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Stuck in Transit: Secondary Migration of Asylum Seekers in Europe, National Differences, and the Dublin Regulation

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The European Union's ambition to create a harmonized reception system for asylum seekers differs from the realities on the ground. We address how differences in national reception conditions stimulate the secondary migration that challenges the creation of an effective common migration regulation in Europe. We base our analysis on the Dublin Regulation (DR) and the secondary movement of Eritrean asylum seekers from Italy to Norway. The empirical material consists of qualitative interviews with civil servants, NGO representatives, and Eritrean migrants in Milan and Rome, and Norwegian civil servants. Recently developed models of migration destination selection were used to analyse the interaction between individual aspirations and structural constraints. We found that the Eritrean informants remained highly motivated to apply in a second country but were to some extent held back by the DR. Supranational regulations were challenged by the migrants' actions and by national differences in reception and welfare standards. Both the migrants' aspirations to move on and the challenges to a harmonized regional regulation of migration increased during times of economic crisis.

Keywords: Dublin Regulation, migration, Eritreans, asylum seekers, destination selection, secondary migration, Italy, Norway, Common European Asylum System

The standards for receiving asylum seekers vary considerably between EU countries today [...] It should not matter which country you flee to [...] If all member countries have a functional reception system, we can help more people in need of asylum (Cecilia Malmström, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs, 2012).

There is a discrepancy between the European Union's ambitions to create a harmonized reception system for asylum seekers and the realities on the ground. National differences in reception conditions, access to integration measures and social rights undermine the supranational efforts to coordinate policies across the region. These differences encourage secondary movement by migrants, movement that the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) was intended to prevent. The current economic crisis heightens these differences, creating tension between countries and increasing the importance of reconsidering the common knowledge on harmonization efforts in Europe.

The Dublin Regulation (DR) which states that asylum seekers should have their cases processed in the European country in which they are first registered, constitutes one of the basic elements in the harmonized policies. The Dublin system is now challenged across Europe by gaps in reception policies and living standards: significant national differences prevail as to liberality in granting asylum status, access to welfare goods and the labour market. In this article we analyse how these discrepancies impact individual migrant strategies in terms of secondary movements within the European Economic Area (EEA: the European Union plus Switzerland, Iceland and Norway). We shed light on the movements of Eritrean

applicants who land in Italy and consider moving on to northern Europe, particularly to Norway. For people fleeing Africa, Italy is a major gateway to Europe; it has also been one of the countries hardest hit by the financial crisis. Norway continues to have a strong economy and generous welfare policies. The Italy–Norway axis today represents a significant example of regime competition within the EEA.

Thus, the article aims at a three level approach: regional, national and individual levels are considered in combination, and corresponding to these levels, we apply institutional, policy, and agency perspectives in our analysis. The *interplay* between the levels is central. The refugees' opportunity structure is conditioned by the EU and Dublin institutions and influenced by the varying national bundles of welfare, protection, and labour-market parameters. On the other hand, the individual asylum seeker or refugee in acting upon the opportunities, in turn challenges their legal environment.

More specifically, we ask: how do the Dublin Regulation and national differences in reception conditions influence migrants' strategies for secondary movements within Europe? And how do these secondary movements and national differences within the region challenge the DR?

We use concepts from migration systems theory and an empirically based model of forced migration to analyse the interaction between individual actions and the transit context (opportunity structures *en route*). This allows us to combine a structural approach with individual decision-making.

A Common European Asylum System and National Differences

The Dublin Regulation is key in the European effort to create a common regional asylum legislation. It is based on the principle that 'it should not matter which country you flee to', as Commissioner Malmström put it. However, great variations in pull factors beyond protection, represent stumbling blocks for the harmonization project. The current gap between goals and reality provides the background for our discussion of secondary migration.

CEAS

The CEAS (Common European Asylum System), formed to ensure the orderly processing and reception of asylum seekers, has four EU directives: the Dublin Regulation (DR) (2003/343/CE),ⁱ the Asylum Procedures Directive (revised version: Directive 2013/32/EU, processing asylum cases), the Qualification Directive (Directive 2011/95/EU (recast), clarifying the grounds for granting international protection), and the Reception Directive (reception conditions and rights for asylum seekers).ⁱⁱ All four directives have been revised over the past five years.

The EU countries have also adopted other directives (on labour migration, irregular migration, return, family migration, and more) to create a wider harmonized migration policy throughout the EEA region.

