# Italian Refugee Crises

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### Part 1 - Problem:

Even though refugee arrivals into Italy by sea have decreased between 2017 and 2018 so far, the Italian government claimed that they could no longer bear the burden. On June 10, 2018, Italy's new Interior Minister Matteo Salvini, barred the rescue ship Aquarius from docking at Italian ports (Kington). Like many South European countries, Italy is facing a dilemma: how to balance the humanitarian rescue and the social instability brought by the overwhelming influx of refugees.

### Part 2 - Causes:

Fleeing from wars and seeking better economic opportunities are the main reasons that drive millions of refugees to risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean Sea. After 7 years of civil war, almost half of Syria's population has been displaced, creating over 6 million refugees (McKenna). Refugees from other conflict regions of Africa have tried every means to reach the northern shores of Libya, hoping to sail across the sea regardless of the rampant human trafficking and adverse weather conditions. Due to the special geographical location, Italy is one of the primary countries of first arrival for refugees. According to the International Organization for Migration, 114,287 migrants have reached European shores, "of which 85% are Italian arrivals" (Fox). It is unfair to let Italy solely accept all the refugees. However, the Dublin Principle "places legal responsibility on migrants and asylum applications", rendering many migrants stuck in Italy (McOuirk). Even worse, many countries in the European Union are unwilling to take the responsibility. Some wealthier countries such as Germany and the Netherlands argue that "they have done enough", and hardline central European governments including Hungary and Poland "flatly reject all compulsory refugee distribution schemes" (Henley). The African political turmoils, Italy's geographical position, and the lack of support from other European countries put a disproportional refugee burden on Italy.

### Part 3 - Effect:

Banning the rescue ships from docking has induced numerous disapprovals from international authorities. The politics professor Flavio Vassallo pointed out that the Italian government was disregarding International law and the European Convention on Human Rights (Brabant). Meanwhile, Amnesty International heavily criticized the initiative, saying that repatriating the refugees would "expose [them] to horrific abuse" (Fox).

In spite of the harsh criticisms, the simmering migration crises still gave rise to heavy antiimmigrant sentiments and vehement violence towards the refugees in Italy. A research conducted by
the Pew Research Centre in 2016 showed that 60% of Italians believed that inflows of refugees will
increase domestic terrorism, much higher than the European median (McQuirk). Some radical
Italians vented their discontent in violent ways. For example, Konate Bouyagui, a 22-year-old
Malian with legal residency, was struck by bullets fired by two Italian boys in June, 2018 (Tondo).
The Interior Minister Matteo Salvini's opposition politicians have accused him of "creating a
climate of hate" rather than finding a solution to the issue (Tondo). To find out whether the
immigrants actually generated more crime in Italy, a group of scholars from the London School of
Economics and Political Science have conducted a statistical analysis. Based on the data from the
Italian National Institute of Statistics, they illustrated that while the amount of refugees continued to
rise, the share of crimes committed by foreigners has fallen significantly over the last decade
(Saudelli).

The domestic perception of threatening crime is unwarranted, and many Italians ignore the positive effects brought by the refugees. Studies by Prof. Alexander Betts, director of Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre, emphasize that refugees are able to boost the country's GDP if they are "given enough work opportunities, access to capital, and education" (Aimar). A good example is the dying small Sicilian village of Sutera. Thanks to the refugees, who are thriving in the new environments by opening up new businesses, the village is now flourishing again (Tondo).

Moreover, the refugee populations could help alleviate the lack of labour due to the aging population. The proportion of old people is forecasted to soar from 28.8% in 2015 to 50.3% by the middle of the century (Reynolds). In contrast, about 50% of refugees who have sought asylum in EU are between 18 and 34, with one third are below 18 (Reynolds). Admittedly, local residents' employment may be affected by refugees somehow in the short term. However, the refugees have the potential to contribute to the society positively in a long term if they are supported by both citizens and the government.

# **Part 4 - Potential Solutions:**

One solution suggested by the Italian officials is to grant refugees temporary visas that enable them "to travel on to other countries in the EU if a more equitable arrangement between EU member states was not reached" (Srour). The visas could potentially give refugees more mobility to seek job opportunities, and thus relieve Italy from the excessive congestion of refugees. Also, the government should provide more opportunities to the refugees rather than constrain them. Currently, the Italian government's current policies require the illegal refugees to "do nothing but live off the welfare system" (McQuirk). They cannot improve their lives even if they have the ability and willingness to do so. To help refugees adapt to new environments, many countries and NGOs have founded special refugee programs. For instance, Germany and Sweden have set up service centers for refugees to help them learn local languages, get financial aid, and find job opportunities (Reynolds). With the support from both government and INGOs, the refugees are able to integrate into the society more seamlessly. Last but not least, the government need to combat the prevailing xenophobia. Instead of stirring up hatred towards the refugees, the government should inform citizens both the positive and negative effects brought by immigrants through the media. The more objective the message conveyed, the more calm citizens would be to optimistically resolve the

problems. Refugees do not deserve the title of scapegoat for all the economic and social problems, since they are just the victims of wars who are striving for better lives.

# Part 5 - Recommended Action Plan:

Italy has been fighting for refugee crises in various ways. In 2017, the Italian Parliament passed a bill to "green-lighted Libya's request for help", providing military cover and support to the Libyan coast guard (Fox). The Parliament also passed a "code of conduct" for NGOs to limit their rescue missions in the Mediterranean Sea (Fox). These measures are not effective to solve the problem and have drawn severe international criticisms. Consequently, the Italian government changed its strategy in 2018 to solve the problem by blocking the refugees directly at the sea shores. Nevertheless, the strategy do not seem to be effective either. Despite the changing policies, Italy has been clamoring for EU solidarity since the 2011 Tunisian migration crisis (Armellini). Italy is aware of the fact that no country can shoulder the refugee crises alone. Based on this principle, the most effective solution to the refugee crises is to form a set of rigorous asylum rules that apply to every country in the European Union. Penalizing non-cooperation and rewarding countries who cooperate can consolidate the European solidarity. Only with the unanimous acknowledgement of the rules, the proposed temporary visas would possibly be implemented, other countries would be motived to set up refugee help centers, and Italy would stop blaming on refugees when they see the economic benefits.

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