Between Policy and Peril: How Italy Fails Its Refugees

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This project investigates whether Italian migration policies from the past 10 years perpetuate violence in refugee reception facilities. While there is no research looking at the relationship between migration policies and violence in reception facilities, previous researchers have examined the political tension within the European Union (EU) regarding migration policy, and the relationship between national sovereignty and supranational governance. The multidimensional nature of the social suffering theory is used to help explain the causes of suffering happening in the reception facilities in Italy. This research will collect primary data from two interviews, and the secondary data from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports, Asylum Information Database (AID) reports, and Italian laws decrees and migration policies. Furthermore, a thematic analysis of the interviews and articles will evaluate trends between migration policies and violence in refugee reception facilities. The results from this research found that Italian migration policies and the Italian government perpetuate violence and unnecessary suffering for asylum seekers in reception facilities. Constant policy revisions produce a systematic form of violence for asylum seekers, while the Italian government violates basic human rights by not providing basic services in both levels of reception facilities. Bringing to light the issues in the reception facilities and the challenges for asylum seekers helps bring awareness to what is happening in these facilities, while pushing for policy reform to improve the reception facilities' conditions to ensure future refugees do not have to endure the same violence and suffering.

Key Words: Italy, Migration Policies, Asylum Seekers

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Imagine being forced to flee your home due to war, persecution, or political collapse only to arrive in a place that promises safety but delivers fear and silent suffering. In Italy, reception facilities meant to house asylum seekers have become holding pens where vulnerability is met with neglect, and rights are reduced to rhetoric. Cramped rooms, inadequate healthcare, and scarce access to legal aid become part of everyday life. Trauma you hoped to escape is compounded by a new kind of violence: systemic neglect masked by legal bureaucracy. The new violence is not always loud, it seeps in quietly when systems designed to protect instead erode dignity. The buildings may wear the label of "reception," but in reality the buildings represent confinement and confusion, a limbo where survival eclipses stability. Behind the bureaucratic language of immigration policy are lives caught in cycles of institutional violence and abandonment. Italian laws, often revised with shifting political winds, fail to account for the human cost of their inconsistencies. Slowly, but in plain sight, asylum seekers become victims of the broken system.

The Dublin Act implemented in the EU member states significantly increased the number of refugees in Italy since many asylum seekers cross the Mediterranean Sea and enter Europe through Italy. For clarification, the Dublin Act requires all refugees to claim asylum in the European country of the refugees' point of entry. Mendola and Busetta (2018) note how since the implementation of the Dublin Act and the refugee crisis in 2015, Italy jumped from 84,000 to 130,000 asylum applications. Italy has threatened to withhold billions of Euros from the EU unless other member states help with the rapidly increasing amount of asylum seekers in Italy (Davis, 2020, p. 264). To grasp what is happening in Italy, it is crucial to understand how the implementation of the Dublin Act further intensifies the strain on Italy's resources and infrastructure. Research on the laws and policies in place in Italy can serve as references for future policy change.

Italy does not treat all refugees in reception facilities equally. Refugees in level 2 facilities, such as SAI (Sistema di accoglienza e integrazione), also referred to as SPRAR (Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati), receive more resources and better accommodations than refugees in level 1 facilities, such as CAS (Centri di Accoglienza straordinaria) reception facilities. Buccione and Zurla (2022) report CAS facilities only provide food and lodging. Asylum seekers in CAS facilities cannot work outside of the facility, thus requiring asylum seekers to find and fund any additional services that might be needed (Acocella & Turchi, 2020, p. 80). On the other hand, SAI facilities provide an abundance of services to help with social integration such as language classes, legal services, job assistance, medical and mental health support, vocational training, and school for children (Terlizzi, 2020, pp. 20-21). While the Italian government does not give refugees a voice when deciding the reception facility placement, vulnerable people such as women and children are more likely to be placed in a level two facility. Research

on the stark contrast in services and living conditions can reveal how the legal and policy framework in Italy leads to unequal treatment of refugees. Understanding these differences is key to evaluating how Italian laws and policies influence the outcomes for refugees in Italy's reception system.

This research examines the relationship between laws and policies in Italy and Italian reception facilities. The research focuses on how the relationship may perpetuate the mistreatment of refugees in Italian reception facilities. I collected and analyzed data from three structured interviews, various NGO and census reports, along with Italian laws and policies. The interviewees were one Italian social worker and two current refugees in Italy. Italian laws change so frequently with few people looking into or caring about how the changes impact reception facilities and refugees in Italy. This research aims to pinpoint specific disparities in the law and how it negatively impacts refugees so policy changes can occur.

