants are, almost completely, the third-sector actors (Sanò, Zanotelli, forthcoming). Ultimately, what is proved by the instances in this volume (Marchetti, ch. 2; Marebello and Parisi, ch. 6; Storato, Sanò, Della Puppa, ch. 8) is that in the policies and inclusion processes of immigrants, the institutionalisation and formalisation of the practices represent a crucial role, even after the reception, in the phase that is now generically called 'post-reception'. When the previous migration policies have largely changed to highly implement procedures in the phases and steps that characterise migration projects, and the effects of which are essential in the mechanisms of selection and differential inclusion (Mezzadra, Nielsen 2013) active at every level, from reception to housing and working inclusion practices, it is then perfectly clear that such change aims, ultimately, at replacing any practice and relation of informal support and aid, within and without reception. With this we do not want to discredit the

presence and work of activists and informal social nets, but rather highlight the fact that such practices and relations find, nowadays, every kind of resistance, especially by media, politics and economy (Storato, Sanò, Della Puppa, ch. 8).

Consequently, it seems only right to remark here the centrality of the work done by the informal political and support nets, because considering the economic hardships and political obstacles that they must face – especially in those Southern Italy regions with a welfare system still mostly deficient and unequal – contrary to the mainstream narrative that depicts them as only interested to profit or that do not acknowledge their importance and work, they instead act only for the interest of immigrants and to improve their living conditions, even without the necessary resources, mainly directed to the projects formally acknowledged and, most of all, recognisable. This lack of resources is the effect of a precise government migration policy, to vulnerabilise immigrants, to deny their human and social rights, including the right to mobility.

From the one hand, we aim to highlight the consequences that such political strategies have on migrants, emphasising the fundamental issues of freedom of movement and the abolition of borders, the denunciation of repression and the disavowal of rights to which migrants are subject while entering into Italy and Europe – or into Europe through Italy – and the obstacles placed by Italian and European governments to their mobility. However, at the same time, we would like to recognise the structural causes underlying contemporary migrations (global inequalities, wars, colonialism and neocolonialism, environmental and climatic devastation...) and, consequently, underline how international migrations themselves – from global peripheries towards the metropolises of the world system and within them – do not constitute a generic response to a generic impulse to migrate, but, as we have anticipated, a mandatory choice, since no one leaves their country, family and friends unless somehow forced to do so (Basso, Perocco 2003). Therefore, if the forms of disavowal and denial of the right to immigration and mobility must be denounced, the causes that emigration and mobility impose on them must be denounced even more.

Above all, we want to make it clear that the political devices embedded in the borders and acted upon through the repression of migrants and the criminalisation of mobility are not ends in themselves or the mere denial of a ‘civil right’, rather they constitute instruments of repression, a tool of submission and discipline, aimed at making migrants accept increasingly worse living and working conditions. Therefore, the issue of mobility (and its denial) must be read in its intimate connection with that of work (and its exploitation), and the political and symbolic dimension must be traced back to the economic sphere.

#### 4 Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Storm of COVID-19 Pandemic

This volume stems from reflections that emerged during a panel hosted by the *Migration Conference*, organised in Bari, in June 2019. Since that meeting, despite a relatively short period, the planet and the capitalist system that organises its economic and social activities have been deeply and irreversibly marked by the profound changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>1</sup> and the consequent – ecological, health, economic and social – crisis on a global scale. As a factor characterising this phase of capitalism, the pandemic will leave nothing ‘as it was before’ and will constitute a watershed moment in what has been called the “age of migration” (de Haas et al. 2020). Obviously, the social earthquake caused by the pandemic swept also over the refugees and asylum seekers condition and the Italian reception system. Therefore we could not refrain from including an insight on such impact, so we gathered the contributions – sociological, legal, medical, anthropological – arranged in the second section of the volume.

The COVID-19 pandemic, indeed, has exposed the general issues of the Italian healthcare system, partly due to the functioning of the reception services for the most vulnerable groups and specifically to the features of the so-called ‘closed communities’ (retirement homes, RSA, etc.). The Health Ministry itself included these situations among the most exposed to infection risk, and noted their difficulties in putting into practice physical distancing and the precautions included in the regulations of the DCPCMs (decree of the President of the Council of Ministers), because of overcrowding and limited spaces at their disposal. Similar places are the Centres and projects for reception of asylum seekers and refugees – Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS), reception centres of the Protection system for protection claimants (SIPROIMI, ex SPRAR) –, also often overcrowded, with forced cohabitation, limited space, issues related to the impossibility of going out to perform preparatory activities for autonomy (e.g., work placements).