The process towards harmonization of the Member States' and later the EEA countries' asylum policies began in the late 1990s (European Parliament 2010). Its goal is to reduce the differences between countries through common supranational legislation that binds national legislators (ECRE 2006).ⁱⁱⁱ

The CEAS's impact has been more profound than most academics predicted in the late 1990s (Vevstad 2006). National differences in legislation and practices in asylum law have steadily decreased over the past 15 to 20 years. In 2008, an evaluation of the CEAS directives confirmed a convergence in standards: countries that started at lower levels had improved and those that started at higher levels had maintained above-minimum standards (European Parliament 2010).

The Dublin Regulation is formulated to ensure that only one country shall be responsible for processing an asylum seeker's application. It regulates the transfer of people who move on to present their case in a second country and hinders asylum seekers from 'asylum shopping', moving from one country to the next and applying multiple times for protection, or from 'orbiting' throughout Europe with no single country taking responsibility for their cases (ECRE 2006). The default is to return persons to the first European country where they applied for asylum (according to DR deadlines).

Part of the Dublin system, the EURODAC Regulation, establishes a database of fingerprints of asylum seekers entering the Schengen area. All asylum seekers who arrive in the EEA area are obliged to have their fingerprints taken during registration. The EURODAC archive is an important tool that immigration authorities across the DR area can access when determining whether an individual has applied in or travelled through other European countries.

The DR has faced two main challenges since it was introduced in 1997 and reformed in 2003 (Dublin II) and 2013 (Dublin III): The principle of 'first country of arrival' lays a disproportional burden on the countries on Europe's southern border (e.g., Italy and Greece); and differences in reception conditions, processing ability, and access to social rights prompt regime competition.

Differences among the member states in living standards, labour-market conditions, and access to government support create incentives for asylum seekers to move on from the first country of asylum to better conditions in the North. As we shall see, some are discouraged by the DR; others move on regardless.

In 2011 most European countries, including Norway, stopped returning asylum seekers to Greece under the DR, initially because the European Court of Human Rights decided that reception conditions and case handling in Greece did not secure the returnees' human rights (Welcome to Europe 2011). Since then, asylum seekers travelling from Greece to Norway have had their cases processed upon arrival. In 2012 Norwegian NGOs suggested a suspension of Dublin returns to Italy, arguing that Italy's reception conditions were unacceptable.

Reception Conditions in Italy and Norway

There are substantial differences between Italy and Norway in reception conditions for asylum seekers, in government integration efforts, and general welfare systems.

When we collected our data in 2012, Italy had five distinct reception systems for asylum seekers.^{iv} Cross-communication was limited and with one exception, they did not have their own designated groups of migrants or specific tasks.

After the primary reception and processing phase, the Italian government offers a limited number of places to those who are accepted, that is, those who have been given either refugee status or one of two subsidiary statuses. The integration efforts include housing and vocational training, but again, parallel systems existed and there were many local solutions involving local government, NGOs and national initiatives. In 2012, the national initiative SPRAR (Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati) estimated a need for 30,000 spaces for such secondary reception support, yet only 3,000 were at their disposal, according to our informants.

Typically, an asylum seeker in Italy would be to be registered upon arrival and transferred to an open reception centre (i.e., one of the five systems), where they stay from two months to several years; employees estimated an average of eight to twelve months for the whole process. After processing, a minority (mostly members of vulnerable groups and families with small children) got access to one of the all-inclusive places within the SPRAR. The duration of the SPRAR offer was six months, occasionally extended to one year. Some

asylum seekers had day-to-day arrangements with minimal social support, and others were left to themselves. Those who were not moving on hoped eventually to achieve a ‘normal life’ that would provide a minimum level of income and basic housing. Our informants were in the midst of this difficult process: not yet settled, remaining in limbo with unclear prospects for the future.

The economic situation in Italy in 2012–2013 was strongly marked by the financial crisis. Unemployment was high (BLS 2013: 3), and certain regions were particularly hard hit, including Milan and Rome.

Italy has been labelled a Mediterranean or rudimentary welfare state (Esping Andersen 1990; Leibfried 1992), characterized by both modest compensation levels and limited access to social benefits. Many of its benefits are contribution based or needs based. In practice, Italy’s welfare system presupposes family support (called ‘familialism’ by Esping Andersen) when problems arise (Esping Andersen 2000: 5).

In contrast, asylum seekers who are accepted in Norway encounter a well-organized reception system, a two-year comprehensive introductory programme, and extensive welfare benefits. Fuelled by the oil economy, Norway has, by and large, escaped the financial crisis, and its unemployment rate has been stable at a low level. Primary reception has been organized under one directorate that controls approximately 130 reception centres. The secondary introductory programme includes guaranteed housing and a mandatory qualification course with language and job training. Its participants receive a salary higher than the basic welfare benefit (social assistance). Beyond this specialized training for newly arrived refugees and their family members, all legal residents have access to a wide range of universal social rights.