The Italian migration policies and the Italian government perpetuate violence and unnecessary suffering for asylum seekers in reception facilities. Government policies produce a systemic form of violence for asylum seekers due to the constant revision of the policies. The government violates human rights by not providing basic services in both levels of reception facilities. The literature review explains the political tension within the EU in regards to immigration, the debate between scholars on national sovereignty and supranational governance, and the usage of the social suffering theory. The research design describes the interview process, how the secondary data was collected, and how the data was analyzed using thematic coding. The analysis section dives into the living conditions in reception facilities, asylum seekers integration into Italian society, and the legal, social, and political challenges for asylum seekers. Finally, the discussion section determines the theoretical implications and the global importance of the analysis findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

European Union Immigration

Scholars investigated the political tension within the European Union (EU) regarding migration policy. The tension stems from the lack of solidarity in migration governance as agreed upon by member states. Bryne et al. (2020) found the Dublin Regulation, which assigns responsibility for asylum seekers to the first country of entry, placed disproportionate pressure on frontline states like Greece and Italy. Instead of adopting collective solutions, many member states resisted efforts to relocate asylum seekers, undermining the principle of burden-sharing (Bryne et al., 2020, p. 875). Luedtke (2009) similarly found that national governments often use EU directives to justify restricting migrant rights rather than expanding protections. Eastern European countries like the Visegrád states (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic) were reluctant to accept asylum quotas following the

2015 migration crisis (Favi, 2022). Although scholars already acknowledge the failures of other member states, research has not covered the direct impacts these failures have on frontline states. This study will look at how the failures of other member states to help alleviate the pressure of Italy receiving refugees impacts the laws Italy put in place and the conditions of the reception facilities.

Scholars examined the relationship between national sovereignty and supranational governance. EU institutions aim to standardize immigration policies, but national governments choose to prioritize domestic concerns. Luedtke (2009) investigated how EU institutions such as the European Commission and European Parliament advocate for liberal immigration policies, yet national leaders often push back by implementing restrictive measures. The Hague Programme and the Lisbon Treaty attempted to shift more control to EU institutions, yet member states retained significant discretion over legal migration (Luedtke, 2009, p. 3). Similarly, Byrne et al. (2020) noticed that this power struggle intensified during the 2015 refugee crisis, exposing weaknesses in the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), which led to the collapse of key EU legal commitments as some states ignored asylum regulations. The battle between national interest and European integration for migration governance will have a direct impact on the laws and policies put in place in Italy. Therefore, the current study will explore the impacts of the greater EU migration policies on Italian laws and the violence refugees face in Italy.

Social Suffering Theory

Social suffering has an interdisciplinary nature of exploration. Theorists use various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy to address how social structures contribute to suffering. Renault (2010) discovered how social suffering is a critical concept for understanding contemporary injustices, necessitating an interdisciplinary approach integrating social and psychological dimensions. Similarly, Victora (2011) found how the anthropological perspective argues that suffering is not just a biological or psychological phenomenon but a social process embedded in historical and political contexts. Scholars have not used the Social Suffering theory in relation to refugees or the refugee crisis. The following study will use the interdisciplinary nature of the theory to discover if social structures contribute to the suffering of asylum seekers in Italy.

Social suffering theorists view suffering as a multidimensional issue. The concept of suffering extends beyond individual distress, encompassing political, economic, and institutional factors, such as laws, contributing to collective suffering. Maconick et al. (2020) recognize the difficulty for people to separate the social and political contexts responsible for perpetuating suffering in the forms of poverty, trauma, and powerlessness. Victora (2011) states how Indigenous communities' suffering and health outcomes are a

direct result of policies failing to address the historical marginalization of Indigenous people, thus reinforcing structural inequalities. She noticed how the Indigenous communities face persistent barriers to healthcare access, cultural erasure, and systemic discrimination, all of which create a cycle of physical and emotional suffering that is not merely an individual affliction but a collective condition produced and sustained by socio-political forces (Victora, 2011, pp. 4-6). While scholars recognize a link between political institutional factors and suffering, little research has been done specifically looking at the link between migration policies and suffering. The use of the theory in this study will help to determine if a link between migration policies and suffering exists in Italy that affects asylum seekers.

