

# **Eritrean Boat Refugee Migration and Integration in Italy**

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Polina Aleshina

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Advisor: Dr. Bryan Ganaway

## Introduction

The process of integrating into a new state and culture is a difficult one for all migrants, regardless of the preparation and expectations they may have envisioned for themselves prior to their resettlement. Irregular migrants, specifically refugees, face certain complications different from those encountered by regular migrants due to the circumstances behind their movement. Often the nature of refugee push factors—war, immediate threat of violence or danger, or pressing political instability—as well as their limited resources if they reside in a dangerous environment, make it difficult for them to plan out their route and course of action in their movement, and they seldom have control of the various positions that they are put in throughout the migration process. Similarly, while refugees who travel by land are susceptible to poor treatment, difficulties crossing rough terrain, politically established or violent borders, brutality, and capture, those who traverse bodies of water have to encounter a different struggle for survival that relies heavily on secure transportation to face an unpredictable environmental dimension.

Due to its access to the Mediterranean Sea, as well as its colonial past, Italy has become a common destination for many refugees, specifically, but not limited to, Eritrean refugees who use Libya as an optimal transition point. Upon the dangerous and strenuous arrival to Italy, refugees must face a new set of challenges, including securing asylum status, navigating asylum and detention centers, establishing housing, jobs, and safe lifestyles for themselves and for their children or dependents. Though some choose to stay in Italy, others continue their journey to other destinations, including Germany, Sweden, and England. The processes of social, cultural, economic and political integration that migrants must traverse have been explored in both theoretical and practical discourse. Although each refugee's experience is unique and each

receiving country has its own approach to accepting or rejecting the incoming flow of migrants, certain qualities of the integration process are similar throughout the European Union, and can be studied with application to Italy.

Ultimately, in this paper I argue the true necessity behind Eritrean refugee migration—a sentiment occasionally contested within asylum decision making, media and amongst the general public—and provide a number of policy recommendations that Italy could consider in order to accommodate and help assimilate the ever growing number of refugees that enter its borders. Through the research process, I became aware of the lack of first person accounts of the Eritrean refugee experience, as well as the overwhelming dominance of Western discourse in regards to the refugees' struggles and history, as opposed to qualitative research collected on the ground. In order to overcome this lack of information, and still effectively build my argument and better define my policy recommendations I rely on various reports presented by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the assorted recommendations and implementations present through Italy's two cycles of the Universal Periodic Review, and on reputable news sources—in order to garner more personal information about Eritrean refugee experiences due to the lack of personal accounts of these refugees.

The fairly recent nature of Eritrean boat migration to Italy accounts for this paper's depiction of the forced migration experienced by Eritrean refugees through the lens of the first generation migrant integration experience—though it should be noted that integration difficulties persist to further generations as well and the second and third generations are discussed also. In this way, genealogy and Bourdieu's concept of social capital play a pivotal role in the experience a refugee has abroad, whether they are first, second or third generation migrants. First generation migrants arrive with little to no social capital, and therefore usually struggle with integration and

attaining status that moves them up from the lower class. Upon reaching the second generation, integration becomes much more generalized—less to do with migration policy, and more with the structure of wider institutions, such as the education system or citizenship laws. The children of refugees attain certain amounts of cultural capital via their natural placement into the culture of the receiving country. Although the third generation has not yet become tangible, due to the fairly recent influx of boat refugees, it can be viewed as a generation for which solutions can be implemented to a fuller and more developed degree of integration. It is imperative to note that migratory assimilatory struggles do not cease to exist after the first generation.

Thus, this paper will be structured in a way that first frames the issue in a theoretical and literary context, and continues to depict and assess the experiences of the Eritrean refugees beginning with their movement from Eritrea and leading up to their future migration to Italy and through Europe. While Libyan refugees also enter Italy in large numbers, this paper will primarily look at Eritrean refugees who use Libya as a transition point. In the following sections I will discuss the various theoretical and practical dimensions that impact and encompass Eritrean migration and integration, particularly policies, race, differences in cultural values, the phenomenon of second generation migrant identity, as well as a brief discussion of the Eritrean and Italian postcolonial relationship. Following the literary foundation, I will continue to present Eritrean history in a way that leads to the understanding of why Eritreans flee their country as well as why they are considered political refugees, and discuss the various dangers of boat migration, as well as the complications of integration that Eritreans and other refugee groups face upon arriving and remaining in Italy.

## Literature Review

I have identified six key themes that help to understand why migrants and refugees either succeed or fail to integrate within their receiving country, with a general reliance on existing theoretical discourse, and a particular focus on Eritrean refugee experience when applicable. These themes: policies, perspectives on race, cultural differences, implications for the second generation and postcolonial dynamics, are all instrumental to understanding the complicated dimensions behind migrant integration.

### Policies

Due to the recent emergence of Italy as a receiving country, its migration policy has not quite reached the same restrictive point as in older receiving countries—though the ongoing refugee crisis has caused a spur in the development of new migratory legislation or even extreme actions taken in retaliation to the incoming population. In the work, “Immigration in Italy: Between Economic Acceptance and Political Rejection,” Ambrosini (2013), brings to light the broader European context of Italian migration policy. Although it complies with EU standards and provides migrants with a variety of social rights, including health, education, pensions and family reunification, while following an annual quota system for migrant admission, Italy has a more lenient policy than do many other EU countries. Historically, migration to Italy began its increase in the early 1990s and coincided with the enactment of the citizenship code in 1992. The code links citizenship to birthright and does not easily grant citizenship to foreigners, especially to those without EU origins. The tedious process of obtaining citizenship requires ten years of residence, not to mention a four-year application process (Ambrosini 179). Although some migrants aim to escape it by marrying an Italian citizen—a process that still requires a two year wait under the Security Set, but is still admittedly an option for Eritrean refugees due to

complicated postcolonial factors—the waiting period is usually the only sure way to reach citizenship. In this way, the parameters of the citizenship code create very natural barriers to refugee integration. While this is a hindrance in the life of a regular migrant, it complicates the fate of Eritrean refugees who leave the oppressive conditions within their country in a permanent attempt to escape them. Many European states, Italy included, favor the policy of repatriation upon conflict resolution, an issue that becomes convoluted when refugees do not have anything to return home to or do not have lingering emotional or familial ties in their country of origin.

Within a deeper migratory discourse, attaining citizenship becomes a coveted occurrence especially in refugee situations. In his work “Citizens All? Citizens Some! The Making of the Citizen,” Wallerstein identifies that, “The world found it necessary to invent the concept of ‘stateless’ persons, to describe the relatively small portion of humanity who were unable to claim citizenship anywhere” (Wallerstein 651). In this way, in alignment also with a chapter from Arendt’s work, “The Origins of Totalitarianism,” human rights and national rights become intertwined, to the point that if one does not have citizenship, and thus no national rights, one becomes stripped of human rights as well. The concept of ‘citizen’, which was originally meant to be an inclusive term and was utilized in order to promote a more equal society, actually began to work against those that somehow found themselves without any national ties. Europe’s historical emphasis on the nation-state too, created a foundation that strongly emphasized the necessity of national ties. These concepts apply directly to Eritrean refugees as they have very few national rights in Eritrea—perhaps in connection to Arendt’s understanding of denationalization as a weapon of totalitarianism—and have no national rights when they arrive in Italy. Gaining citizenship within Italy or their destination country, therefore, becomes the means by which they can access any national, and in turn, human rights. Countries that do not have

motivated and effective integration programs or have policies that counteract the processes, for example, deny the Eritrean refugees national rights and thus do not provide them with guaranteed human rights.

