



**Navigating Uncertainty: Assessing the Impact of the EU Hotspot Approach  
in Lampedusa's Migration Management**

A Thesis Paper

by

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MASTER OF SCIENCE IN INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

with specialization in Governance of Migration and Diversity

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Word count: 11989

Date of Completion: 2nd of August 2024

## **Abstract**

Despite being a key EU response to the migration crisis in 2015, the “EU hotspot approach” has not been thoroughly studied by academics. Addressing this research gap, this study investigates the implementation and consequences of the “EU hotspot approach” in Lampedusa, considering the numerous organizations present there since 2015. Building from a clear theoretical framework, this paper illustrates how EU migration agencies have strengthened their administrative capacity and influenced other entities working in the field. For a comprehensive understanding of migration management development, interagency coordination and cooperation are widely discussed and examined. The analysis draws on a qualitative content analysis of policy documents, reports, and interviews.

This paper found that the “EU hotspot approach” fundamentally shaped migration management in Lampedusa, perpetuating long-lasting problems with the intent of accelerating the identification and registration procedure to facilitate relocation and returns. Thus, the research contributes to the ongoing debate regarding EU migration management at the borders, specifically on the role and influence of EU agencies on decision-making processes about asylum applications. The incapacity of the EU strategy to effectively address migration reception issues, even after decades of experience, reveals the limitations of such institutions. Overall, the thesis concluded that the attempt of the EU to improve migration management, while reinforcing border control, led to the establishment of a temporary solution deemed as a mechanism of “stop-gap”. Hence, a series of recommendations focused on elaborating a clear and detailed legal framework and the successful execution of receiving procedures through interagency cooperation are delineated for the actors involved at the end of this study.

**Keywords:** EU hotspot approach, EU agencies, migration management, interagency coordination and collaboration, Lampedusa

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

CRI	Italian Red Cross
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
EU	European Union
EURODAC	European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database
EUROJUST	European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation
EUROPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
EURTF	Regional Task Force Catania
FRONTEX	European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of The European Union
MLG	Multi-level Governance
IO	International Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
SAR	Search and Rescue
SCI	Save the Children Italy
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## **Introduction**

“(...)you have to understand,  
that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than the land  
no one burns their palms  
under trains  
beneath carriages  
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck  
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled  
means something more than journey.  
no one crawls under fences  
no one wants to be beaten  
pitied

no one chooses refugee camps  
or strip searches where your  
body is left aching  
or prison,  
because prison is safer  
than a city of fire  
and one prison guard  
in the night  
is better than a truckload  
of men who look like your father  
no one could take it  
no one could stomach it  
no one skin would be tough enough (...)”  
(Shire, 2016, lines 23-47).

The poem, written in 2017 by Warsan Shire, was dedicated to anyone who experienced the reality of living as an undocumented migrant in Europe (Facing History & Ourselves, 2017). The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed the outbreak of wars in the Middle East,

the rise of the Arab Spring, and the increasingly attractive regulations on labor migration to Europe (Pachocka, 2015). The occurrence of these events resulted in a chain of repercussions, which European policymakers attempted to unravel by carrying out different strategies to slow down and, eventually, push back the flow of migration to European territory (Guild, 2013).

In 2015 the European Union (EU) reached a record number of arrivals which generated a migration management crisis. Thus, EU executive actors created and applied the “EU hotspot approach” to improve the organizational structure of EU migration agencies to overcome times of crisis (Pulitano, 2022). More specifically, the approach foresaw an increase in funding for EU agencies that work at the border, such as FRONTEX (border agency) and EUAA (European Union Asylum Agency). Despite its implementation, the approach lacked detailed guidelines, leaving the EU agencies free to operate on the ground (Pulitano, 2022). During the last decades, the EU classified different areas at the European borders as “hotspots” and applied the newly devised strategy. Yet, year after year, NGOs and other entities have consistently raised concerns about these hotspots, providing evidence of human rights violations and breaches of international law. This has sparked debates over the objective of the EU's "EU hotspot approach" (Casolari, 2016).

This thesis explores how the “EU hotspot approach” has shaped migration management for the actors present in Lampedusa since 2015. Lampedusa's hotspot (the first established hotspot) serves as the reference point for the recently opened hotspots throughout Italy, and by extension, throughout Europe. The goal of this research is to analyze how the increased funding and presence of EU agencies contribute together with local NGOs to a more efficient migration management as well as how it affected the different dynamics among the different actors.