Differently from the ‘first reception’, within which the protocol and guideline adoption valid in the country has been already planned and formalised (landing screening, identification procedures, evaluation of vulnerability), the ‘second reception’, in particular, appears to be lacking any measure or procedure nationally unified, and they change depending on the context.

Despite relatively little time, much has already been written on the impact of the Coronavirus crisis on migration, migrants and mo-

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<sup>1</sup> Here we would like to make a distinction between the pathogen called ‘SARS-CoV-2’ or ‘New Coronavirus’, and the disease developed, the ‘COVID-19’, acronym of ‘Coronavirus Disease 19’.

bility (Della Puppa, Perocco 2021), both from an international perspective (Della Puppa, Perocco 2021; Pastore 2021; Prencipe, Sanfilippo 2021; Sirkeci 2020; Sirkeci, Cohen 2020) and with a specific focus on Italy (Ambrosini 2020; Della Puppa, Perocco 2021; Pastore 2021; Prencipe, Sanfilippo 2021, Sanò 2020).

Many of these studies contemplate, both formally and in their content, the urgency of capturing the emergency and its most immediate effects; they are inevitably unsystematic and fragmented, but despite that it is possible to identify some recurring issues, where the relation between health emergency, migrations and reception system has been observed (Attanasio 2020; Tabar 2020). Among them we mention: mobility limitation (international and national) of people (Attanasio 2020; McAuliffe et al. 2020; Rango, Borgnäs 2020; Sirkeci, Yüceşahin 2020; Zambrano et al. 2020); the increased difficulty in order to access the procedures for international protection recognition and acquisition of residence permits (Agier 2020); a high infection risk in reception and detention centres (Navarrete, Sanchez 2020), due to living conditions in the centres (Agier 2020; Della Puppa et al. 2020, Sanò, Tabar 2021); the impossibility for many migrant workers to move and reach their workplaces because they lack a contract to show in case of control (Samaddar 2020; Marabello 2020; Sanò, Della Puppa 2021); the impoverishment recorded among migrant and precarious workers (Fondazione Leone Moressa 2021; Samaddar 2020); the rise in risks in the migration routes (Sanchez, Achilli 2020); discriminations in the access to prevention and treatment of asylum seekers.

What emerges clearly and upon which all the different researches converge is that what we can frame as a double (health and social) crisis (Della Puppa, Perocco 2021) – as well as an economic crisis and of the capitalist system –, has affected social classes, workers, genders, territories, ‘ethnic’, national and social groups in different ways, deepening social inequalities and worsening the social conditions of the disadvantaged ones: among the most affected social groups, we find migrants and, among migrants (Fondazione Leone Moressa 2021; Fasani, Mazza 2020; Giammarinaro, Palumbo 2020; Navarrete, Sanchez 2020), especially women (European Network of Migrant Women 2020), but, even more, asylum seekers and refugees (Filippi, Giliberti 2021; Pitzalis 2020; Sanò 2020; Sanò, Tabar 2021).

As Della Puppa and Perocco (2021) already underlined, restricted in their mobility and stranded in countries of departure or transit, huddled in reception centres in precarious conditions and hampered in admission procedures and applications for asylum or international protection, forced to work despite health risks, discriminated against in their access to prevention or treatment, impoverished and more exploited in the labour market, accused of carrying the virus or being immune from it (Della Puppa, Perocco 2020; Pitzalis 2020; Sanò

2020), asylum seekers and refugees are one of the most vulnerable groups at risk of suffering the heaviest consequences of the pandemic.

Both the pandemic and migration reveal the deepest contradictions and social issues of contemporary society, its political organization (Della Puppa, Perocco 2020). If much has been written on the social transformations brought about by migration, as well as, in the wake of Sayad's lesson (1999; 2006), on the ability of the migration to reveal what one has an interest in ignoring, still little has been said about the global change that the pandemic is bringing about, as well as about its social revealing and political unveiling action (Della Puppa, Perocco 2020).