The majority of our informants in Italy knew about the legal aspects of their situation. They were familiar with the DR and the national differences in reception conditions, integration programmes, and social rights.^v

Secondary Migration from Italy to Norway

In 2011, 10,058 Eritrean asylum seekers were registered in Europe, rising to 11,440 in 2012 (UNHCR 2013a:24). Eritrean refugees follow two main routes to Europe: most use the central Mediterranean route, through Sudan, Libya and by boat to Lampedusa, Sicily or Malta; others follow the land route through Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Israel or Jordan to Turkey and Greece. Some asylum seekers have enough resources to fly directly into one of the major cities in Europe.

Most refugees landing in Italy are apprehended offshore and brought to reception centres on the islands where they are fingerprinted before being transferred to case processing on the mainland. Some refugees manage to land unnoticed by the authorities; unregistered, they can move on to other European countries.

A large proportion of asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa who arrive in Norway have travelled through Italy (Brekke and Aarset 2009). There are no exact statistics, but over the past five years, around 750 Dublin cases were presented by Norwegian authorities to their Italian colleagues each year, most pertaining to Eritrean applicants.^{vi} In 2012, the Eritrean refugee population in Italy increased by 100 and in Norway by 1,500, supporting the notion of a movement towards the north (UNHCR, Statistical Yearbook 2013b:87). Data on asylum seekers in Norway waiting to be returned to Italy under the DR also indicate more Eritreans coming to Norway through Italy after the 2008 financial crisis. The number of Eritreans with a Dublin request to Italy in reception centres more than tripled from autumn 2008 through 2009.^{vii}

Methodology

We undertook two separate field studies, one in Norway (2009), the other in Italy (2012). Case-file studies and semi-structured qualitative interviews were combined with visits to reception facilities, shantytowns and public offices.

Empirical Material

The data gathered in Norway in 2009 included access to 20 case files of recently arrived Eritrean asylum seekers along with 15 qualitative interviews with applicants residing in reception centres in the Oslo region. All informants were adults and the man to woman ratio was even. The questionnaire focused mainly on their reasons for applying in Norway (Brekke and Aarset 2009). Both the case files and the interviews showed that the majority had travelled through Italy where they stayed for some time before moving on. Although the case files were for different individuals than those interviewed in the Norwegian reception centres, their stories of moving through Italy and Europe were similar, supporting our conclusion about the importance of conditions in transit. In 2012, we complemented the 2009 Norwegian fieldwork with interviews with civil servants who processed Dublin cases.

The Norwegian material about the asylum seekers' experiences in transit spurred our second field study addressing the situation in transit in Italy for the Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees. Findings from the 2009 interviews are referred to, although the main emphasis is on the data gathered in 2012.

Whereas the interviews in Norway were done after the asylum seekers had arrived at their (wanted) final destination, the informants in Italy were in the midst of deciding whether to stay or move on.

In October 2012, we gathered our data in Italy (Brekke, Brochmann and Belloni 2012). This involved three groups of informants: authorities and NGOs working with asylum seekers; staff and NGOs at reception centres; and asylum seekers and refugees living under different conditions. We interviewed 54 informants, including 30 asylum seekers or refugees; 10 civil servants working for the local or national migration authorities; 8 reception centre staff members; and 6 NGO workers.

The first group of informants, civil servants working for local and national authorities in Rome and Milan, included the office responsible for SPRAR, the asylum office in the city of Milan, and representatives for the municipality of Rome. The meetings were based on a standard open interview guide that was adjusted to each new setting. Notes were taken, transcribed, and discussed among the research team while in the field. We interviewed ten civil servants and key national and local NGOs, including UNHCR, Jesuit Refugee Service, Caritas and Cittadini del Mondo. Eight informants discussed the situation for refugees and asylum seekers residing in Italy and their aspirations to move on.

The second group of informants consisted of staff members and NGOs at the reception centres. We visited two centres in the Milan region and one outside Rome where we conducted open semi-structured qualitative interviews with employees responsible for administration, health services, and counselling. We also interviewed NGO representatives from Aquarinto (psychological counselling), Sinergasia (communication), and Befree (vulnerable women). These organizations were all represented inside one of the reception centres.