This is a relevant study as it elaborates on the level of precision of EU agencies’s mandate and interagency cooperation which has been neglected by many scholarly works (Loschi & Slominski, 2022). Existing literature focused on the efficiency of some management procedures (part of the “EU hotspot approach”), such as the identification and registration of migrants in the EURODAC database, which stores the fingerprints of international protection applicants or people who have crossed a border illegally (Brouwer, 2002). These procedures are a priority for the EU as they serve as an appropriate tool for illustrating the public with the number of arrivals and to demonstrate the effectiveness of the EU mechanisms. Nevertheless, they do not guarantee the safeguarding of the welfare of migrants or the circumstances in which these operations occur (Den Heijer, 2015).

Comprehending the functions of the EU approach is complicated as the *approach* implies the readjusting of already existing legislation to fit the requirements demanded by the EU institutions. This leaves the responsibility of the implementation to the member states, which are required to follow a set of guidelines to ensure the successful interpretation of such an approach (Pagano, n.d.). However, the lack of detailed guidelines leads to an unclear distribution of responsibilities between different actors: EU agencies, member states (in this case Italy), and NGOs (Casolari, 2016). This can bring to the development of a counterproductive environment where key actors operate without an effective organizational structure or procedure.

The study strives to expand on the literature regarding the work of EU migration agencies at the border by providing an in-depth analysis of their work in Lampedusa since 2015. It will answer the following research question:

*How has the increase of funding and presence of EU agencies shaped migration management for the actors involved in Lampedusa since 2015?*

This thesis will contribute to the ongoing debate on migration management in the European Union, by giving the perspectives of operators who work in the field and are directly affected by the national and supra-national legislations. Providing these insights gives the opportunity to improve future policies that can benefit the receiving country and its community without denying the safe and equal treatment of arriving migrants. In terms of interagency coordination and collaboration, this study provides a meticulous overview of what is the reality in the field. Taking into account the challenges encountered by operators working in such sensitive circumstances, where the lives of migrants often hang by a thread.

The paper is structured in different sections. Initially, a look into the main theories and concepts was taken under scrutiny for the purpose of this research and its expected outcomes. Followed by the research design which incorporates methodology, data analysis, sampling, and ethical considerations. Further, a section on the analysis of the empirical data contributes to the established theoretical framework. Toward the end, an in-depth discussion of the overall findings and the research's input on the literature, incorporated with the concluding remarks and limitations of the thesis. Lastly, a section dedicated to feasible recommendations for the actors involved in migration management.

## **Theoretical framework**

The theoretical foundation of this research relies on different theories and concepts that have been the subject of critical European migration studies and legislation on a national and international level. By engaging with existing literature, the following chapter analyses how interagency cooperation, migration management, and multi-level governance intersect in the “EU hotspot approach” in Lampedusa, impacting the work of local NGOs and sabotaging cooperation between actors.

### **The “EU hotspot approach”**

In 2015, the European Commission classified the arrival of Syrian refugees as an “unprecedented” migration crisis (EU Commission, 2015). Therefore, a new approach was necessary to tackle the so-called “refugee crisis”. The European Union developed a common platform for EU agencies to intervene, efficiently and rapidly, at the EU borders when high numbers of migrants arrive from third countries, known as the “EU hotspot approach” (Casolari, 2016). The approach foresaw the increased funding and presence, at the European borders, of EU agencies (European Union Agency for Asylum, Frontex, Eurojust, and Europol) to alleviate the pressure of migration flows from the Member States most affected, such as Italy. Moreover, this new line of action was meant to contribute to expediting the mechanisms put into place for emergency relocation, set by the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (Casolari, 2016). Thus, both of these tools layout pragmatic and tailored provisions, emphasizing the need for flexibility in effectively addressing the issue of increasing migration flows. These procedures of support and the length of assistance to a Member State are contingent upon its specific requirements and the evolving circumstances (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016). A clarification of terminology is required to enhance comprehension: the term “hotspot approach” refers to the comprehensive set of policies and procedures implemented to address migration flows in strategically located areas; whereas, the term “hotspot” denotes the physical structure located in these strategic regions where migrants are registered and identified (European Parliament, 2023).

Empirical research has been conducted to evaluate the mechanisms behind the EU hotspot approach and its consequences for the European community and the local host community. In Lesbos, the studies uncovered an elusive process that strengthens the current boundaries and differences, where the government forcefully separates human rights from the region's borders (Papoutsi et al. 2019). Establishing a definitive differentiation between the

inside and outside: a secure interior consisting of deserving and equal individuals, and a scary outside including undeserving individuals. The institutionalization of movement is reinforced by the established methods that humanitarian agency workers employ to regulate marginalized individuals in camps and transit points elsewhere in the world (Agier, 2011).