Some aspects of the 'mirror effect' of the pandemic have already emerged. We can give two examples:

1. An even more intense criminalisation of the im-mobility of refugees and asylum seekers, represented as 'infectors', that is manifested in the media and political attack against the reception centres in which COVID-19 broke out, almost always attributable to the Italian social workers who worked there and, above all, to the conditions of massing and absence of security measures that characterise these places. However, this criminalisation is also revealed in their confinement on quarantine ships moored in the ports of the Italian coasts.
2. The reduction to "work fodder" of refugees and asylum seekers and the function of "industrial - or, better, as we already underlined - reserve army", in which they are confined and to which they are condemned, to the point that it is possible to speak of a process of "refugeesation" of the agricultural workforce (Dines, Rigo 2015); as emerged on the occasion of the amnesty provision for illegal migrants (enormously increased thanks to the aforementioned governmental measures - Law Decree 113/2018; Law 132/2018; Law Decree 53/2019), who should have put their health at risk, exposing themselves to contagion, in exchange for a temporary and short-term residence permit, to relaunch the Italian agricultural economy, in crisis due to the pandemic and the first lockdown, during the harvest season (Dal Zotto, Lo Cascio, Piro, ch. 14).

Also the risk of infection that asylum seekers have faced and still face in reception centres without adequate conditions must be traced back to the aforementioned dismantling of the SPRAR system - that advantaged mainly the bigger centres, where many people are amassed, often managed by big cooperatives able to be competitive on the market, especially after the reduction in resources for reception. These centres, besides the fact that they almost never provide real social inclusion programmes, are organised in dormitories with many people, where it is impossible to enact self-quarantine for whoever is under monitoring and therefore shows the first symp-

toms of what might be COVID-19 disease, with serious consequences for vulnerable people (immunosuppressed, sick, torture victims, etc.).

A further note must be said for CPRs, detention centres for immigrants without residence permit and, therefore, waiting for repatriation. Again, they are structures without any basic measure to contain the virus spread. Consequentially, in many CPRs there have been outbreaks, but despite that they have not been closed, instead they kept on receiving new guests. It must be mentioned that the 'guilt' of the immigrants secluded in the CPRs is to not possess a regular residence permit - it is not, then, a criminal offence - and the law provides that, if the repatriation cannot be carried out in the shortest time, it is not possible to strip of any freedom people who did not commit crimes. Given that after the 'first wave' of COVID-19 the borders - especially the Italian ones - have been closed, there has not been reasonable timeframes for repatriations, so the detention of immigrants without residence permit - who often would stay at safer accommodation out of the CPR - was no longer legal.

To complete the picture of the conditions of refugees and asylum seekers in Italy, within the frame of the pandemic, it is useful to recall the arbitrary application of the Civil Protection's ruling (658/2020) regarding urgent food solidarity measures that provided for the population to be helped in case of difficulties in the food supply, for economical issues, for social vulnerability or other reasons. This ruling has been interpreted very inconsistently by the different municipalities: the municipality of Perugia, for example, asked for the requirement of possessing the European residence permit for long-term residents, thus excluding the vast group of people without such papers, including many homeless individuals, and countless refugees and asylum seekers (Sanò et al. 2021; Storato et al. 2021).

Furthermore, it is possible that, shortly, when humanity will have learned how to live with the pandemic and societies will be reshaped by its social-economic effects, the 'virus issue' will be used instrumentally and ideologically in politics and the rhetoric against refugees and asylum seekers. That is, punishing legislation and propaganda against them - temporarily supplanted in the media by the theme of the pandemic - could become even harsher in affecting refugees and asylum seekers, making entry and regular residence more difficult, discriminating them in the labour market and several areas of social life (Della Puppa, Perocco 2021).

## 5 Structure of the Volume

With the evolution of the health crisis and the economic and social consequences created by the policies and measures adopted to contain the virus, we deemed useful to divide this volume into two sections, in or-

der to stimulate a reflection on continuities and changes in the crisis era. Even though imaginary, this subdivision allows us, indeed, to put on paper that critical continuity line that crosses migrations, making of this field – constantly exposed to media and political tensions – the indicator of socio-economical inequalities and disparities.

The first section contains the contributions from authors who, besides defining the legal-administrative frame where immigrants move or must move, offer at the same time a focus on different local conditions. The result is a kind of blending of propositions and practices more or less virtuous, which reflects an extremely articulated and complex national situation, where besides numerous grey areas sometimes there can be sparks of light.

In the first chapter, Gennaro Avallone describes clearly and thoroughly the features of the Italian reception system, showing how some of the enforced laws and regulations produce social effects on the life of people stationing in reception centres, which turn out to be harmful. With the help of interviews held with migrants and the authors of the campaign ‘LasciateCIEntrare’, Avallone assesses the asylum right in Italy and finally offers possible solutions, proposing a change of pace for the reception policies, which, according to the Author, must necessarily be reconverted e reoriented to grant housing access as a universal right.