The third group of informants consisted of the asylum seekers and refugees themselves. Besides the asylum seekers in two large reception centres, we interviewed refugees with residence status living in temporary integration facilities, and refugees who were already accepted and living in shacks, along closed railway lines, or in the streets.

A semi-structured open interview guide was used to interview asylum seekers inside the reception centres. Notes were taken, transcribed, and discussed among the team of researchers

the same evening. The information was coded and concepts were developed during this process. In total, the field work inside the reception centres provided six one-hour individual interviews with Eritrean asylum seekers and one group interview with eight Eritrean informants. We also spoke to 10 asylum seekers of other nationalities (including Sudanese, Pakistani, and Ethiopian) about the conditions in Italy and their aspirations and earlier attempts to leave Italy for other European destinations. In one reception centre, we were approached by several Asian and African residents who spoke Norwegian; they had returned to Italy under the DR after having been in the Norwegian asylum system.

Apart from the informants in the centres, we met with individual asylum seekers as well as small groups in cafes, squats, and other sheltered or unsheltered temporary housing. These persons were predominately men age 25 to 35 of Eritrean or Sudanese origin whose situations differed with regard to migration status. Some had no papers, others were having their asylum cases being processed, and still others had legal residency in Italy.

Access

In Norway, access to informants was secured by contacting reception centres directly and getting asylum seekers to volunteer.

In Italy, we visited three reception centres, selected to provide a variety of function and size; the largest was for more than 600 applicants in the Rome region, and the smallest for around 60 mothers and their children in Milan.

We gained access to the asylum seekers and refugees outside the centres with help from an Italian PhD student with close ties to the Eritrean migrant community in the two cities. Starting with her network, one informant recruited others. This ‘snowball method’ might lead to most informants belonging to the same social community, limiting the range of information. We countered this by starting several recruitment chains at the same time and directly recruiting informants in reception centres. In each city, we encountered gatekeepers who guaranteed our legitimacy to the others in the loosely knit community.

Several of our informants stated that they wanted to tell their story; they wanted to be heard. It is always a challenge to draw wide conclusions from case-study material. However, the qualitative information discussed in this article is invaluable within the larger endeavour of understanding individuals’ decisions to move on within the context of macro and meso-structures. We looked for patterns and commonalities in the stories and statements.

Using a model of forced migration developed by Brekke and Aarset (2009) and selections from the work of de Haas (2010), we structure our data presentation via the following concepts: the migrants’ *immediate situation*, their *perception of opportunities* in Italy and alternative destination countries, *information*, *perceptions of hindrances*, *capabilities* (resources, networks, abilities), and finally, *destination specificity* (directedness towards one specific country).

The Migrants’ Immediate Situation

How did the Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees in Italy experience their situation?

The standards of the reception centres in Italy varied greatly. We visited one of the larger CARAs that had more than 600 residents and a challenging physical and social environment. The building had been repurposed and not well maintained since the 1960s. The director said:

Our main challenge is with the building and the structure of the building. It was not built for this purpose. We are surprised all the time, mould, water leaks, doors that break. And it is very difficult to clean. The trash and dirt influence the asylum seekers (October 2012). The staff reluctantly tolerated daily inconveniences, such as insects in the ventilation system, visible humidity in the walls, and missing doors. The minimal cash support and the location,

far from any city centre, contributed to a sense of isolation. Staff pointed to the lack of funding and the fact that the asylum seekers were meant to stay for only a few weeks. In reality, many residents spent months—and some even years—there (a single mother with three small children had stayed more than two years), which heightened everyone's frustration. Many left the centre and then returned; we met asylum seekers from all over the world who told us they were back after having tried their luck in other European countries, including Norway. There was constant talk of better standards and cash allowances in reception facilities further north in Europe. However, there were few complaints about case processing or access to health, school, and psychiatric support.

At a specialized reception centre for women and children in Milan, the standard of the building and the staff-to-resident-ratio were considerably higher. But this centre had a very limited number of spaces available and fathers and sons were not allowed to stay. The splitting of family units most likely spurred onward migration.

The push factors in the reception phase became stronger for the vast majority after they left the centres. We met people who had not been accepted into the SPRAR system, who lived in squats, in shantytowns, in occupied buildings, or outdoors along the railway tracks, occasionally taking up offers from NGOs and local authorities of a hot meal and day-to-day housing. Their short-term prospects in Italy were meagre, and they needed a stable income to get family reunification. In Italy, where the informal sector could normally serve as a bridge into legal employment for migrants, the financial crisis had now by and large removed this option for our informants.