Furthermore, comparative studies that analyzed hotspots both in the Mediterranean area and the Baltics presented similarities in law enforcement presence, unfair treatment, and pseudo protection (Liparou et al, nd). Firstly, the noticeable increase in the presence of law enforcement shows a heightened focus on maintaining border control and national security (Papoutsi et al. 2019). Consequently, the registration and identification processes have turned into sites of semi-detention due to the constant presence of armed officers and the highly securitized buildings. Inside the hotspots building, agencies operate to gather intelligence but it remains unclear how they coordinate and cooperate (Papoutsi et al. 2019). The allegations levied against EUAA personnel in the Lesbos case exposed the organization's employment of private security officers to deter legal practitioners from accessing the premises (Papoutsi et al. 2019). Thirdly, the dubious registration and identification procedures, which purportedly led to false assurances of security and additional criminalization (Liparou et al, nd). These instances fund the base for further allegations made against the EU hotspot approach.

However, the implementation of said approach has been justified by emphasizing the existence of organized crime and the need to protect vulnerable migrants who might be subject to exploitation by smugglers and/or criminal organizations (Neocleous & Kastrinou, 2016). Thus, these identification and registration strategies are indicators of the EU's capacity in order to regulate movement, institutionalization, and the creation of ambiguous categories are implemented (Papoutsi et al, 2019).

Since the approval of the "EU hotspot approach", the EU started opening hotspots in the South of Europe, especially in Italy and Greece, creating a "migration frontline archipelago" in the central and eastern Mediterranean Sea (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016). The geopolitical positioning of Lampedusa is strategic for the EU because it gives the opportunity to block migrants and obstruct their possibilities to seek asylum.

### **Multi-level governance in Lampedusa**

The concept of "multi-level governance" (MLG) pertains to the relations among several levels of government. These relations can come in different ways, considering that any of

these levels is dominant over the others (Scholten et al. 2022). MLG includes the structures and processes of policy-making and politics inter-jurisdictional (Bache et al. 2016).

In the context of Lampedusa, many actors are at play: national legislation, international organizations, supra-national organizations, and international non-governmental organizations. This multilevel setting renders the cooperation between actors complex but crucial to the efficacy and efficiency of the work.

After 2015 and the implementation of the “EU hotspot approach”, the cooperation between actors became less clear. The Italian reception regime is shaped by policies implemented at the European Union, national, and local levels. This results in a multifaceted system of governance and a stressed system that continues to operate in an emergency mode, unable to adapt to the large influx of migrants (Kushminder, 2021). The hotspot in Lampedusa is managed by local authorities and works with staff of the EU agencies, all fulfilling the obligation stated by EU Law (European Commission, 2015). Nevertheless, the EU agencies called to support Member States in the logistic and technical department of the migration reception, are perceived as “controllers” that ensure the rightful implementation of the aforementioned EU Law (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016). Creating an environment of tensions and delegitimation. The dissatisfaction has further damaged the network between civic organizations and official institutions.

Civil society organizations are involved in humanitarian work, which is often diminished as complementary and hostile to the institutions and the state (Trombetta, 2024). Authorities and NGOs play a crucial role in humanitarian borders, as evidenced by their collaboration in search and rescue missions (SAR) and initial response efforts. However, governments are resolute in suppressing any dissenting voices against the existing border regime (Dadusc & Denaro, 2021).

Thus, MLG is suited for this context considering the number of actors involved in the migration management in Lampedusa. MLG will be used to identify the different arrangements and patterns for coordination and cooperation and, thus, understand how EU agencies have changed the work and relations of national institutions and civil society organizations. Lastly, this study contributes to the academic debate surrounding the functioning of multi-level governance and its limitations by analyzing its implementation in Lampedusa.

### **The role of NGOs in the hotspot approach**

NGOs have been employed in European borders since the late nineteenth century, thus before the implementation of the EU hotspot approach, and experienced a shift of responsibilities, purposes, and coordination throughout the decades due to the different management bodies (Kourachanis, 2018). Particularly in the context of Lampedusa, where the number of residents hardly reaches 3000 people, everyone (not only NGOs' personnel) has been somehow involved in informal practices of hospitality (Quagliariello, 2021), especially when the hotspot was facing a management crisis due to high numbers of arrivals (most recently in September of 2023) (Vassallo & Briguglio, 2023).

Hence, since the start of the migration route to Lampedusa, NGOs' work has been complementary to the local model of hospitality. The introduction of the EU hotspot strategy has replaced the aforementioned model with an institutional approach that involved administrative processes and the establishment of more militarised areas (Quagliariello, 2021). This led to a significant division between the residents of Lampedusa and the migrant population. In addition, the NGOs involved in the humanitarian assistance of the migrants upon their arrival to the island became strictly limited by the Italian government and the new guidelines provided by the "EU hotspot approach" (Brambilla, 2015).