Despite how strict these citizenship laws seem, Italian migration policy has faced particular scrutiny from the greater EU community for a number of reason—including its inability to manage its migrant population and its failure to stop “illegal” migration—encompassing both the migrants and refugees that enter via the Mediterranean, and those who are able to pass through Italy to other destination countries within Europe. Triandafyllidou’s (2011) work demonstrates how such scrutiny served as incredibly unconstructive criticism, as Italy’s reactions caused the EU to question the capacity of the country’s human rights violations against refugees. After attempting to tighten regulations, Italy was accused of not examining whether certain migrants require or qualify for refugee status and of sending “illegal” migrants back to their origins. This turn led to violent and dangerous consequences for the refugees. Similarly, pregnant women, wounded migrants, and children have been denied refugee status despite dire circumstances throughout Italy’s migration history (Triandafyllidou 253). Although denial of refugee status in order to avoid its “refugee burden” is an important aspect of Italian migration policy, it has become increasingly difficult for them to take such actions with the constantly growing media coverage of the struggles of boat migration, as well as the rising awareness of these migrations throughout the world. Additionally, the current refugee crisis has caused Europe to increase its expectations for member-state cooperation in terms of refugee acceptance, causing major pressure on Italian government and migration authorities.

Triandafyllidou also discusses Italian actions outside of the overarching framework of EU migration policy, where it enacted a number of policies that aimed to increase the difficulty

with which foreigners could obtain Italian work permits in addition to citizenship. The most accepted of these policies, despite its exclusion of certain social rights such as disability pensions, lay within the Framework Law of 1998, which granted migrants who already resided in Italy for five years and possessed an official right of permanent residence, equal social treatment as Italian citizens. Although this seems like a progressive action, policies are rarely enforced to the fullest, as equal social treatment is a promise that cannot be upheld without the engagement of society as a whole, including law enforcement and everyday citizens. Italian policy also took a turn for the controversial with the Bossi-Finni Law of 2002, which required migrants to have a long-term work contract in order to be able to renew their stay permit for two more years (Triandafyllidou 263). This policy, although logical because labor migrants by definition should have work that keeps them within Italian borders, created contention because of the common inability of migrants to obtain long-term contracts, since their labor is often performed on a short-term basis. Although refugees are not specifically labor migrants, such policies demonstrate stigmas that make it difficult for any migrant to obtain work, even those who enter the country documented, adding yet another barrier for refugees to cross in order to be even a step closer to integration.

Despite the many criticisms of the Bossi-Finni Law, immigration policy remained fairly untouched until the Security Set of 2009—an incredibly vital policy to the understanding of refugees within the Italian context. As discussed by Komada (2011), the policy covered multiple points, all revolving around “illegal” immigration, and officially noted the criminality of “illegal” immigration, tasking public officers and public workers with the responsibility of reporting the presence of an “illegal” immigrant. Additionally, it declared that reported migrants must pay a mandatory fine as well as be detained by authorities—sentences sometimes lasting



more than six months. Further elaborating on the criminal aspect, the policy also penalizes those who help immigrants illegally come to Italy and those who house undocumented migrants with up to three years in prison. Such legislature pertain directly to Eritrean migrants and the people they turn to for aid on their journey, as they are primarily smuggled into the country and often eager to escape documentation in Italy. Aside from the severe intolerance they institute, these policy updates clearly demonstrate the shortcomings of Italy's relationship to immigration, considering the policy language clearly denotes migration as capable of being "illegal", does very little to account for helping the migrants who find themselves in these irregular circumstances, and views migration within an extremely negative context without any mention of aid.

While a brief overview of the broader Italian migration policy does not capture all facets of the issue, it is important to understand that refugees do not enter a context where they are openly accepted and willingly integrated by the state. On the contrary, most Italian policy prevents migrant and refugee integration—an occurrence that will later be explored through Eritrean experiences and Italy's assessment during the Universal Periodic Review.

## **Race**

Racial difficulties greatly impede social, economic, and political integration throughout Europe, with the Eritrean refugee experience in Italy being no exception. The perception of racial differences often leads to automatic stigmatization and stereotype application, especially if the race of the migrant happens to be that of a minority population. While language and cultural attributes can give away a migrant's "otherness" as well, a difference in race is much more easily and accessibly perceived. An existence of prejudice to race outside of the majority leads to a number of stipulations that have no evidence to back them—creating a cycle that correlates

poverty to racism, thus giving the impression that migrants are incapable of the same lifestyle and conventions as the majority.<sup>1</sup>

In a migratory context, a perceived difference in race impedes many migrant opportunities—one of the primary points of Brah's (1996) work, "Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identity." Although he looks particularly at England it can be generally applied that any country that has job centers in place may stigmatize those that use their services based on race, and present them with jobs that they "look the part" for, rather than those for which they qualify. In fact, this practice is fairly widespread throughout Europe. For example, while a migrant may have had pharmaceutical experience in their home country, due to existing racism, they may be assigned a janitorial position because of an existing misconception that a migrant, particularly of non-European and non-white background, cannot succeed at a job that requires a higher education level. Outside of the workplace migrants also face conflicts while going through their everyday lives. Brah highlights how securing housing and safety is the first priority for many migrants and refugees once they have permission to leave the asylum centers, and demonstrates the implications migrants must face when their landlord believes that they will not be responsible tenants due to their race. This not only contributes to the xenophobia and racism present among the majority, but also suggests that the migrants can no longer secure shelter—a very important component of the integration process. Examples of Eritrean housing acquisition will be provided in the following sections. Often, one's community demonstrates their place within the broader social structure, whether these communities are constructed based on racial, ethnic, economic or other differences. Race undoubtedly plays a pivotal role in the difficulty migrants have with integration—a difference in their skin color from that of the majority

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, Solomos, and Saha all reference this poverty-to-racism cycle, as it is a fairly common theme within such discourse.

instantly and without much effort marks them as the “other” especially in homogenous communities.

Italy in particular has also exhibited multiple accounts of racism both on an individual and a national level—a characteristic that has many potential explanations, such as the incredibly provincial nature of the country, its fascist history, economic instability, and pull to conformity and aversion of diversity.<sup>2</sup> The placement of Eritrean and other refugees within the same proximity also allows for them to be easily identified as targets for xenophobic or racist crimes.

Since the beginning of postcolonial migration in Europe, the use of race when describing migrant differences has been limited in policies due to the emerging convention of replacing “race” with “culturalism”, as an attempt to lessen the perception of differences between migrants and nonmigrants to the basis of culture, not race. Although this distinction had promise in theory, Lentin (2005) demonstrates how culturalism, to an extent, began to replace and even be synonymous with racism. Instead of the dominant race being accepted as the norm, the dominant culture is, and, “The predominance of cultural interpretations of human differences and their official endorsement suppress state-centered critiques of racism that focus on race as above all else a political idea that adapts itself to a variety of political circumstances” (Lentin 382). This becomes an issue in the context of Eritrean refugee migration because it starkly sets Eritreans apart from the majority Italian population, and the aforementioned problematic Italian migration policy has the ability to discriminate under the mask of “culturalism.” Cultural values, in turn, must then be carefully addressed as they also incite discriminatory action against migratory and refugee population.

### **Differences in Cultural Values**

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<sup>2</sup> Smith discusses all explanations in his work.

Naturally, due to the difference in origins and ethnicity, migrants have a tendency to have cultural characteristics that differ from that of the majority culture in the receiving country. While these cultural differences may be minor, such as subtle actions that occur within the home, even the smallest occurrence, if perceived within the misconception of migrants as “the other” can trigger an obstacle in migrant integration. One of the most commonly occurring cultural differences that hinders the process of migrants throughout Europe is religion, often the clash between the Christian majority and the stigmatized Muslim minority—an issue that has become much more prevalent since the rise in fear of terrorism from radical Islamic groups. This difference can be identified through the application of stereotypes and visual detection, such as the headscarf tradition practiced by some Muslim women and the practice of prayer that differs from that of Christians. This becomes both interesting and complicated in the case of Eritrean refugees, as the majority religions of Eritrea are both Christianity and Islam—accounting for roughly 50% and 48% of the population, respectively.<sup>3</sup> Still, their race, their origin, and the minority religion ties of some of the refugee population grants the refugees a certain identity within the eyes of the Italian state and people due to the formation of ties between ethnic minority and immigration. In this case, discrimination is misplaced, demonstrating the imperfection of the practical use of culturalism.