In 2012, the overall unemployment rate in Italy was 12 per cent and for people younger than 25, it was above 40 per cent (<http://countryeconomy.com/>). According to our informants in Milan, the region around the city was particularly hard hit by the economic crisis, making it very difficult for newly arrived migrants to find work. Norway's overall unemployment rate in 2012 was around 3.5 per cent and for those younger than 25, it was 9.5 per cent (<http://countryeconomy.com/>).

The immediate situation in 2012 of the Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees in Italy was challenging both inside and outside the formal reception system—and sometimes the line between the inside and the outside blurred. The director of the larger CARA stated:

We have a very fluid situation here. People are coming and going at will. But the situation is also fluid because of Dublin returnees that come back after having stayed in other countries. We have gates and a fence, but people who no longer live here jump the fence and spend the night (October 2012).

Perceptions of Opportunities

Most of our informants stated that their aspirations, their hopes and dreams, lay outside Italy's borders. They idealized the lives of asylum seekers and refugees in the countries further north. The UK, Norway, and Sweden stood out as attractive destinations for the Eritreans. One informant stated:

There you get everything if you are accepted: housing, pocket money, education and work.

Only one of our informants held that life in Italy had its advantages: an Eritrean man in his late twenties, sitting in an improvised backyard in a shantytown who spoke about the vivid Southern-European culture:

Here in Italy we talk to people at the bus stop. It is easier to manage yourself, the laws are less strict. There are fewer benefits, but a structure that is easier to live with.

He compared it to the bleaker prospect of an existence in an organized but remote Norwegian reception centre:

In Norway it is too quiet, people from other countries that go there feel very lonely. My cousin told me that you open the curtains in the morning, sit at the computer with Facebook all day, then close the curtains. They get depressed.

Still, he recognized his own lack of prospects, and continued:

But in Norway there is hope, a future, a way forward. I look at my friend here who has been living in [shantytown] for two years longer than me. And I think, is this what I have to look forward to?

The lack of opportunities in Italy dominated the other informants' responses, and they viewed the country as a gateway to Europe and countries further north. An Eritrean mother of two, who like many others, had fled the unpredictable military service in her home country, said:

I had heard bad things about Italy before I left Eritrea. I only wanted to get to a safe place. People told me that Sweden and Norway were much better, but that it was difficult to get papers [residency] there. In Italy we get our papers, but we don't get school, shelter or assistance.

To most, the long-term prospects in Italy seemed bleak. Many needed outside support to maintain a basic standard of living. Although an improved labour market could ease the situation for most male refugees, several of the long-stayers were in a marginal position even after years in the country and existence would be challenging for the single women with young children.

Information

The asylum seekers and refugees in Italy got their information from several sources.^{viii} Most learned about the Dublin Regulation, national asylum regimes, and access to social rights while *en route* to or after arriving in Italy. Others had explicit knowledge about the DR and the conditions in the various European countries before they left their home country.

The DR was particularly well known among the migrants. The significance of fingerprints was widely discussed and most informants knew about the consequences of the regulation.

We interviewed a group of young Eritrean men who had arrived in Lampedusa on a boat carrying 54 asylum seekers. While at sea, everyone had agreed to collectively resist having their fingerprints taken once they arrived. This resulted in a confrontation between government officials and these new arrivals. In the end, they were all fingerprinted and registered. Others told us they had, before reaching the shore, planned to run in different directions and hide to avoid detection and registration (Brekke and Aarset 2009).

Spreading information about other opportunities in Europe was an important part of the temporary-migrant culture in transit. Fellow travellers and temporary networks were essential *en route*, as were people within the diaspora, inside the reception centres, and later in the various temporary housing arrangements, including people with first-hand experience of the migration regimes in other countries, of opportunities and hindrances. Some of them had tried moving on only to be returned, and others were living (with or without permission) in other European countries. Dublin returnees provided specific—often negative—information about the conditions in other countries. They had tried and failed and now told others about what could happen to them if they were to try. Within the Eritreans' networks, phones, internet, email, and especially, social media facilitated the flow of information.

Our informants, too, provided information to each other and to others in the migration system. However, living in reception centres, shantytowns and squats, they felt pressured to sugarcoat the stories they sent home or to those on their way to Europe:

If my cousin asks me, I cannot tell him not to come here. There is no alternative. He cannot stay in Eritrea and nowhere along the route. So what can I tell him? So they arrive and end up here, like us (Eritrean man, early thirties).