European immigration laws in relation to the 2015 migration crisis and its impact on refugees is a salient topic. Even though an abundance of research is available on the matter, not much has been done specifically looking at Italian immigration laws and the effects the laws have on refugees. Therefore, the current project focuses on Italy since Italy is an entry point country on the Mediterranean Sea and was hit head on by the mass wave of refugees in 2015. Specifically, the following research will examine the link between Italian immigration laws and the violence refugees endure due to said laws. The research will also investigate if the Social Suffering theory provides an explanation for the link between Italian laws and the violence/suffering refugees face. By doing so, the results and conclusions from this research could aid the Italian government in recognizing the detrimental impacts specific laws have on refugees. Furthermore, since not much research is available on this topic, results could help local Italian nonprofit organizations, such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC), fight for the basic human rights of refugees and help improve refugees' experiences in Italy by exposing the misfortunes happening in the reception facilities.

RESEARCH DESIGN

For primary data, I conducted two separate interviews with two participants. The participants for the study consist of one Italian social worker and one refugee currently living in a reception facility in Italy. I reached out via email to roughly 50 academic professionals around the world who are doing or have done work with refugees in Italy. Out of the 50 people, one person shared the contact information of an Italian social worker, who then provided the contact of a refugee willing to participate in the study. The interviews consisted of 14 to 17 structured questions that I conducted over Zoom, accommodating the participants' language preferences in either English or Italian. Interviewing the social worker and refugee provided unique insights and perspectives of the reception facilities and interactions with the law through first-hand experiences. The social worker provided an "outsider" perspective while the refugee provided the "insider" perspective of the reception facility and asylum procedures.

To help further explain the relationship between Italian migration policies and the violence refugees face, the second data type for the project consists of Italian law decrees, Asylum Information Database reports, and The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) articles and reports. I located the data by searching the designated websites and narrowing down the documents to be between 2015 and 2025. After retrieving all of the data, I translated the law decrees from Italian to English. The reports from the Asylum Information Database, UNHCR, and Italian law decrees provided specific information regarding refugees in Italy. Collecting data from 2015 to 2025 helped to grasp the legal situation in Italy by looking at how the policies evolved over the years. Comparing the laws that were in place, the rights asylum seekers had, the information asylum seekers were told by government employees, and the information the Italian government promised refugees helped to determine the relationship between laws and violence within the reception system in Italy.

I employed a semi-structured interview methodology to gather qualitative data from the participants. I conducted the interviews via Zoom, lasting from 35 minutes to an hour. The process began by starting the recording of the session for transcription purposes and going over the consent form with each participant. I commenced the interviews with introductory questions tailored to the social worker or the refugees, such as "Tell me a little bit about yourself" or "What do you do for a living?" establishing rapport (see Appendix 1 & 2). Subsequent questions followed exploring participants' experiences with Italian reception facilities and migration laws along with their views on potential improvements to the situations, particularly regarding the reception facilities and communication from the government. The semi-structured approach allowed for more flexibility in responses since the participant got to interpret how to answer the question and in return also allowed for impromptu questions to be asked to the participants. Ultimately, this approach provided a deeper and more well-rounded understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives of Italian reception facilities and Italian laws.

I used thematic coding on both the interview transcripts and all of the secondary data to reveal correlations and trends in experiences in Italian reception facilities and migration policies. I read through all of the documents making general codes such as "refugee laws, migration laws, violence, reception facility, and government behavior." After generally coding the documents, I went through and broke down the codes into even more specific groups, such as "type of reception facility, laws pertaining to men, laws pertaining to women, violence from other refugees, and violence from facility workers." Once I coded all of the information, I put all of the data with the same code together in a separate document, repeating the process until all of the data was broken up into its designated groups. With the code trends that

I found, I was able to identify patterns between the interviews and secondary data.