In the second chapter, Chiara Marchetti focuses instead on the project Wonderful World House, built by the cooperative CIAC in Parma to answer actively and in an innovative fashion to the administrative and social exclusion of immigrants that occurred after Law 132/2018. In particular, the Author researches on how, after the general worsening of the material living conditions of immigrants, the third-sector activities could effectively represent a process of community building, not just with the goal of enacting virtuous and voluntary reception activities, but by becoming a practice of social innovation.

In the third chapter instead, Stefano Pontiggia describes the social and administrative dispersions of the homeless refugees and asylum seekers in Milan. The Author, in this case, reflects upon the biographic and geographic trajectories of the people who, once expelled from the reception system, end up living on the street. Particularly, Pontiggia discusses the founding mechanisms of what he defines as ‘expulsionism’. Borrowing this term from Sassen (2014), Pontiggia argues that “the term ‘expulsionism’ is a set of political decisions, daily practices, and bureaucratic communications oriented to manage a population that is perceived as not deserving state support based on specific ‘models’ (in Geertzian terms) of society”.

In the fourth chapter, Devisri Nambiar and Serena Scarabello highlight the issues that the female migrants victims of human trafficking face in their regularisation processes. Through the ethnographic method, the two Authors deal with structural problems starting from

two case studies. With the report on the lives and experiences of two women met on site, Nambiar and Scarabello suggest to reason on the overlapping between being asylum seeker and also victim of human trafficking. By doing so, the Authors challenge the institutions and operators in charge, pointing out the contradictions and stretches that can be generated by the reception and asylum system when based only on general criteria and models, with deep consequences for the women who refuse to play the passive role of the victim.

The fifth chapter deals with the reception system in Bologna, or better said, with a system that earned over time the reputation of 'model of excellence'. The hypothesis of Stefania Spada is that in reality it is not a model at all and to prove it she challenges it by measuring its effectiveness against the effects and consequences of the enforcement of Legislative Decree 132/2018. As opposed to the social innovation experience described by Marchetti, in this case the Author informs us of the flaws in a system that cannot answer to the social problems posed by the decree, or at least not in a way expected from a model of excellence. The recent measures adopted to face the health crisis also confirm Spada's hypothesis. In front of a national and general problem, the Author seems anyway to glimpse and report a decisive ambivalence, sign of the continuity with the social and economical inequalities preceding the pandemic outbreak. While for some, in fact, the health crisis has proved to be a 'blessing', for others, especially for migrants without residence permit, housing and job, it has been a real 'damnation'.

By focusing again on the reception system in Bologna, Selenia Marabello and Maria Luisa Parisi address in the sixth chapter the issue of unaccompanied foreign minors. Starting with an analysis of the legal and administrative conditions of migrants in this age group, the Authors look into the main problems of the reception system intended for minors and, at the same time, explain the potential of a co-housing project (Vesta) which provides for temporary placement of young migrants in the houses of Italian families and friends. As seen with Spada, the present health crisis is an indicator of the issues and grey areas of the reception system in Bologna (and beyond), but unlike that one, Marabello and Parisi show the light, or rather, the change and transformation opportunities that come from the third sector, interpreted as a place of politicisation.

As already pointed out at the beginning of this introduction, in the seventh chapter, Serena Caroselli and Michela Sempredon warn us about the use of a terminology that is actually decisive for the articulation and enactment of practices and policies crossed by a logic mainly of emergency. Thus, along with the attention for the stretch of the term 'forced' - where the effects of its misuse can, from time to time, translate into the adoption and implementation of temporary and precarious policies - they emphasise also the term 'transit', used

instrumentally by local and national politics to legitimise the transitory nature of the solutions and measures activated. Through the analysis of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, crucial node for incoming and outgoing traversing along the Brennero route, Caroselli and Sempredon report the marginalisation, invisibilisation and exclusion processes that affect people coming to Italy by land and describe Bolzano as: “a ‘grey area’ characterised by increasing forms of institutional violence, associated on the one side with the control of mobility and a more and more organised and systematic management of the border, as a point of intersection and re-distribution of people in transit, overlapping with stratified historical and linguistic borders; on the other with the limitation of access to asylum procedures and reception as a result”.