But not everyone was well informed about the details of migration regimes in other European countries. Interviews with newly arrived Eritrean asylum seekers in Norway revealed that secondary migration can be spurred by diffuse rumours (Brekke and Aarset 2009). They reported having chosen Norway as a result of unspecified information that held Norway to be 'a good country...now'. This finding was confirmed during our fieldwork in Italy. Some reported having left Italy after hearing an unspecified 'someone' or 'they' say that Norway was a good destination. A female Eritrean informant in her late thirties said: 'I heard everyone was going to Norway'.

This study revealed an uneven distribution of information and knowledge among the Eritrean asylum seekers. Their access to sources of information and systematic use of this knowledge seemed to be correlated with factors such as general level of resources and education.

Perception of Hindrances

Perhaps surprisingly, the Eritreans did not see crossing borders as a major obstacle for moving on to other European countries. Inside the Schengen area, border controls were minimal or absent. Travel was relatively inexpensive, and if they had papers and legal residence in Italy, direct flights within Schengen could take them to countries in the north in a few hours. If they had not yet received their papers, they could travel by car. They could get a ride from people within their network and drive from Milan to Oslo in less than two days. These tempting options were reality checked by the DR and the possibility of being returned. According to staff at the reception centres, NGO personnel, and the asylum seekers themselves, being sent back after living for months or even years in other DR countries could set them back: they would have to re-start their integration process in Italy, and the mental strain was considerable.

At the same time, the legal risks of travelling to countries like Norway to re-apply for asylum were minimal. No legal sanctions followed such actions, apart from a possible forced return. Consequently, many Eritreans tried a second country one or more times.

A group of five residents of the shantytown outside Rome agreed:

We want to go anywhere else. We have all been outside the country and been returned here. It is impossible because of Dublin. All people that leave come back, from Norway and Sweden as well.

Our informants expressed envy of those who had the good fortune to avoid being registered upon arrival to Italy. According to one:

My brother went through Sardinia and did not have his prints taken. He got his status in Norway. On his way north, he travelled through Rome and stayed with us here in

[shantytown]. This summer he travelled down from Norway and visited us...as a tourist!

Our fieldwork revealed contradictory descriptions of hindrances and options within the transit community, but that there were enough stories of successful secondary moves to maintain the drive to try. The ratio of Dublin cases being returned to Italy from Norway confirms this perception. According to Norwegian civil servants, a small proportion of Eritrean Dublin cases were processed and ultimately given residency.

Capabilities

The capabilities (networks, access to resources, and abilities; see de Haas 2010) of our Eritrean informants varied widely. Some had education and support from networks in Italy, in other European countries, and at home in Eritrea. Others had varied backgrounds and meagre work experience or education. Women with responsibility for children appeared particularly vulnerable.

Our informants depended on their networks for their immediate material needs in Italy and for maintaining their aspirations to a better life. They sent money to relatives in their home country, but received support themselves from friends and family who were in a better situation. The people within their networks could encourage them to move on to other countries or to stay in Italy. Some were waiting, hoping to be reunited with family or friends who were on their way to Europe. Others, possibly hampered by family and children, were less mobile or not as willing to risk a second try in another country.

Many of the Eritreans we met in Italy were highly aware of their rights as applicants for asylum or as recognized refugees. They could point out breaches of deadlines by the local government in providing them with papers or housing. One individual in Milan had organized a petition to pressure the local authorities to provide migrants with temporary housing. A copy was sent to UNHCR in Geneva. There were also active exiled political groups among the more established Eritrean diaspora in Italy.

Apart from educational background, an individual's capabilities appeared to be strongly linked to knowledge and information. As has been argued by Antonovsky (1987), understanding one's environment and having the capabilities to influence outcomes in that environment represent keys to empowerment.

Destination Specificity

What was the asylum seeker's destination specificity at different stages of the journey to Italy and beyond? Although Italy was not the preferred destination for most of our informants, not all had any specific country in mind at the outset of their flight. In fact, most reported that their primary concern was to leave Eritrea. Only later, while in Sudan, Libya, or Egypt, did they consider different destinations within Europe. With some exceptions—applicants who had relatives in a specific country—their preferences seemed fluid during their journey.

A common mantra heard during our interviews was 'anywhere but Italy'. This was mirrored in the stories of people trying to avoid having their fingerprints taken and their envy of those who had actually managed to avoid registration in EURODAC and travel through Italy to other destinations. Some of these travellers stayed one or more nights with our informants in the shantytowns, another perk of their networks.

Was there a difference between the Eritreans who continued their journey to other European countries and those who remained in Italy? Among our informants, there were examples of single mothers, married couples, and young men who had gone to Norway or Sweden and come back. There did not seem to be a clear pattern of who went and who stayed.