As it stands, identity is an incredibly convoluted and complicated lens through which to view migrant integration, but it is important to make a distinction between the multiple facets of cultural identity, which can include either one shared culture which people with a mutual history/ancestry hold in common, or a recognition of many points of similarity, while maintaining the occurrence of significant differences where no one person has the same experience or the same identity. In this way, one cannot be lost between two cultures, as culture

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<sup>3</sup> Information provided on UNHCR’s Eritrean fact page.

is not stagnant. This becomes convoluted under such pretenses as Italian unwillingness to accept Eritrean refugees on the notion that they cannot assimilate into the specific Italian culture. This rigidness is an illusion, as culture is fairly malleable and in all technicalities both Eritrean and Italian culture can accommodate one another.

Theoretically, and this is directly relevant to the discourse of immigration, culture can be viewed as a marketplace with symbolic currency, called cultural capital, as Bourdieu (1977) presents in his work, “Structures, Habitus, Power: Bias for a Theory of Symbolic Power.” He presents the concept through the explanation that people who have higher education levels, higher levels of integration, and higher wealth—three characteristics pertinent to migrant livelihood—in turn have higher cultural capital, which they can use in exchange for real goods and services such as securing a better paying job or housing in a different district. Recent immigrants, particularly refugees, typically arrive in the receiving country with minimum if not completely absent amounts of cultural capital. They are often without funds, without education (or with an education that is not transferrable to Europe), and almost definitely on the lowest of integration levels—a case that remains true for Eritreans. As they spend time within their receiving countries, refugees become exposed to possibilities that facilitate gaining more cultural capital. Often, asylum centers help to provide some sort of direction towards job opportunities or housing communities, for example, although high numbers of incoming refugees make this difficult and centers may neglect to fully facilitate this process. While the options that exist for refugees may be on a lower tier than the jobs and housing situations held by the culturally dominant population, there is no amount of social capital gain that is insignificant, once again emphasizing the time required for refugee integration to take place, as well as the importance of acquiring citizenship. This concept heightens in applicability when addressing the Eritrean

refugees, since they often have very little social capital even in their country of origin, as well as within their destination in Italy. In fact, one of the greatest pull factors of Italy and other parts of Europe lies in the Eritrean hope to live in a state that allows for social capital gain, though as Eritrean experience reflects in later sections, attainment of capital is not always guaranteed.

## **Second Generation**

While a migrant's integration experience affects them throughout their arrival in the receiving country, this experience is transformed into a new phenomenon when the second generation is born. Before beginning to explore the existence of the second-generation migrant, it is important to understand the origins of that conceptualization. Within "Immigrant Racialization and the New Savage Slot", Silverstein (2005) characterizes immigrants by genealogies, and places the second-generation migrants within the "hybrid" category. The second-generation categorization was one made up by scholars, and began with the understanding that they were youth that were "caught between two cultures"—a concept refuted in an earlier section. Through the lens of the tri-generational model, first generation migrants primarily exist within the cultural context of their country of origin, while second generation migrants experience the norms of their parents' culture and the majority culture within which they live. Despite being a part of a constructed category, "Through state anxiety, sociological description, immigrant avowal, anthropological celebration, and corporate commodification, the postcolonial, second generation immigrant in Europe becomes a racialized vector for the study of multiculturalism and global cosmopolitanism" (Silverstein 375).

The experiences of second-generation migrants can also be viewed using Foucault's concept of governmentality, which describes how there are multiple governmentalities that act on the lives of individuals. Like all families, migrant families have to navigate a series of

governmentalities on a regular basis. Even though non-migrant families also have to withstand various governmental forces—such as the state, church, familial hierarchy and the education system—their part in the dominant culture and the way they are viewed by the prevailing political system allows them to rarely question these pressures as they are seen as the “norm”. Meanwhile, migrant families must experience the different governmentalities with accentuated cultural pressure—if their culture does not fit the norm, they have to work past both the difficulties created by multiple governmentalities and their minority culture.

One of the reasons second generation migrants do not completely assimilate into the dominant culture is justified by Foucault’s (1991) distinction of family having its own governmentality. Second generation migrants can be seen as a product of at least the following governmentalities: their own (their morality), their family, the state, and the other dominate institutions in their lives (Foucault 91). Due to the liberal governments of the majority of European countries, there is a stress on roles of nonpolitical actors in peoples’ lives. This causes second-generation migrants to be caught between the governmentality created by their family and some relevant nonpolitical institutions, such as their place of worship, and the expectations of the state, other political actors, and nonpolitical actors who are part of the majority. Hence, the differing culture of migrant families from the majority creates a tension of governmentalities, especially if viewed within the lens that family is an instrument of the government. Perceived conflict arises when the beliefs of family differ from the desires of the state—a context within which second generation migrants often exist. The more political and nonpolitical actors present in the lives of migrants, the more difficult it is for them to successfully navigate the societal system, as the concept of the second generation is constructed using these pressures. The actors as they apply to Eritrean refugees will be discussed in further sections.

The tribulations encountered by the second generation can also be interpreted within the context of Lentin's "Replacing State, Historicizing Culture in Multiculturalism", where she argues that though the modern understanding of culture developed in a way so as to avoid racism, it instead lead to a new version of it—no longer biological, but rather cultural. The second generation becomes part of the disenfranchised culture, in part due to the Eurocentric notion of progress that Lentin discusses, where all cultures are seen as heading on a trajectory that essentially leads to the peak, which is the epitome of Western culture (Lentin 352). Due to this establishment of cultural racism, second generation migrants are faced both with remnants of biological racism ingrained in many Western cultures and cultural racism enforced by the state in an effort to avoid biological racism. This view influences the belief that the dominant culture is the norm; therefore, any culture that deviates from the given trajectory is not normal. Within the migratory context, this gives the illusion that the dominant culture within the receiving country and the culture of migratory parties are inherently different from one another, thus creating a "separate but equal" relationship to the creation and upholding of immigration policy (Lentin 389).

While there are certainly Eritrean migrants who have been present in Italy since its decolonization, this research concerns itself more with the future second generation of the current Eritrean refugees. The effect of migration policy and refugee integration is of utmost importance to the continual and cohesive survival of the latter generations. Thusly, second generation Eritrean migrants should always be considered during policy implementations in Italy since those will shape the experiences of the descendants of these refugees.



## Postcolonial Dynamics

Many modern refugee and migrant situations pertain to the colonial history between the sending and the receiving country—as is the case with Jamaica and Britain or Algeria and France, for example. In the case of Eritrea and Italy, meanwhile, such dynamics occur on a much more subtle and less influential scale, one that is important to briefly mention as it is tempting to analyze their relationship within a postcolonial framework. While there is a postcolonial relationship that exists between the two, this relationship is, indeed, more historical than personal—in present day, Eritreans rarely display ties, either negative or positive, towards Italy—a postcolonial phenomenon that Riley and Emigh (2002) explain in their work “Postcolonial Journeys: Historical Roots of Immigration and Integration”. They discuss how Eritrea’s pre-colonial Christianity, sharp class distinctions, and strong state emphasized a relationship between Italy and Eritrea—as well as how this relationship contributed to Eritrean nationalism against Ethiopia. Pre-colonial Eritrea had a, “Well-developed quasi-feudal class structure,” (Riley 172) indigenous Christianity, and the advantage of having a strong neighboring state, Ethiopia, which served two purposes: Italy was careful not to cross it, and Eritrean nationalism opposed it, rather than the Italian state.

Such dynamics contribute to the understanding of why Eritrea harnessed its nationalism against Ethiopia—contributing to over half a century of ongoing conflict between the two states—and why there was no sharp postcolonial fracture between it and Italy, despite Italy’s undeniably exploitative, racist and violent colonialism. Similar to other colonial relationships though, after the end of the colonial era, there was a stream of migration that flowed from Eritrea to Italy—in part due to the Eritrean-Ethiopian War. Eritreans that did move during this time were typically students, professionals, children of interethnic marriages, and domestic workers, though

those that sought political refugee status typically aimed to move through Italy to countries such as Germany and Sweden due to their ability to reap more benefits there. Still, upon their arrival in Italy, very few Eritreans have unrealistic expectations regarding what Italy, as their former colonial power, owes them in terms of treatment and opportunity.