ANALYSIS

Reception System and Living Conditions

The reception system for asylum seekers in Italy is fragmented, with significant inconsistencies in the quality and availability of services. Asylum seekers' access to housing, healthcare, and other integration programs can differ widely depending on the placement of each individual. The Italian reception system is devoid of mental health services to help the reception of vulnerable people (Asylum Information Database, 2024d). In contrast to level 2 reception centers, level 1 reception facilities, like CAS, provide asylum seekers with only basic assistance such as food, lodging, clothes, and basic legal aid, even though asylum seekers can spend up to three years in these centers (Terlizzi, 2020). Legislative Decree No.142 (2015) states the reception facilities "must guarantee the protection of physical and mental health, family unity, age-related needs, respect for privacy (including gender differences), and the provision of necessary measures for persons with special needs," yet services provided vary at every level 1 reception facility. The fragmentation and inconsistency in services show a failure to uphold legal obligations, effectively institutionalizing neglect within the reception system. The state perpetuates unnecessary suffering of vulnerable people by denying all asylum seekers equal and consistent access to services such as healthcare. The stark contrast between level 1 and level 2 facilities shows the normalization of an environment where violence and neglect are ignored.

Overcrowding in reception centers remains a persistent issue, leading to deteriorating living conditions and increased social tensions. Many centers operate beyond the intended capacity, forcing residents to share limited space and resources, leading to a strained environment. With the continuous arrivals of asylum seekers, reception facilities have become overcrowded, with their conditions deteriorating, compromising health, hygiene, and privacy (Asylum Information Database, 2024b). Overcrowding also promotes violence in reception facilities since not enough resources are available, thus causing tensions to rise (see Figure 1). The Italian government forcing facilities to operate beyond capacity without adequate reform creates conditions that breed tension, violence, and conflict among residents. The resulting deterioration of health, hygiene, and privacy not only violates basic human rights but also impacts the mental and physical health of those seeking refuge. The Italian government's inaction on such conditions actively contributes to a cycle of suffering and institutional violence within the reception system.

"There were 50 people but then they were 100 and so we didn't have time to work with all of them. And there were a lot of fights because of course they get really frustrated and there were a lot of nationalities inside. So there were, for example, boys coming from Tunisia or Morocco. They were fighting against Nigerian guys because also their rooms were also mixed. So it was a great mess and it was a problem."

Figure 1: Interviewee One - Overcrowding Causing Violence

The Italian government and reception facility management often neglect or ignore violence and internal conflicts within reception facilities, leaving residents without protection or resolution mechanisms. The neglect not only fosters a climate of fear and impunity but also undermines residents' trust in the Italian government and the reception facility authorities, effectively silencing victims and allowing abuse to go unchecked. Interviewee Two shows how systemic issues occur in many reception facilities, with institutional passivity promoting violence, thus eroding trust in the protection mechanisms provided. Although the Italian government promises protection in both CAS and SAI reception facilities, there are no formal personnel or forums to manage the interpersonal conflicts or ensure the residents' safety (see Figure 2). The government openly exposing asylum seekers to harm fosters a sense of abandonment and powerlessness (Asylum Information Database, 2024b). The Italian government perpetuates harm and exemplifies a broader pattern of institutional neglect by failing to address violence and internal conflicts in reception facilities. The absence of accountability sends a clear message that the safety and dignity of asylum seekers are secondary to bureaucratic convenience and institutional complacency. The Italian government not only fails in its duty of care but actively sustains a system inflicting physical and psychological suffering on vulnerable individuals already in precarious situations.

"It was just one or two weeks when we came here and we were shifted in the welcome center and there was a family who had the same number of children like us and their children's ages were also the same as my children's ages were. So they were obviously fighting for playing for toys and something. The other family was from Morocco or Tunisia. So the other dad of that family started to fighting with me physically the management of the center interrupted and stopped that fight… I talked with the management about how this man was physically threatening and hitting me and I want to make a complaint. She was not ready to do that… later the children fought again and that dad of the other family fought with me. Sometime after that the wife of that family beat my son again. I called the police but the person from management of the welcome center stopped him, and told the police that she would talk to the lady and make her understand. She put the problem under the carpet again."
"And the top of all that I told you that the behavior, their attitude and the resolution from any problem resolution mean that if there is any call, if there is any file between two person, between two families how to resolve it and one person is agreed and one person is doing all these things, they put them at the same path and they never try to resolve and never make a proper decision. They just put everything good and bad under the carpet. So this is a very, for example, if I agreed and I think I should properly address my problem, they never do. There is no forum, no persons to look after all these because they think they are like if you put some birds in a cage, you put them in a cage and you close the door. It is like that. I think it is very bad to do in this way."