Furthermore, the quick implementation of the hotspots resulted in the formation of a number of obstacles, both in terms of the effectiveness of the reception system and the bureaucratic procedures used. The heterogeneous nature of the actors involved is the root cause of the majority of the difficulties that have emerged, which are associated with coordination problems and overlap in the activities and services that are being delivered (Kourachanis, 2018). These conditions will inevitably hinder a safe and orderly migration for both the migrant population and the host population.

### **Inter-agency cooperation within the "EU hotspot approach"**

The EU hotspot approach explicitly establishes interagency cooperation among EU agencies and international organizations. However, it omits the involvement of civil society organizations, such as NGOs. This omission along with the reluctance of the State to commit to the implementation of the hotspot, due to a fear of dependency on EU agencies (Sarantaki, 2017), has created a circumstance where the overall inter-agency cooperation, among EU agencies, NGOs, and national authorities, is not guaranteed. This is due to a lack of trust between actors and insufficient capacity (Horii, 2018).

Trust refers to the perception that NGOs and the State have of the hotspot approach, whereas capacity pertains to the insufficient national staff with the required skills (Carrera & den Hertog, 2016). Indeed, Italy remains hesitant in deploying specialists due to the absence of an official operational plan for EU agencies on their work in Lampedusa. The lack of a dedicated operational strategy for the hotspots increases the State's uncertainty about the nature and purpose of their involvement with EU agencies (Neville et al., 2016). Consequently, the EU agencies remain in a weak position and the State maintains its sovereignty (Horii, 2018). The ambiguity of the roles of EU agencies poses challenges for all stakeholders in terms of attributing accountability and distributing responsibility, hence exacerbating the negative impact on cooperation (Sarantaki, 2017).

Nonetheless, the presence of several international organizations (IOs) (Italian Red Cross, UNHCR, IOM, Save the Children, and Unicef) is supported by their distinct institutional missions. Together with the mentioned organizations, NGOs including Mediterranean Hope, Maldusa, and the FORUM are operating on the island but are unable to access the hotspot facilities. Although, they are granted permission to enter the harbor, where they offer essential humanitarian assistance (Loschi & Slominski, 2022). The absence of a standardized protocol for interagency coordination and cooperation is contingent upon the availability and volition of the personnel present at the disembarkation. In Italy, the functioning of the hotspot is not governed by any legislation that is specific to the matter or amended legislation. Instead, the European Commission and the Italian Ministry of the Interior have adopted Standard Operating Procedures for hotspots, which remain vague and superficial and, again, fail to incorporate the participation of NGOs' work (Neville et al, 2016). The fragmented framework of inter-agency cooperation poses a danger to the overall success of migration management processes (Sarantaki, 2017).

Considering the insights discussed above, the expectation is that when cooperation between actors is not established it translates into a counter-productive environment where accountability is overlooked due to the fact that the objectives of one's organization take precedence over ensuring a flawless execution of coordination and cooperation.

### **Migration Management Paradigm**

A wide range of literature exposes the different understandings of "migration management", but three different trends can enclose the numerous definitions (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010). Firstly, the concept used by actors to justify and conceive their increasing mobilization and

interventions in migration domains. Particularly, indicating the stand of the agencies present in these circumstances and their strategies and operations (Martin et al, 2006). Secondly, “migration management” as the various practices that are part of migration policies, and are implemented by different institutions which promote the concept. In particular, these policies target the capacity-building activities to facilitate the processes at the borders (Taylor, 2005). Thirdly, a trend that focuses on the discourses that regard the narratives of how migration should be tackled (IOM, 2005). However, another argument focuses on connecting actors, practices, and narratives in a complex matter. In fact, actors establish discourses in order to legitimize their practices and explain their presence, but the actual actions and policy interventions that they engage in frequently differ significantly from the language that underpins them.

Notwithstanding the efforts of the European Union and the Italian authorities to promote the “EU hotspot approach” as a new tool to improve and facilitate the work of Member States in receiving high numbers of arrivals, the main vision of the hotspot was based on the migration management paradigm (Calarco, 2024). The European Commission implemented the hotspot approach to reinforce and uphold a fundamental principle of EU migration management. This principle states that migrants who reach the EU "irregularly" must be halted at the EU's external borders and handled by the countries located at those borders (Vianelli, 2022).