### **A General Outline of Forced Migration**

Article 14.1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights maintains that, “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” In discourse, this right applies directly to forced migrants, and in this case, to Eritrean refugees. The UNHCR defines a refugee as a person, "Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

Karunakara (2004) denotes and further outlines the phases of forced migration as the home phase, the transit phase, and the refuge phase. During the home phase, migrants experience threats to human security, disruption of services or access to food either on a chronic low intensity, or an acute high intensity. When the migrants reach their breaking point in terms of intensity, they enter the transit phase—which can last anywhere from a day to multiple years. During this phase, they can encounter separation from their families, sexual violence, or even death, and the phase continues until they reach refuge. Refuge also is broken up into two: assistance and settlement. While assistance has a positive connotation, it can be hard for refugees to feel safe or calm as they could still be experiencing post-traumatic stress and overcrowded camps. Once they reach the settlement prong, the refugees have more of an exposure to an ability to adapt and also more autonomy. UNHCR recognizes three solutions to the refugee crisis faced

throughout the world in modern day: local integration within the country that provides refuge, resettlement in a third country outside of the country that provided refuge to the migrant for a time, and voluntary repatriation upon the end of the conflict within the country of origin.

The Eritrean experience follows these phases fairly closely, with the exception depending on whether they stay in refugee camps prior to their entry into Italy, as many often do.

Additionally, this paper concerns itself mostly with the first solution, or local integration of Eritreans within Italy, because the other two options have not generally occurred for the population in question, although a recent EU plan that involved migrant redistribution implies possible resettlement for a third country outside of Italy.

### **The Conflicts Behind Eritrean Migration: The Home Phase**

Political unrest and accusations of human rights violations within its borders has led to mass Eritrean emigration and refugee movement to Europe or to refugee camps in Ethiopia and throughout the Horn of Africa. Eritrea's geographic placement bordering Sudan, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, as well as its colonized past under Italy have placed monumental pressure on Eritrean wellbeing and government with a detrimental and oppressive result. After the Second World War, where both Ethiopia and Eritrea were liberated from Italian occupation, Eritrea became a part of Ethiopia—a happening that incited grand occurrences of social and political unrest as Eritrea lost its status as an independent state, which was originally created by Italy. Thus, Eritrea's historical involvement in countless violent militaristic conflicts in order to regain its independence and territory—the most recent and pivotal being the thirty-year Eritrean War of Independence and the Eritrean-Ethiopian War—has contributed to the twenty-three year

presidency of Isaias Afewerki, who has been in office since Eritrean independence from Ethiopia in 1993.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, since its independence, Eritrea has never had a national election, despite one being scheduled for 2001, on the original grounds that some of Eritrean land was still occupied by Ethiopia even after their independence, in part due to the Eritrean-Ethiopian War, which persisted until 2000. This political regime, though called a presidential republic, most resembles a totalitarian dictatorship. The overarching corrupt governmental framework, as well as Eritrea's title as one of the poorest countries in the world, its low catering to education, and its rating as one of the worst countries for freedom in the media, has done little to help Eritrea move forward from its stark number of human rights violations, which continue to grow with each passing year. These violations are enforced and carried out largely by the government, and include torture, extrajudicial executions, forced labor under the stipulation of "national service", and rape. In addition to their gruesome nature, these violations are generally inescapable, so any Eritrean is susceptible to the government's impositions.<sup>5</sup>

Eritrea as a state receives minimal international attention or aid, and has been categorized as one of the most repressive existing regimes, to be compared only to North Korea. While this may be the case—arguably considering some first-person accounts of Eritrean citizens within Italy reveal the possible beneficial actions of the government—it is important to note that the Eritrean government has consistently refused to accept foreign aid, usually under the proclamation that they have their own solution for their state's problems. Such an example can be observed during their drought in 2011, where the ambassador to the European Union maintained that, "Foreign food aid demonizes the local people and makes them lazy." In suit

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<sup>4</sup> Noted in UNHCR's Eritrean report.

<sup>5</sup> Discussed in UNHCR's report in regards to Eritrean refugee migration.

with this statement, the Eritrean government seized the harvest of those farmers who did not succumb to the draught, and paid them as little as 8% of market value, all the while trying to distribute the limited amount of food throughout the country.<sup>6</sup>

On a psychological, social and daily level the citizens are constantly in fear that they are under surveillance by the government, extensive documentation is required to travel along the minimal infrastructure that remains open, there is a shortage of food and petrol, both of which are overpriced upon their availability, and people live in unarguable poverty, despite the media's reassurance about the state's well-being. In December 2015, for example, the *Guardian* reported that a school nurse's salary was approximately fifty dollars a month. The news outlet also demonstrated the innate fear felt by the people—no one interviewed vouched to provide their name or information, for fear that they would be found and punished by the government in under twenty-four hours if they were to do so. Even though there are thousands of refugees that emigrate from Eritrea every year, the *Guardian* also cited the general culture and attitude of the citizens as being outwardly content—meaning no one would openly confess to their animosity towards the president, and any signs of unhappiness or discontent would only be noticeable within a private household. Counteractively, while Isaias Afewerki mandates that Eritreans should be happy because all is well, he also projects the image of an imminent war that the citizens must be willing to make sacrifices for in order to prevent—fueling the majority of the government's explanation into why the people must live in the way they do.<sup>7</sup> This sheltered behavior reaches the point where OHCHR's heads of the Eritrean committee have never had the possibility to enter the country, and obtain the majority of their information with reliance on Eritrean refugees located in countries outside of their own.

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<sup>6</sup> Disclosed in a BBC news report on the Eritrean crisis.

<sup>7</sup> Evident in David Smith's *Guardian* report on conscription and poverty within Eritrea.

Along with the high chance of an impoverished life that is starkly susceptible to violence, one of the primary push factors for Eritrean refugees is the mandatory national service, which is nonnegotiable for all Eritreans for an indefinite period of time between the ages of 18 and 40. This service applies both to men and unmarried women, causing many people, especially the younger population, to escape the oppressive regime as refugees—especially common in this because even within their home countries the refugees had little to no chance to acquire social capital. In 2015, Amnesty International noted the indefinite nature of this conscription, and placed it within the context of Eritrean migration, noting that European countries have begun to cite this migration as economic, rather than asylum seeking. AI emphasized that while there are definitely economic factors involved in the refugees' movement, they are also faced with a desperate situation within Eritrea, and their only way to escape forced conscription, poverty, and abuse is to escape the country. They provided an example of a woman whose grandfather and husband were both reentered into the conscription system, despite already serving twenty years. While education is mandatory until the age of thirteen, families may be faced with economic or cultural reasons for not sending their children to schools as it may be more profitable or less monetarily exhausting to have them work for the family. This being the case, even those who obtain university degrees have very little to no chance for social mobility. Thus, in December 2014 there were 363,077 refugees and 53,662 asylum seekers emigrating from Eritrea, some with the destination of Ethiopia and others, arguably with more resources and with specific motivations, with the destination of Europe.<sup>8</sup>

The act of migrating in this instance becomes a dangerous one from the very beginning, as refugees who return to Eritrea are often perceived as traitors by the government and punished in accordance for their crime, as even leaving the country for legal reasons is quite difficult to do

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<sup>8</sup> Reflected by the UNHCR in their Eritrea fact sheet.

and crossing the border “illegally” is increasingly difficult due to the shoot-to-kill policy enforced at the border.<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that Ethiopia is a neighboring country, the refugee’s journey still requires vast amounts of perseverance, as they often traverse grand distances by foot and through degrading conditions.