Figure 2: Interviewee Two's Experience With Violence

The conditions in reception facilities do not meet basic humanitarian standards. Lack of adequate food, medical care, sanitation, and safe sleeping arrangements exposes residents to health risks, violating their fundamental human rights. Many asylum seekers describe reception centers as overcrowded and lacking privacy (see Figure 3). In some cases, asylum seekers report not having consistent access to essential services such as housing, electricity, food, clothing, or water, and several reported severe health and hygiene issues in the reception facilities (Asylum Information Database, 2024b). The substandard conditions in Italian reception facilities are a prime example of the failure to uphold basic humanitarian obligations. By allowing residents to go without consistent access to essential services like food and housing, the state exposes asylum seekers to preventable harm and suffering. The Italian government and reception facilities tolerating the degrading conditions and ignoring the international human rights standards reinforce a structure where asylum seekers are treated as less than human.

"First, where we were living in the center, it was another place where we were given a very small bedroom. Although we have four members of the family, husband, wife, and two children, the room was very small, but after then they put us and force us to shift in a room where that room was. On the sharing basis, we protested a lot in this regard because when my daughter was just eight or nine month old and she was taking the feed from her mother, we were seeing them. It is not advisable that in our culture and religion it is not considered good that one mother is feeding and living in a shared bedroom but very bad."

Figure 3: Interviewee Two's Reception Facility Account

The Italian reception system fails to ensure continuity in asylum seekers' accommodations. The failure to provide continuous housing during the asylum application process disrupts asylum seekers' access to essential services like healthcare and legal support, further destabilizing the already precarious lives of asylum seekers. The Italian government sometimes forces asylum seekers to leave reception centers without alternative housing options available (Asylum Information Database, 2024a). Limited spaces in level 2 centers lead to prolonged stays in inadequate level 1 facilities. (Interviewee One, personal communication, January 24th, 2025). The Italian government's failure to ensure continuous, stable housing for asylum seekers reflects a disregard for the well-being of asylum seekers, since they are left in a more vulnerable state. The government's neglect leaves asylum seekers to navigate bureaucratic systems without a stable shelter or access to services like legal aid, showing a broader disregard for the dignity and safety of asylum seekers. A harmful and hostile environment results from failing to address the gaps in continuous accommodations.

Legal, Social, and Political Challenges

Legal assistance for asylum seekers is insufficient, making it difficult for asylum seekers to navigate the complex procedures. Asylum seekers have limited access to qualified legal support, leaving unqualified social workers to explain the legal procedures, leading to a higher number of unjust application rejections. Many asylum seekers do not fully understand their rights and the application process to obtain the correct documents and protection (Interviewee One, personal communication, January 24th, 2025). A lack of trained legal operators are available in reception centers, especially level 1 CAS facilities (see Figure 4). The failure to provide adequate legal assistance to asylum seekers contributes to the marginalization and suffering of asylum seekers within the reception system. The systemic neglect not only obstructs asylum seekers' right to a fair asylum process but also reinforces a power imbalance, further disempowering already vulnerable people, since asylum seekers do not fully understand the legal process. Withholding the legal re-

sources necessary for asylum seekers to defend their rights denies justice and exposes asylum seekers to prolonged insecurity and harm.

> "And also I was telling you a legal operator would be necessary because I'm not a legal operator and I try to do my best, but I dunno exactly all the stuff about documents and how to do things, which kind of appointment, which documents. So I need someone that is really able to do this because documents are so important and right now we are not supposed to do this. So yeah, this is a big problem."

Figure 4: Interviewee One - Social Workers' Issue With Legal Assistance

Lengthy asylum procedures exacerbate the stress and uncertainty asylum seekers experience. Tedious procedures often leave individuals in prolonged limbo, unable to work or reunite with family, deepening the sense of instability. The asylum process can take up to two or three years for just the first decision (Interviewee One, personal communication, January 24th, 2025). During the waiting period, many asylum seekers struggle with financial insecurity due to reasons such as needing to send money back home and emotional distress from living in uncertainty (Terlizzi, 2020). The tenuous asylum procedures, long wait times, and financial insecurity become sources of harm for asylum seekers due to the mental toll of the process. The prolonged limbo often means asylum seekers can not access basic rights like employment or family reunification, further stripping them of any sense of stability.