Further, following the theoretical concepts in this article, we would be right in assuming that the persons moving on would be those who found their immediate situation the most intolerable, who had the highest destination specificity (of a country other than Italy), high capabilities, high perception of opportunities (elsewhere), and who saw few hindrances in borders and regulations and had enough information to make the decision.

However, by and large, our fieldwork revealed a group of people who remained in transit but aspired to move on. Mentally, they had not embraced Italy as the end of their asylum journey. Many of them had tried one or more times to go elsewhere in Europe, only to return or be returned. Their situation was characterized by a prolonged limbo, which left them even less motivated to integrate in the local Italian society.

During our interviews, it became clear that many Eritreans recently arrived in Italy had an unclear and indecisive approach to the alternatives 'stay', 'wait' and 'move on'. Although they nurtured thoughts of moving on one day, they existed while waiting for the next phase of their lives to start. In the end, many would probably stay in Italy. Nevertheless, their aspirations, their hopes and dreams of not only protection but also a better life made them unsettled.

A distinction can be drawn between perceived transit and real transit. Almost all of our informants wanted to move on to another country. Everyone had heard of someone who had managed to do so without being returned to Italy. Based on our interviews, an even more precise distinction may be made between a ‘temporary transit’ and a (near) ‘permanent transit’.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our case study addressed how the migrants’ strategies were influenced by the differences in regional and national policy, and highlighted the challenge of secondary migration to Europe’s common asylum regulations.

The challenges to a harmonized European asylum system caused by the differences in reception and welfare systems have been accentuated by the economic crisis. The breakdown of the asylum system in Greece and a constant high number of secondary migrants from Italy to Sweden, United Kingdom, and Norway support this statement. We argue that the migrants’ situation in Italy was strongly influenced by the DR. It tied them to Italy, unless they were willing to risk trying elsewhere, which would most likely lead to a waste of time and resources. And it influenced their strategies even before they arrived in Europe: trying to avoid ending up in one of the countries with a lower standard of reception conditions, integration support and welfare rights, they strove to avoid being registered upon arrival.

Various factors place EU/EEA countries along a scale of attractiveness for the migrants: geographical location; lenience of immigration and border control; the asylum process and the likelihood of getting protection; extension of rights, welfare goods, integration facilitators; and access to the labour market (Brekke and Aarset 2009). National differences in these areas directly affected the Eritrean asylum seekers’ and refugees’ aspirations. In the meantime, they led marginalized lives in Italy and tended to idealize life in the more elaborate welfare states further north.

Thus, although European regulations were meant to create comparable conditions across the region, differences persist. This is caused partly by conditions beyond migration policies (such as labour-market conditions, the recession, and general welfare provisions) but also, clearly, by the persistent institutional differences in reception conditions and integration efforts in the EU/EEA countries.

Our interviews revealed that newly arrived immigrants in Italy risk ending up in a precarious situation because of the lack of inclusive welfare arrangements. The Italian welfare model is contribution based, that is, support depends on previous legal employment. Without welfare, migrants and citizens alike must depend on help from family or others, but without formal employment or resourceful family networks, immigrants are particularly vulnerable. In the institutionally different and more comprehensive Norwegian welfare state, legal newcomers are included in the basic support system from day one.

Considering the almost systematic aspiration for a secondary asylum move, the secondary migration route between Italy and Norway can be viewed as a separate migration system (Mabogunje 1970; Portes and Börez 1987; de Haas 2010). Movement between the two countries was more or less stable in numbers; information flowed both ways; people returned or were returned to Italy after being rejected in Norway under the DR; and money flowed from Norway to relatives and friends who were still in Italy. It could perhaps be called a transit migration system. This would be distinguished from systems of forced migration involving routes from country of origin to country of destination in which migrants would typically be moving from an unsafe area or country to one that is safe. Instead, it includes routes between a transit country and the preferred destination country. One key element is that a high percentage of the Eritrean asylum seekers were protected in Italy, so they moved from ‘safe’ to ‘safe’, but to better living conditions and prospects for the future.

The transit migratory system presented here is explicitly sequential. The access to information, resources and networks, as well as the destination specificity was radically altered for the Eritrean asylum seekers in Italy compared to previous steps in their journeys; they recalibrated before possibly moving on.

We found that the Eritrean asylum seekers remained highly motivated to apply in a second country despite the DR. Many of our informants planned to leave Italy or had already done so. National differences in the asylum reception system, the integration support, and the comprehensiveness of the welfare states fuelled these aspirations. Their immediate situation provided the potential spark.