Those refugees who do seek passage to Europe, meanwhile, generally pass through Libya’s coastal access to the Mediterranean Sea. For Eritreans, Libya serves as a point of historical significance as both countries used to be Italian colonies as well. They even had some amounts of interaction when Eritreans—then also perceived as Ethiopians—were sent over as conscripts to fight for Italy against the Libyan insurrection. It was there, that “These young Ethiopians, whose faces had shone before as if they had been rubbed with butter, turned into such emaciated bodies in one day. It was hard to recognize them as Ethiopians at that time, but as useless persons from a cursed land” (Hailu 26). The negative implications of Italian colonization and their use of their colonies in their war effort become surprisingly overlooked upon refugee efforts to leave Eritrea and Libya. Although such a colonial past and interaction exists between both Eritrea and Libya and Eritrea and Italy, it does little to limit Eritrean efforts to use them as points of departure and destination, respectively. This movement has become comparatively simpler since after the Arab Spring, Libya has come to face the Libyan Crisis, which began in 2011 and is comprised of two civil wars—one of which is ongoing. In the time between the first and second civil wars, and during the civil wars themselves, Libya has faced a great amount of violence, increased lawlessness, and political instability that has contributed to social unrest. This lack of stability has allowed for increased activities of human trafficking and human smuggling to take place along the Libyan coast—where an estimated half a million migrants

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<sup>9</sup> As illustrated by *Guardian’s* report on the status of Eritrean welfare.

await the possibility to depart on a boat to Europe—making it a prime destination for refugees and migrants who hope to cross the Mediterranean to Italy.<sup>10</sup>

### **From Eritrea to Italy: The Transit Phase**

Although most Eritrean boat refugees begin their movement in Asmara, Eritrea and enter Europe through Sicily, Italy, there are a number of different routes that they take. Again, it is important to reiterate that those who decide to leave Eritrea do so at great risk to themselves and their families from the very beginning of the departure—risks that do not yield until even after they are accepted with asylum status in their receiving country. Cairo, Egypt is one of the most common points of passage along the journey, and some boat refugees, though rarely, even depart for Sicily via Alexandria. More commonly, Eritrean refugees pass through Cairo and use Tripoli, Libya and Benghazi, Libya as points of departure for Sicily, as well as other miniature port cities located along the Libyan coast. Although the water crossing often causes the most concern, it is important to note that the journey from Eritrea to the Mediterranean Sea is often a grueling one that warrants reliance on dangerous transportation or the crossing of vast amounts of land on foot with limited access to vital resources such as water or food. Not to mention, the Sahara and a number of other deserts stand in the way of refugees who travel on foot. Refugees who are desperate to escape their country, such as Eritreans, take greater risks to their wellbeing in order to complete the passage. These risks, in turn, can yield horrific results in a variety of ways, the most pertinent to Eritreans being the trust in a stranger to carry out the smuggling process. In many situations, human smugglers can easily turn into human traffickers in order to gain more of a profit at the cost of the wellbeing of the refugees.

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<sup>10</sup> Evident via Harter's BBC report on internal motivations for Eritrean movement.



While these cases remain fairly undocumented, as those who are trafficked across borders typically do not report their status for fear of deportation, it is valuable to understand that not all refugee movement leads to positive outcomes or outcomes in their favor. An account of an Eritrean family depicted just that. When an older brother, Tesfom, was contacted by a younger sibling to help pay a hefty fee for his transport across the Sahara, the older brother gave him the following answer: “You will either drown in the sea or die in the desert...Or worse still, someone will slaughter you like a lamb on your way there. I can’t let you do this to our mother.”<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, this movement through Libya and the illegal border crossing it facilitates becomes possible via the dangerous routes taken over the Mediterranean Sea by refugees and is recognized as an international issue by UNHCR and the European Union, as well as other states which concern themselves with it as a humanitarian issue. This concern is expressed rightfully so, as at least 3,279 migrants and refugees, from all countries, died during their migration in the Mediterranean in 2014, with over 34,000 Eritrean refugees being rescued by Italian authorities in the same timeframe. This has in part placed extreme pressure on Italian resources and the navy, as they regularly patrol the sea in order to provide aid to those refugees who cross in these dangerous methods. It has been proposed that the risk of this migration can be curbed with the availability of lifeguarding ships, but it is not a sufficient way to combat at-sea deaths considering a large part of that success relies on being at the right place at the right time. This was addressed in part through Italy’s Mare Nostrum Policy, which was instituted in 2013 and has accounted for the rescue of at least 100,000 boat migrants.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Italian or other European ships are not allowed to enter Libyan waters since that constitutes an invasion, so

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<sup>11</sup> The full story can be found in Gebrekidan’s *Reuters* article depicting struggles regarding this issue.

<sup>12</sup> Statistics courtesy of UNHCR.

Europe cannot monitor this smuggling activity at its source. While stormy weather and vicious waves are often the cause of the lives lost at sea, the boats the refugees themselves use are often extremely unstable, flimsy, and over capacity—increasing the chance of them sinking.

On April 19, 2015, as reported by *BBC*, a boat carrying 700 refugees and migrants capsized in the Mediterranean Sea. The boat was only seventy feet long and allegedly capsized due to an imbalance on its deck. Out of the 700 refugees it held, only dozens survived due to rescue efforts put forth by the Italian Navy, Italian coastguard, Maltese cargo vessels, Maltese Navy, and three helicopters. Such an example is incredibly relevant since it demonstrates both the dangerous nature of boat migration, and the reactions such incidents incite in those involved and the greater international effort. People involved in the situation reflected on its preventability, and brought to light the issue of stopping the boats before they depart from Libya, citing smuggler activity as a “plague” on both Libya and the refugees they entwine. The ability to stop these boats before departure is farfetched as refugees are often smuggled on fishing boats—some that are occasionally still in use—or on boats made out of inflatable rubber material. Due to their commonplace nature, it becomes difficult to track these boats because they are used so interchangeably between the two tasks, and government efforts to identify these boats before their embarking for smuggling have failed in the past.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, Eritrean refugee movement occasionally becomes hindered if they are intercepted by Italian ships. These interceptions may lead to them being redirected back to Libyan detention centers where they are often abused and tortured while being held in horrible conditions—an issue that has garnered international attention as well as through such actions Italy violates many international principles.

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<sup>13</sup> More can be found in *BBC*’s article depicting the Lampedusa tragedy.

If, and when, Eritrean refugees actually arrive in Italy—about four days after they depart from Tripoli and assuming that Italian authorities spot them prior to their arrival—they are exposed to a whirlwind of a process that includes a rapid medical assessment and an application of a surgical facemask and wristband. They are then typically seated on rows of plastic chairs while volunteers pass out clothes and food and officials decide which reception centers have available space. Occasionally, despite the steady opening of reception centers in some coastal Italian cities, migrants and refugees are relocated to other cities throughout the state and housed in hotels, gyms or closed nursing or special care homes.<sup>14</sup>

From this point, the migrants must wait to see if they are eligible and approved to receive asylum status. A migrant can be dubbed “irregular” if they do not have family connections, a work-permit or a history of political persecution, they are typically held in a detention center until faced with an expulsion order. In all, as defined by the Security Set of 2009, there are three types of centers that migrants have the possibility of being processed through. CDAs or “Centers for First Assistance” are the primary points of entry for most migrants and the reception camps in which authorities decide whether migrants have the credentials to begin the legitimization process or if they are to be deported. CARAs, in turn, are identification centers for immigrants that desire political refugee status, and CIEs are the “centers for identification and expulsion” where migrants without residence permits, or unrecognized asylum seekers are identified and deported to their home country. In the case of the Eritrean refugees, who do in fact come from a background of political instability and prosecution, immigration officials typically believe the credibility of the asylum claim and the migrant is placed in the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees or to the Accommodation Centre for Asylum Seekers, where they can wait

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<sup>14</sup> Barker discusses this in his *Independent* article which covers the experiences of those refugees who enter Italy during the summer months.

until their case goes before the Commission. Some NGOs and other organizations can provide legal aid to some migrants to help prepare them for this panel, and migrants are allowed to leave the centers during the day—though town is usually not within a walking distance of the centers. Additionally, migrants who do not legally report their presence to Italian officials lose the privilege of staying out of the centers at night. While the period to hold migrants in the centers should legally not exceed 35 days, the time they spend there has exceeded one year for some, and has become increasingly tentative as refugee numbers rise.

### **Integration Complications in Italy: The Refuge Phase**

In 2014, about 34,000 Eritrean refugees made up about 18% of the observed illegal border-crossings to the European Union, most commonly via the routes that passed through Libya to Sicily.<sup>15</sup> Italy, in contrast, received around 38,000 total applications for asylum, and accepted only 20,000 of them—while Eritreans made up 22% of the refugee population entering Italy by boat.<sup>16</sup> In December 2014, there were a total of 93,715 refugees, 45,749 asylum seekers, and 813 stateless persons within Italy, of which Syrian, Afghan and Eritrean refugees made up the majority. Although in this situation, there were only 1.3 refugees per 1,000 Italian citizens, Italian popular opinion reflects a decidedly negative outlook on immigration. People are primarily concerned with immigration from outside the EU, and although Eritrean refugees have historically been granted asylum fairly regularly in the European Union, the Refugee Crisis has incited a change in the willingness of states to admit them. Additionally, public opinion reveals that 68% believe that immigrants “are a burden on the country,” while only 19% believe that they make the country stronger. This outlook does not bode well for Eritrean integration, as the process of assessing their asylum claims and beginning their assimilation into Italian society is a

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<sup>15</sup> Information and statistics disclosed via a number of visuals by the *Economist*.