New governments habitually revise or overturn previous asylum rules and regulations, leaving asylum seekers unsure of their legal rights and future. Frequent policy shifts disrupt the continuity of the asylum process, making it difficult for individuals to navigate an already complex system. Each new government introduces changes to asylum laws, affecting protections and eligibility for asylum seekers (Zanfrini, n.d). Legal professionals struggle to keep up with evolving regulations, leaving asylum seekers with no understanding of their rights (Interviewee One, personal communication, January 24th, 2025). Due to the lack of trained legal professionals available in reception facilities, asylum seekers do not fully understand the steps needed to obtain documents and protection (Interviewee One, personal communication, January 24th, 2025). The constant revision of asylum policies in Italy exacerbates the vulnerability of asylum seekers, leaving individuals without clear guidance or support in navigating the system. The confusion amongst asylum seekers creates a hostile environment in reception facilities. The lack of consistency in policies, coupled with insufficient legal support, contributes to the sense of uncertainty asylum seekers endure during the application process.

Italy's asylum policies often prioritize administrative efficiency over humanitarian concerns. The emphasis on efficiency results in policies priori-

tizing cost-cutting and rapid case resolution over the well-being of individuals. Policy makers frequently design asylum procedures to manage numbers rather than address the complex human needs behind each asylum application. The Italian government has attempted to shut down reception facilities and relocate asylum seekers to other countries (Zanfrini, n.d). Financial considerations often determine the level of services the government provides in reception centers (Terlizzi, 2020). Humanitarian needs are routinely overshadowed by bureaucratic and financial priorities. By valuing administrative efficiency over individuals' well-being, the system neglects the complex traumas and realities that asylum seekers face, ultimately treating them as statistics rather than people in need of protection and support.

Complex legal procedures and limited access to work permits, education, or other social services prevent asylum seekers from fully participating in Italian society. This exclusion hinders asylum seekers' ability to become self-sufficient while also undermining asylum seekers' sense of belonging and purpose. Without legal residence permits, asylum seekers struggle to access stable employment and housing (Asylum Information Database, 2024e). The absence of mandatory language courses in level 1 facilities limits the asylum seekers' ability to integrate into Italian society since they are not able to properly communicate with locals (Asylum Information Database, 2024c). Systematically obstructing the social integration of asylum seekers by restricting access to work and social services ultimately creates prolonged instability. The lack of language courses and a secure legal status leaves asylum seekers in a constant state of uncertainty, making it nearly impossible to rebuild their lives.

Integration and Access to Opportunities

Without access to consistent language education, asylum seekers struggle to communicate, understand legal procedures, find work, or engage with local communities, delaying integration and reinforcing feelings of exclusion and marginalization. Due to the lack of structured language courses, asylum seekers struggle with social and cultural integration because of the language barriers. Without language skills, many residents struggle to navigate legal, medical, and employment processes (Asylum Information Database, 2024d). Many asylum seekers find engaging with the local communities to be difficult when they lack the resources to learn the language (Interviewee One, personal communication, January 24th, 2025). Limited access to language education reinforces social isolation and dependency on NGOs and social workers for basic communication needs (Terlizzi, 2020). The absence of structured language courses isolates asylum seekers, preventing individuals from accessing essential services and building independent lives. The lack of such a fundamental tool for integration supports exclusion rather than promoting recovery and inclusion.

Access to the labor market is technically available, but remains practically challenging for asylum seekers due to bureaucratic reasons and social stigmas. Although the law permits asylum seekers to work, they regularly encounter delays in receiving the necessary permits and frequently face bias from employers, making employment more difficult to secure. Asylum seekers can work 60 days after applying for asylum, but bureaucratic delays often prevent timely employment (Asylum Information Database, 2024f). Many employers hesitate to hire asylum seekers due to the temporary nature of their legal status and frequent changes in immigration policies (Asylum Information Database, 2024e). The removal of mandatory Italian language courses and job orientation services further impedes asylum seekers' employment opportunities, leaving them trapped in informal or exploitative labor conditions (Asylum Information Database, 2024e). Asylum seekers are locked out of the economy due to bureaucratic delays, lack of support services, and social stigmas, making it nearly impossible to secure stable work. The failure to address these barriers and provide essential resources like language courses and job orientation programs prolongs the hardship and suffering of asylum seekers in reception facilities.