The DR contributed indirectly to creating the limbo that many of our informants experienced. Although the economic crisis in Italy increased their incentives to leave—for some, everyday life in Italy was close to unbearable—the chance of being returned was an important factor in their decision to stay or move on. A second try in another country would involve new stresses and new uncertainties, extending a complicated life in transition. The result was that their lives were on hold while they tried to ride out the crisis.

Judging from our interviews, without a DR, secondary migration within Europe would most certainly increase, particularly during an economic crisis.

Simultaneously the DR was challenged by these same national differences in reception and living standards. Since 2011, this had hindered returns to Greece, and stopping returns to Italy was being discussed.^{ix} Norwegian authorities were hard pressed by registered asylum seekers coming from Italy who argued that they should not be returned because of the lack of decent reception conditions there. The Norwegian Appeals Board has consistently pointed to Italy's orderly asylum process and has not found the conditions in Italy to be in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights (article 3). The 2011 stopping of returns to Greece immediately threatened Dublin cooperation. In practice, it gave *carte blanche* to asylum seekers arriving in Greece to travel to the European country of their choice to have their cases tried. Stopping returns to a second major entry point in Europe would have been a serious blow to continued cooperation.

Studying the secondary migration of asylum seekers provides an opportunity to analyse the tensions between the supranational ambitions of governance at the EU level and the persistent national differences in integration and welfare policies. These tensions shape the migration strategies of forced migrants who enter Europe via countries with a low level of support. One result is that migrants risk becoming stuck in the first country while aspiring to move on, so they do not try to integrate.

Our material provides evidence that the supranational asylum regulations in Europe are challenged by the actions of the migrants and by national differences in reception and welfare standards. Both the migrants' aspirations to move on and the challenges to a harmonized regional regulation of migration increase during times of economic crisis.

The development of the CEAS over the past 15 years has secured a coordination of legislation and procedures in the EEA countries, but national differences in other policy areas persist. Integration policy has not been coordinated within the EU. Committed to their national welfare regimes, these countries have so far refrained from any real attempts at harmonization. As long as the common regional legislation presupposes equal conditions in the individual countries and these conditions continue to differ in key areas, secondary migration will be motivated, which in turn will strain the supranational regulations.

This study of Eritrean asylum seekers and refugees residing in Italy and of their aspirations to move on gives us four key findings: National differences in the quality of the reception system, in welfare policies, and in labour market opportunities motivated the secondary migration of asylum seekers and refugees in Italy. The chance of being returned under the DR deterred such secondary migration, thus leaving the asylum seekers in limbo.

Norwegian authorities found that secondary migration increased during economic downturns and that national differences challenged their execution of returns under the DR. Stories of registered individuals who had left Italy and successfully re-applied for asylum in other European countries played a key role in keeping the dreams of a prosperous future alive.

ⁱ A revised version, Dublin III, took effect on January 1, 2014.

ⁱⁱ Council Directive 2003/9/EU. Expected to be revised in 2014 (EU COM 2011/320 Final).

ⁱⁱⁱ The institutional framework for CEAS can be found at www.ulb.ac.be/assoc/odysseus/CEAS/CEASinstframework.html

^{iv} The Marcone Emergency Centres (established in 2008), CARAS (Centri accoglienza per richiedenti asilo, reception centres; established in 2008), SPRAR (Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati, housing and vocational training; established in 2005), and local/NGO driven reception centres.

^v The psychological implications of staying or moving on to a third country are not discussed in this article. Such perspectives would most certainly shed light on the refugees' experiences of living in prolonged temporary conditions (Antonovsky 1987; Brekke 2004).

^{vi} Statistics provided by the Norwegian Directorate for Immigration on request.

^{vii} Statistics provided by the Norwegian Directorate for Immigration on request.

^{viii} The role of information in determining asylum seekers' destinations has been widely discussed in the literature. Significant contributions have been made by Havinga and Böcker (1999) raising the discussion, Koser and Pinkerton (2002) pointing to the varying legitimacy of the sources of information, as well as Gilbert and Koser (2006) who found limited pre-arrival knowledge among applicants to the UK, supported a few years later by Crawley (2010). Brekke and Aarset (2009) pointed to varying degrees of information among different nationalities.

^{ix} Decision of the Norwegian Immigration Appeals Board February 2011. Accessed 30 July 2014: <http://www.une.no/no/Aktuelt/Redegjorelser/Ingen-returer-til-Hellas--asylsoknadene-behandles-i-Norge/>

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