<sup>16</sup> Demonstrated in a *Guardian* article on refugee boat migration.

lengthy one that takes more than a year on average. The problems with integration too, can be approached from a number of different directions, including personal opinions of accepted refugees—whose information is so difficult to locate and obtain, it may itself point to a problem—recommendations made by other states, and the responses and perspective of Italian policy itself.

### **The Eritrean Perspective**

A letter from the Community of Eritreans currently residing in Italy to the Italian Order of Journalists provides an interesting view of Eritrean integration in Italy from the Eritreans themselves. One of the main concerns the authors express centers on the issue of Italian media presenting Eritrea in an incredibly negative and defamatory light—to the point where the Eritreans feel, “Singled out and persecuted by the Italian media.” They state that out of the fifty-four countries in Africa, Italian media targets Eritrea the most, and that there is a clear lack of historical knowledge that backs this media and these news stories. While thousands of refugees regularly escape Eritrea, the authors emphasize that thousands are staying behind in order to help incite change and help build and rebuild the nation, thus urging the Italian media to present more positive sides to Eritrea. An additional concern involves the notion that such information hinders integration and does not reflect accurately the experiences of these refugees who later became assimilated in Italian society. Rather than allow Eritreans to share their own voice, the authors believe the media capitalizes on the people’s pain, discourages communities, and destroys the country’s image. Despite this, the Eritrean refugees who entered Italy before the surging refugee crisis report to be well integrated into the Italian society, noting that there are many mixed marriages and that there are now second-generation children that exhibit a positive identification

with both their Italian and their Eritrean identities. While this demonstrates the migration of the past—it also gives hope and a chance for integration for incoming refugees of the present.

A different perspective can be identified through the scope of the refugees arriving more recently, during a time where there is a frantic struggle to accommodate large numbers of incoming refugee populations. Eritreans move forward to Europe despite passing through a number of countries and perhaps even refugee camps along the way, only to eventually end up in a culture that does not have a sufficient understanding of the tribulations and facets of the Eritrean life prior to their settlement. The lack of first person accounts on refugee integration within Italy today can point to a number of different things. The first one being that the Eritrean refugees continue to be unused to sharing their displeasures due to their cultural past of living in an oppressive regime. The second one, that the refugees are not given a voice in this situation, or rather that mainstream media does not see the profiting point of profiling these people or their stories in order to inform or educate the public about their experiences. This becomes particularly problematic as emphasized by the Eritrean community because it contributes to both xenophobia and creates an identity for the people that does not fit how they themselves identify. Lastly, and perhaps the most optimistic reason behind the lack of first person accounts, is the preexistence of an Eritrean diaspora within Italian borders that allows for incoming refugees who make their way through the asylum process to find a community in which they have a shared history.

After copious hours of searching for these elusive first person accounts, including an attempt to look at the interviews conducted by the Commissioner to Eritrea, Sheila Keetharuth, which yielded no information in regards to Eritrean integration but rather focused on the state of

affairs in Eritrea, CNN's story, "Why I Fled: New Migrants to Italy Share their Stories" was able to provide two instances of the Eritrean refugee experience.

Esayas Nisque, an eighteen year-old student from Senafe, Eritrea, left the country like many others because, "As soon as you finish school and are not learning, then they want to make you a soldier" (Penhaul). He stayed in an Ethiopian refugee camp for six years, before making his journey to Libya, where he was held in terrible conditions. "We were 250 men in one small house. No wash. Food was not enough. If you stand up, electric shocks," Esayas described, further disclosing that his father had to send him \$1,800 in order to pay the smugglers for the journey to Italy. He, as a refugee, has little desire to stay in Italy because he believes: "Italy no good. No work, no money." The second refugee account, provided by Grymay Tesfamical, also provides little on integration and much more on the transition phase as well. He cites, similar to Esayas, "In Libya, it was very very dangerous. If you have a crucifix...it means this [he slices a finger across his throat]."

Again, even though these are first-person accounts of the refugee experience, they once again show the emphasis on the transition phase, and the lack of focus or interest on the refugee phase. The interviewers were more attentive to the journey, rather than to the destination—perhaps overlooking the fact that Eritrean refugee difficulties do not cease with their arrival on Italian soil, or after their acquisition of refugee status. A closer look at the integration issues of Eritrean refugees can be seen through *Guardian's* brief documental news story of refugees within Rome, "Rome's Homeless Refugees at the Heart of European Law Row". Although the video focuses mainly on the shortcomings of the Dublin Regulation in terms of refugees not being able to rejoin their families in other European states, it also highlights some of Italy's structural shortcomings that make refugees so desperate to go anywhere else. One refugee even

states, “I’d choose to be illegal in England, than to be legal in Italy.” An issue that they identify results from the lengthy and poorly carried out process of granting asylum status. While refugees are held in centers and given a certain amount of attention in terms of their needs being met, upon receiving their “legal papers”, the CARAs are no longer held accountable for the wellbeing of the refugees, and they are sent into the real world. “If someone said, even when you have the legal papers you still sleep on the street, I would have said that’s wrong, that’s not possible,” one man reflects, “But now I see for myself that it’s true. It’s reality here. I’ve got papers but I sleep outside.” A different man shares a similar view; “Living is bad in Italy because there is no work and no housing. Living here is bad.”

Similar issues are seen through the account of seventeen year-old Filmon Mengs, an Eritrean minor residing in Italy. His story, told by Dan Rivers, shows a similar situation, where Filmon lives in an abandoned office building with other Eritrean refugees. Filmon, a minor, was not assigned additional guardianship or assistance despite his age, and instead relies on certain protection through his fellow Eritreans, within their deplorable living conditions.

These first person accounts demonstrate a clear lack of follow-through in terms of refugee integration within Italy. While the fact that such integration or accommodation is difficult for Italy due to the high numbers of refugees that enter and are forced to stay within its borders to the Dublin Regulation every year exists, it does not excuse Italy’s inability to ensure the human rights of those that enter. It can be seen that even a legal status does not guarantee an integration experience, as the government and officials do little to interfere past the end of the asylum process. Video footage demonstrates minimal efforts to provide housing—Filmon, for example, sleeps on a ruined couch within an old abandoned office room, and while authorities



are aware of the building's current purpose, no effort is made to account for its safety, or for the people residing there.

### UPR Recommendations

Meanwhile, the UPR, or Universal Periodic Review, occurs every four years and entails the overview of human rights within all 193 UN Member States individually. This permits every state to disclose its actions to further ensure and demonstrate the upkeep of human rights within its borders, but also opens them to correction and commentary from other Member States who may not approve of certain actions that they deem to be human rights violations. Although recommendations are just that, and by no means mandatory, states are encouraged to adhere to them as they can directly affect foreign relations and cooperation. Policy commentary from foreign parties is vital to the understanding of Italy's successes and shortcomings in regards to its treatment of refugees, as they largely reflect issues similar to those discussed previously. Italy underwent its first review in 2010, and its second one in 2014. Both review cycles presented the state with further recommendations on a variety of issues relating to both refugee movement and refugee integration, though, as evident later in this section, Italy did not heed these all too carefully.<sup>17</sup>

SuR	Recommendations for Cycle One	RS	Action
Italy	Eliminate the provision criminalizing irregular entry and stay on Italian territory as contained in law No. 94 of 2009, as well as those provisions that regard non-documented status as an aggravating circumstance in the commission of criminal offence, and the creation of vigilante groups, as contained in law No. 125 of 2008	Mexico	5
Italy	Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture, in order to permit the Subcommittee for Prevention to conduct visits to places of detention, including reclusion centres for migrants and asylum-seekers, as well as those with the populations originating in national minorities in order to help the Government improve conditions in these centres	Mexico	5

<sup>17</sup> All information regarding recommendations and actions taken can be found on the Universal Periodic Review Database.