Long wait times and uncertainty lead to frustration and mental health challenges among asylum seekers. Asylum seekers often spend months or even years waiting for decisions on their cases, which makes individuals feel stuck in limbo without a clear future. Many asylum seekers express stress and anxiety due to the prolonged waiting period for asylum decisions and even to enter the offices to apply for asylum, thus leaving them in more precarious positions, having to camp out on the streets outside of the offices (Zanfrini, n.d)**.** The inability to work immediately puts additional pressure on asylum seekers, especially with families, since they have no income (see Figure 5). Extended waiting periods and prolonged uncertainty in Italy's asylum process have profound psychological impacts on asylum seekers and exacerbate the vulnerability of already marginalized individuals, often leaving asylum seekers feeling trapped and destabilized. The bureaucratic delays and lack of timely access to asylum procedures contribute to a climate where individuals are left without direction, resources, or dignity. The necessity for some to sleep on the streets while awaiting access to application offices reveals a system that fails to provide even the most basic conditions for stability.

Interviewee One: "And I also think that this long wait. They have to accept in order to know if they will be able to remain forever in Italy or not. This is also another big problem for them because they get impatient. Maybe they need money, they want to work, but they can't because of documents, but maybe their family is waiting for money in their own countries and so this becomes really stressful for them."

Figure 5: Interviewee One - Social Worker's Insight On Long Waiting Periods

Asylum seekers from war-torn countries or individuals considered more vulnerable, such as unaccompanied minors or victims of trafficking, are more likely to receive support services and protection. However, not all asylum seekers receive equal treatment within the reception system. Some groups, such as Eastern Europeans, receive faster processing and better support due to reasons such as nationality, gender, or age (Asylum Information Database, 2024d). Men without specific vulnerabilities often face longer wait times and fewer services in the level 1, CAS facilities (Interviewee One, personal communication, January 24th, 2025). The unequal treatment of asylum seekers based on nationality, gender, and perceived vulnerability creates hierarchies of worthiness within reception facilities. This selective approach reinforces discriminatory structures within the asylum system, where the Italian government offers some asylum seekers dignity and care while others are pushed into precarious and degrading conditions.

DISCUSSION

Social Suffering

The interdisciplinary nature of the Social Suffering theory highlight why social structures contribute to the unnecessary suffering of asylum seekers in Italian reception facilities. The theory helps to understand the experiences of refugees in Italy because it highlights how suffering is not only individual but also socially and institutionally produced. Scholars found viewing suffering through an interdisciplinary lens (using sociology, anthropology, and psychology) reveals the hidden structures that perpetuate harm. For instance, asylum seekers in Italy experience fragmented reception services, inconsistent healthcare, and a lack of mental health support, leading to institutionalized neglect. Renault (2010) highlights how understanding contemporary injustices requires integrating social and psychological perspectives, which is essential when analyzing refugee experiences. Systemic conditions inflict suffering on asylum seekers in the form of disruptions to key social networks, lack of control, and exclusionary environments, which damage asylum seekers' mental health (Bjertrup et al., 2018). The Social Suffering framework highlights how structural violence, rather than just personal trauma, drives the negative experiences of asylum seekers in Italy. The the-

ory moves the analysis from a purely medical view of suffering to a critique of political and social failures. The Social Suffering theory explicates how broader structures of exclusion and neglect are not accidental.

Social Suffering theory clarifies how ongoing institutional failures rather than isolated misfortunes are the root of suffering for asylum seekers in Italy. The Italian government's tolerance of overcrowded, violent, and degrading reception facilities, with inconsistent social services, reflects a broader pattern where bureaucratic convenience outweighs human dignity. Through daily inaction at the state level, conditions such as prolonged asylum wait times, lack of healthcare, inadequate legal services, and absence of language education systematically erode asylum seekers' mental and physical well-being. Scholars like Maconick et al. (2020) and Victora (2011) reinforce that structural factors, such as failed healthcare and lack of social services, lead asylum seekers to experience poverty and powerlessness, thus further contributing to the cycles of trauma. The Social Suffering theory captures how a cycle of harm invisible to systems focused only on efficiency rather than justice trap asylum seekers. The interdisciplinary strength of the theory allows for a comprehensive analysis of the refugee crisis by looking at the political, social, and psychological dimensions of the issue. By applying social suffering theory, the current study uncovers the deeper structural roots of suffering from policies and the Italian government while challenging dominant narratives that blame individual asylum seekers for the hardships experienced in reception facilities.