In the eighth chapter, Storato, Sanò and Della Puppa analyse the role and capacity of the third sector and the civil society in the Trentino region to answer to the uncertainty that characterises housing and social inclusion paths of refugees and asylum seekers in this context. In this case as well, the dismantling of the reception system, enacted after the enforcement of the security decrees, suggests a reflection upon the actual potentialities of the practices and activities executed by the third sector. The interviews and the histories of the operators show, indeed, how the legal and regulatory consequences in these years have not just deteriorated the material living conditions of immigrants, but they worsened also the third sector and civil society activities that support migrants. Even though the effects of Law 132/2018 have dramatically hit reception workers by shrinking enormously their field of action and by reducing the economical and social possibilities of migrants, still what emerges from interviews and field work is new chances of social inclusion are gradually taking shape.

In the last chapter of this section, Martina Pasqualetto and Fabio Perocco focus on migrant struggles and forms of self-determination, reviewing some events occurred between 2011 and 2019. Firstly, the two Authors bring into focus the transformations that followed the progressive development of migrant struggle groups and associations. In tune with what partially said in this introduction, the two Authors reflect upon how the changes occurred in the field of migrations and, specifically, reception institutionalisation and migration projects procedurisation, have radically changed the nature of the struggles pursued by migrants. If in the past migrants used to come together within associations (mainly cultural or religious) or trade unions, nowadays most of the protests against popular and institutional racism take place within reception and detention centres.

The second section of the volume, completely focused on the consequences of the still ongoing health crisis, opens with the chapter of Fabio Perocco. In these pages, the Author looks into the effects of

the Pan-syndemics on racial inequalities affecting health within the migrants. After a description of the causes and general effects triggered by the Syndemic, Perocco reports the data of three international contexts (United States, England, Brazil) to highlight the centrality of the 'race' in establishing and reinforcing health inequalities. Lastly, the Author focuses on the link between health crisis and immigrants, drawing attention to the level of work exploitation and institutional abandonment experienced by migrant during this pandemic.

In the eleventh chapter, Attanasio ponders over the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the lives of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. By using a catchphrase repeatedly promoted by media at the health crisis beginning, the author believes that: "We are all facing the same storm - as somebody put it -, but our boats are rather different". Starting from this definition, Attanasio's chapter shows us in practice how the life of migrants in their target countries or along the borders have drastically worsened with the start of the pandemic.

In the twelfth chapter are described, from a specifically medical point of view, the conditions of the asylum seekers and refugees during the first phase of the pandemic. By using statistics, national and international, Salvatore Geraci, Elisa Vischetti, Mario Affroni, Silvia Declich, and Maurizio Marceca provide us, in these pages, with the opportunity of observing how social inequalities affect health inequalities. To this end, the Authors deploy the concept of *Global Health*, an interpretative and theoretical tool capable of reading and holding together the complexity of the elements that characterise the health, including those linked to the field of migration.

Marco Ferrero and Chiara Roverso analyse, in the thirteenth chapter, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the legal condition of asylum seekers. Starting from the issues that structurally compose the reception system and the migration policies, the two Authors look into escalation in the material and health conditions of migrants, evaluating the health and social risks amplified by the bottlenecks and the expulsions that characterised the health emergency.

Dal Zotto, Lo Cascio and Piro, in the fourteenth chapter, deal with the topic of migration policies and, in particular, the emersion and regularisation measures for migrants and asylum seekers in Italy. After a dense description of the measures historically present in the country, the authors bring into focus the recent emersion measure, activated to answer to the economical effects promoted by the health crisis. To do so, they use the data extracted from a qualitative survey on effectiveness of the amnesty and, particularly, on the incidence of regularisation applications among migrants working in the agriculture. What emerges is basically the extremely low percentage of applications filed by migrants working in the farming sector and an almost completely ineffectiveness of this measure.

In the fifteenth chapter, Giovanni Cordova focuses on the impact of migration policies and Coronavirus on the migrants living in slums and informal camps in the Gioia Tauro Plateau. In particular, the Author sheds light on the serious lack of health measures and policies for the slums dwellers, whose hygienic-health and social conditions have been heavily challenged during the health crisis, as they were already structurally unstable, unsafe and precarious.

In conclusion, as editors we would like to thank the Authors (and the anonymous revisers) that worked in the drafting of this volume, which we could be of help to whoever wishes to explore, from different areas and perspectives, the reception and asylum system in Italy.

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