Italy	Adopt special procedures to ensure the effective protection of the rights of unaccompanied children in their access to asylum procedures	Czech Republic	4
Italy	Ensure satisfactory asylum procedures for all migrants and asylum-seekers rescued at sea	Denmark	4
Italy	Increase the transparency of arrival and return procedures concerning immigrants and refugees	Japan	4
Italy	Intensify efforts in the resettlement of refugees, especially with regard to the protracted refugee situations identified by UNHCR	Morocco	4
Italy	Make additional efforts in work with refugees and migrants	Kyrgyzstan	4
Italy	Strengthen efforts to protect asylum-seekers and refugees	Yemen	4
Italy	Take further measures to protect and integrate immigrants, asylum-seekers and persons belonging to minorities, including by carrying out investigations into violent attacks against such individuals	United Kingdom	4
Italy	Take further steps to ensure the full respect of the fundamental rights of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees	Sweden	4
Italy	Review its legislation and practices, ensuring that they comply fully with the principle of non-refoulement, and to ensure the accountability of persons responsible for any violation thereto	Czech Republic	3

In 2010, Italy accepted eleven recommendations categorized under the “Refugee” issue. While some of these recommendations, as those proposed by Kyrgyzstan, Sweden and Yemen, were fairly vague and prompted Italy to make more of an effort to work with refugees and asylum seekers, as well as to provide them with better protection, other states provided a more detail-oriented address of the issue. Mexico, for example prompted Italy to, “Eliminate the provision criminalizing irregular entry and stay on Italian territory,” as well as ratify a protocol against torture that would allow visits to be conducted to places of refugee detention and reclusion centers in order to ensure that conditions within these centers improve. While there are few accounts of torture available in the Italian news, this may also apply to the horrible conditions refugees face when they are held in Libyan detention centers upon their interception in the Mediterranean Sea. A prompt for Italy to end such practices is not surprising since their behavior has earned international disapproval and widespread media attention.

In relation to this issue the Czech Republic encouraged Italy to further protect the rights of unaccompanied refugee children, since, as previously mentioned, it has carried out actions that repatriated these children to their origin country without substantial consideration of their asylum status. The Human Rights Watch published a report in 2010, appropriately titled “Pushed Back, Pushed Around: Italy’s Forced Return of Boat Migrants and Asylum Seekers, Libya’s Mistreatment of Migrants and Asylum Seekers” where they present this concern, and cite the return of refugee boats that contain pregnant women and unaccompanied children among the boat population to Libya. Such situations do not sit well with the international community either, especially since it concerns a part of the population that requires additional services and aid. In addition to properly regulating children’s rights to asylum, Japan also encouraged a clarification of arrival and return procedures for immigrants and refugees—again, to combat Italy’s alleged past actions. An example of such an action was demonstrated by a UNHCR review from 2009, which cited a case where a boat of refugees was intercepted by the Italian navy in the Mediterranean, and sent back to their transitional point of Libya, without considering the circumstances regarding their migration or finding out their nationality. These refugees were placed into detention centers, where the UNHCR conducted interviews and determined that 76 of them were from Eritrea, including nine women and six children. Similar to Japan’s recommendation, the UNHCR responded by urging Italy to further uphold international norms in situations such as this, and not resort to inappropriate treatment.

Denmark took this even further with its recommendation that all those refugees and migrants rescued at sea should be able to smoothly be integrated into the asylum procedures, despite not reaching Italian soil of their own accord. Eritrean refugees have even been noted to attempt to refuse being rescued at sea for fear of not being able to take be considered for

processing within Italy itself, as discussed by the Times of Malta in 2009: further demonstrating their need to choose between incredibly dangerous passage for entrance into the EU or safety with no guarantee of fair treatment or EU entrance.

Less to do with the asylum process and more with direct integration issues, the United Kingdom highlighted the important issue of xenophobic violence in relation to refugees, and suggested the state engage further to integrate both refugees and minorities, in addition to investigating any violent action taken against these groups. Eritreans in particular are vulnerable to such attacks if they are associated with or seen as a part of the Muslim community as mosques are often the targets of xenophobic actions. In terms of integration in general, Morocco also noted the need to intensify efforts in regards to resettlement, especially according to UNHCR guidelines. This in part relates to the extended holding terms for refugees in the refugee centers, their prompt and valid assessment for asylum status, and the following movement of them into Italian communities.

While these recommendations all appeared to be a prominent issue noted by many members of the international community, Italy's response to them was disappointingly minimal, as demonstrated by the UPR Mid-term Implementation Assessment. They partially implemented the recommendations of Sweden, Kyrgyzstan and Yemen regarding the broad strengthening of human rights and protection of refugees and asylum-seekers, but neglected to take any other action and implement any other suggestion made in regards to refugees during this cycle. Out of the additional efforts that were made, the "imprisonment for the crime of illegal immigration" was taken out of the legal system—although this point becomes somewhat moot since the detention centers could still hold immigrants for up to 18 months (17). Additionally, no comprehensive legislation was passed in regards to the recognition of refugee status, and the

system of reception was not altered to rise above or meet European standards. While citizens of North African countries were granted special six month permits, this did not apply to anyone from different origins, and thus did not cover the status of Eritrean refugees. On a similar note, refugees were also excluded from a form of financial aid known as “shopping cart” (a new social card), despite the provision of equal treatment in respect to social assistance as provided by the European Directive (19). Specifically in relation to Eritrean migrants travelling through Libya, Italy failed to officially revoke their push-back policy, and while Eritrean refugees were no longer commonly sent back to Libya, the fact that such a component exists in the legislation does not officially prevent such a harmful and unhumanitarian practice. Where Italy failed to carry out recommendations, they backed their lack of action with their belief that they have either done everything they could, or that there was nothing to improve because they truly believed in the practicality and implementation of their set system.

This is where the recurrence of the UPR becomes a beneficial tool for perpetuating improvement. By 2014, no doubt with the rise of the refugee crisis, the heightened attention to boat refugees and the potentially poor performance in response to the recommendations of the second cycle, Italy received four more recommendations than during the previous cycle. Despite this, the Human Rights Council released a document in late 2014 that deemed that Italy did enact legislative measures to better their legislative and institutional framework for human rights protection.

SuR	Recommendations for Cycle Two	RS	Action
Italy	Improve identification of victims of trafficking in human beings by setting up a coherent national mechanism of identification and referral of such cases, including among unaccompanied minors, irregular migrants and asylum seekers	Moldova	5
Italy	Fully align its migration and asylum policy in accordance with international law	Kenya	5
Italy	Suspend summary returns to Greece	Sweden	5

Italy	Finalize the Programme of Action for the new Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020 in due time frame	Turkey	5
Italy	Introduce legislation to ensure assistance and protection for unaccompanied children seeking asylum	Denmark	5
Italy	Facilitate the development of small businesses for both Italian citizens and migrants and establish programmes to encourage the economic and social integration of refugees	Mexico	4
Italy	Reinforce measures aiming at the protection of the rights of migrants and asylum seekers and the improvement of their conditions	Cote d'Ivoire	4
Italy	Take further efforts to improve the conditions of migrants and asylum seekers who arrive to the Italian territories, and ensure that they are provided with their guaranteed rights	Qatar	4
Italy	Strengthen other efforts already in practice which provide life-saving assistance for migrants and initiate the new Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund 2014-2020	Holy See	4
Italy	Ensure that all those involved in the reception process for migrants have the training, time and ability to identify persons who want to apply for asylum. Anyone claiming to be an unaccompanied minor should benefit, without exception, from the specific protections guaranteed under Italian law, pending a properly conducted age determination	Netherlands	4
Italy	Ensure that the system for receiving and registering immigrants and asylum seekers is of a high standard, both in regards to capacity and expediency. In particular, that extra attention is given to minors	Norway	4
Italy	Work with international partners in responding to the protection needs of maritime migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, by developing standardized processing procedures and making necessary upgrades to improve conditions of reception and expulsion centres	United States	4
Italy	Improve the facilities in the reception centres	Sudan	4
Italy	Ensure that every child, particularly unaccompanied minors, whether on the high seas or on its territory, who seeks to enter Italy, has the right to an individual consideration of his/her circumstances and is provided prompt access to asylum and other relevant national and international procedures and protective measures	Brazil	4
Italy	Continue working at the national level to protect the human rights of migrants, including those who have requested refuge or asylum, and in particular with regard to the principle of non-refoulement	Guatemala	2