Humanitarian Refugee Policies

The reception system and living conditions for asylum seekers in Italy are relevant to the global non-academic community because the poor conditions reveal ongoing failures in humanitarian protections that demand international attention. Despite clear legal obligations to protect asylum seekers' mental and physical health, Italy's reception system remains fragmented and inconsistent, often exposing asylum seekers to substandard living conditions and neglect. Legislative Decree No. 142 (2015) outlines Italy's duties, but in practice, asylum seekers, particularly in level 1 CAS facilities, receive only basic assistance without any meaningful integration support. Reports from Mellersh (2024) highlight how such neglect has had deadly consequences, with protests erupting in Bari following the death of a resident due to alleged inadequate medical care. The Italian government's failure to ensure even minimal humane conditions shows how these cases reflect patterns of mistreatment rather than isolated incidents. Furthermore, the normalization of overcrowded, violent reception facility environments reinforces the institutionalization of suffering. This issue transcends Italy, warning the global community of how governments can turn human rights obligations into hollow promises without enforcement mechanisms and accountability. As migration increases globally due to war, persecution, and climate change,

ensuring reception systems respect human dignity is a priority now more than ever.

The systemic neglect of violence and internal conflict within Italian reception facilities reflects a devastating erosion of institutional trust and human rights protections that resonates globally. Facility management often refuses to acknowledge or address incidents of violence, leaving asylum seekers without protection and fostering a culture of fear. Interviewee One's account of frequent violent outbursts among residents corroborates recent protests at the Bari reception center, where neglect bred instability and deep resentment towards the Italian government (Mellersh, 2024). The conditions parallel findings in other European countries such as Greece, where researchers have shown how the stagnant asylum processes and the lack of safety aggravate feelings of meaninglessness, anxiety, and depression among asylum seekers (Bjertrup et al., 2018). When systems designed to offer sanctuary become places of renewed trauma, the damage extends beyond individual suffering, undermining the legitimacy of the asylum system. Globally, the normalization of neglect and violence in reception facilities threatens to crumble the already fragile framework of international refugee protection. Addressing institutional violence is thus essential, not only to restore dignity to asylum seekers but to reaffirm basic global human rights standards at a moment when they are increasingly under threat.

CONCLUSION

Asylum seekers are subjected to suffering and violence in reception facilities due to Italy's migration policies and governmental decisions. Violence and suffering is a recurring issue in reception facilities, often stemming from overcrowding, inadequate resources, and racial tensions. The daily stress of living in such conditions is compounded by complex legal procedures that make the asylum process difficult for asylum seekers to navigate or access protection. Without accessible language programs and the ability to communicate, asylum seekers are isolated and unable to advocate for their rights or pursue employment or education. These failures are not accidental but reflect Italy's asylum policies, often prioritizing bureaucratic efficiency and border control over humanitarian care. Italy is an example of the conditions of reception facilities around the world. No matter where asylum seekers came from or where asylum seekers end up, individuals should never be subjected to suffering and violence.

Appendix 1

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself
2. Where is your family from?
3. What do you do for a living?
4. What is the most rewarding aspect of your work as a social worker in reception facilities?
5. What kind of support is available for refugees at these facilities?
6. How are refugees assigned to different facilities?
7. What legal support is there for refugees (in terms of asylum applications and family reunification)?
8. Are there any programs or services in place to help refugees integrate into Italian society?
9. How are reception facilities typically funded?
10. Do you think Italian migration policies affect refugees in the camps and if so how?
11. What are some of the main challenges that you see refugees face in the facilities?
12. Are there any particular needs or gaps in services that are not currently being met?
13. What kind of support or protection, if any, is provided for women in the facilities?
14. What is the most important thing anyone should know about or understand about refugees or asylum seekers?

Appendix 2

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
2. What was your Journey like to Italy and what brought you there?
3. What was your experience like in the reception facility?
4. How safe did you feel in the reception facility and what contributed to that feeling of safety or lack thereof?
5. Can you describe your experience when you first arrived at the reception facility and what was your initial impression?
6. How would you describe the living conditions in the reception facility?
7. Have there been any moments that you have felt unsafe or uncomfortable at the facility?
8. What kind of support did you receive at the facility?
9. Were you offered any help with job training or job searching?
10. What are some of the biggest challenges you face living in the reception facility?
11. Did you face any issues dealing with long waiting periods or overcrowding?
12. Did you ever feel discriminated against or treated unfairly because of your status as a refugee?
13. What do you think can be improved in the reception facilities to make life better/ easier for refugees?
14. What has the legal process of claiming asylum looked like for you?
15. Do you feel supported in your efforts to build a new life in Italy?
16. What advice would you give local authorities or communities to help make the refugee experience better?
17. Do you know anything about Italian migration policies?

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