Again, some, such as Guatemala, were fairly vague and prompted the state to work further to protect human rights of migrants and those seeking refugee and asylum status on the national level. There were recommendations made by Brazil, Cote d'Ivoire and Denmark of Italy's need to further improve its handling of refugee children—whether accompanied,

unaccompanied, on land, or on the high seas—with a specific emphasis on its need to give specific and individual consideration of their circumstance, which implies Italy's inconsistent assessment of refugee circumstances in general. In December 2014, UNHCR observed a spike in Eritrean refugees entering Europe, noting that 78 children arrived unaccompanied in the month of October alone—an alarming number if considering that Italian conditions may not have been suitable for unaccompanied children. Unlike the previous cycle, certain Member States, such as the United States, also prompted Italy to engage with international partners in order to provide protection needs for the boat migrants and boat refugees by developing more standardized processing procedures and upgrading aspects in order to further improve reception and expulsion centers. Such a suggestion implies a closer tie to international organizations and collaboration, and is a step towards a solution recognized by the international community. There was also a recommendation from Moldova that pushed Italy to further identify victims of human trafficking, particular unaccompanied minors and refugees. Such a concern was not addressed in the previous cycle, and demonstrates increased knowledge regarding boat refugee entry to Italy.

Similar to the first cycle, there is a push for the further integration of refugees, except this time this integration is defined as both economic and social and potentially achieved via development of small businesses.

The issue with such recommendations is their broad nature. Similar to the previous cycle, Member States touched on the overall improvement of refugee rights in Italy, along with a specific focus on rights of the child, renovation of asylum centers and international cooperation. With no published Mid-term Implementation Assessment, Italy's direct actions in response to these recommendations can only be interpreted via its recent action—and these

recommendations may have become even more applicable yet even more inapplicable with the influx of refugees to the EU.

## **Why Go Elsewhere?**

It is important to note that while Italy is part of the European Union and thus under the Dublin Regulation which requires that asylum-seekers seek asylum in the country where they first land, Eritrean refugees do not always have the desire to stay in Italy. If Italy does not fall under their location of choice, they do not announce their arrival if they can avoid it—an action that can be faced with a number of consequences outlined in previous sections. An argument exists against the “fiscally-austere”, slow and overcrowded asylum system in Italy, which becomes particularly extensive during peak migration influx during the summer months. Especially when compared to the more generous and smoother systems in states such as Germany and Sweden, to some Italy has less to offer in terms of social benefits and freedoms granted to noncitizens. Needless to say this leads to a further trajectory of movement outside of Italian territory, where Eritrean refugees are faced with a similar pattern of struggling through the asylum process and barriers to integration through racism, cultural values, socioeconomic standards and so on.

Due to heightened collaboration among the international community, in this case particularly in the European Union, some refugees that enter Greece and Italy—two countries that receive greater amounts than those located further West or more inland—become redirected towards other countries within Europe. This too brings up its own set of controversies, considering that despite being refugees, the people do not lose their right to agency and may have their own motivations to travelling to whichever country they hope to arrive in during their



transit phase. While this does deplete pressure on Italy, the first group was already resettled in October of 2015; it adds more uncertainty to the migratory trajectory.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

An overview of the migratory trajectory and the paths Eritreans take once they enter Italy presents the overall notion that while Italy may be trying to accommodate the circumstances to a certain degree, there are still shortcomings in their approach of handling the incoming refugee populations and their settling within Italian borders. The complications experienced during the Eritrean journey, the pre-existing recommendations from UN Member States and aid organizations, and Italy's responses to them, can serve as a springboard for further recommendations for Italian migration policy—some recommendations being more realistic to achieve than others due to the availability of space, funds, and resources.

Most sources addressed in this paper point towards the necessity to reform the actions of Italian navy and coast guard in regards to intercepting boats that hold Eritrean refugees on the Mediterranean Sea. The international community, as well as international aid organizations, holds these actions below the standard of behavior expected in such a situation, and the Eritrean refugees themselves exhibit fear and avoidance of rescue by Italian ships, even if they are in dire situations, because they are weary of the possibility of being returned to Libyan detention centers. When the Italian government acknowledges this as an issue, the primary concern consists of the illegality of migration within policy—which has not been majorly reformed since 2009—as well as the frantic atmosphere in the state during peak periods of migration. A very obvious recommendation in this case would be to formally address these international standards within a policy context, thus straightforwardly outlining that Italian officials are not to return these refugees to Libya, especially once they are in international or Italian waters. Additionally,

though more difficult to implement, I would also suggest that Italy develop a more effective method of discerning between economic migrants and refugees considering that they have a history of not accepting Eritreans under the premise that they migrate for economic reasons rather than for political asylum. This, together with an implementation against intercepting refugee boats, would limit the number of migrants returned without giving fair assessment of their asylum status, and in turn save more lives than when such measures may be implemented, but not always enforced.

In terms of arrival then, especially evident via first person accounts, Italy does not have an intake process that consists of an effective follow-through. Once refugees receive asylum status, they are not provided with aid that allows them to take a step towards integration and are, in terms of guidance and aid, no longer part of the intake system. This leaves them more or less on their own, in a country where they previously were given guidance, and yet no preparation. Italy could play a more involved role in the fates of the refugees after the intake process, whether it be through the collaboration with social workers, social programs, or the establishment of a non-profit organization that both aids in daily life, such as organizing housing acquisition or work coordination, and allows better communication and understanding between refugees and locals.

Italian policy overall would benefit from extended research done on behalf of the Eritrean population in order to learn more about the people's cultural, political, economic, and social expectations and needs. Currently, the information available in regards to Eritrean refugees in general is decently limited, owing in part to the advanced attention given to the larger refugee group of Syrians, and also the Western focus of the media. As in most situations of migratory integration, the view of Eritreans as the "other" facilitates xenophobic relationships and a lack of

motivation to integrate the “other” into the dominant majority. Additionally, it does not facilitate an integration or assimilation process that provides refugees with an ability to safely retain their culture in the broader Italian process. While this issue is incredibly important to address, there has not been a successful case of non-European refugee integration in Europe within recent years. Even the more flexible and giving of receiving countries, such as Germany and Sweden, have faced regular xenophobic violence. In close relation to the previous point about Italy’s follow through process, Italy should also work to educate a number of different actors within its own communities, such as social workers or politicians, as well as community education events in regards to the refugee population at hand. Fear of the unknown or different is a driving force behind many xenophobic actions and acts as a hindrance to integration on social, political and economic levels. A mutual education of refugees in regards to what to expect in their receiving country, as well as the education of local officials and citizens, could bring about an understanding that would benefit both the ease of the community, and the assimilation possibilities for the refugees.

On a broader scale, Italy cannot hope to cope with this crisis without the greater involvement and aid from the international community, as both UNHCR and the Member States suggested. There is little doubt that the current refugee crisis, involving both Eritrean refugees and others, has placed and will continue to place increased pressure on European states to accept higher numbers of migrants than they originally would have allowed. Still, in terms of the refugees worldwide, not a single European country makes the list of countries that accept the highest numbers of refugees, and in terms of engagement with the international community, all of Europe could further step up in order to accommodate these migratory trajectories and help to

relieve the strain of those European countries that take in the most refugees—either by chance due to border proximity or by choice due to policy considerations.

Despite the extensive list of criticisms and policy changes, it should be noted that the current Refugee Crisis has put a pressure on Europe that has never existed before in this way. There is hope for Italy, and for Eritrean refugees who enter its borders, largely because of the presence of this issue in global discourse and international discussions today. The international standard—though a mysterious and undefined entity—has started to hold Italy accountable to some extent, but more importantly, has come to realize that Italy cannot handle the influx of refugee populations on its own.

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