Moreover, the hotspot consists of mechanisms expected to ease the swift categorization of newly arrived migrants into two distinguished groups: “legitimate asylum seekers” and “economic migrants” (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016). The categorization primarily relies on nationality as a criterion, despite its clear violation of International Human Rights Law (Vianelli, 2022). De facto, the International Human Rights Law guarantees the rights of everyone to seek refuge and to claim asylum on an individual basis, thus irrespective of their country of origin. In the context of remote islands, such as Lampedusa, these strategies are easier to apply because of their geographical positioning which isolates them from the “mainland”, complicating the process for newly arrived migrants to request legal assistance from other organizations (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020).

Furthermore, the reconceptualization of the border as a critical place that requires constant enforcement is the widespread perception that is promoted by right-wing politicians around Europe and advocates for tougher migration policies and stronger border controls (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020). This phenomenon has resulted in a prioritization of stringent

migration management practices, rather than the equitable treatment of migrants in accordance with International Human Rights Law and European principles.

For the purpose of this research, “migration management” will comprise policies implemented by the different institutions present in Lampedusa, the practices and strategies used by the numerous actors, and the narratives perpetuated in the case study. The choice is based on the unique case of Lampedusa which includes all these factors that set in motion the mechanism of that said notion (migration management).

Taking into account the concepts and theory just discussed, this research expects migration management to have become focused on the number of migrants granted entry rather than the guarantee of a safe and orderly migration journey. The research expands on EU migration management strategies at the border and questions their objectives by investigating the management procedures in Lampedusa.

In conclusion, the scholarly literature sheds light on how the “EU hotspot approach” relates to interagency cooperation, migration management, and multi-level governance, while taking into consideration the work of NGOs. The paper contributes to theory-building in the field of migration as it provides an in-depth analysis of migration management procedures in Lampedusa and its evolution since 2015, which is the first classified European hotspot (Agolino, 2022).

## **Research design**

Based on the theoretical framework presented above, the following section reflects on the research question and uses the operationalization table to give an overview of the main concepts and theories used in this study. Subsequently, a description of the methodology including data collection, analysis, and sampling is set out. Lastly, a reflection on ethical considerations will delve into the technical and logistical details behind the gathering of information.

## **Research question**

The purpose of the research is to shed light on the mechanisms behind migration management in Lampedusa, particularly how it evolved in the last decade. Considering the concepts and theories analyzed in the theoretical framework, a series of questions arise:

*How has the increase of funding and presence of EU agencies shaped migration management for the actors involved in Lampedusa since 2015?*

SQ 1: What was the increase in funding allocated to EU agencies?

SQ 2: How has the increased funding and presence of EU agencies changed their role and involvement in Lampedusa?

SQ 3: How have EU agencies influenced management processes on the island?

SQ 4: How do EU agencies and actors present on the island coordinate and collaborate to facilitate migration management?

SQ 5: Which processes of migration management changed since 2015?

Addressing these questions allows one to gain a transparent and precise understanding of the dynamics involved in migration management in Lampedusa's hotspot. Furthermore, it determines if the EU's implementation of migration policies, since 2015, is ensuring secure and orderly migratory movements to Europe.

### Operationalization

The operationalization of theoretical variables, as outlined in the theoretical framework, is delineated in the subsequent table.

Table 1

Concepts	Definition	Sub-categories	Indicators
Interagency cooperation	Cooperation between agencies, to facilitate the logistical and technical department of migration reception (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016).	<i>Successful</i> interagency cooperation. This can be achieved through data sharing, coordination among the actors, and a joint goal (Elliot & Smith, 2020).	Interviewees recognize that maintaining regular contact and effectively exchanging data are essential for facilitating the coordination of hotspot facilities.
		<i>Failed</i> interagency cooperation. An environment characterized by	Interviewees fail to recognize interagency communication and

		actors that are only focused on their individual objectives and do not collaborate or exchange the gathered data (Elliot & Smith, 2020).	admit the absence of a shared space for coordination and cooperation.
Migration management	Based on the principle that irregular migration needs to be stopped at the border (Calarco, 2024). Migration management refers to the actors, practices, and discourse that are interconnected in a complex manner and create a set of mechanisms that mobilize to tackle migration flows (Geiger & Pécout, 2010).	<i>Successful</i> migration management. In order for management to achieve success, it is imperative that all relevant stakeholders, including the government, civil servants, NGOs, and researchers, actively participate in the process of designing migration protocols. For their achievement to be considered legitimate, they must share ownership (Raimundo, 2009).	Interviewees testify to collaborate and synchronize to guarantee the systematic execution of all the tasks specified in their institutional mandates (both inside and outside the hotspot facilities). Interviewees claim that management protocols are explicit and guarantee the consistent execution of all required processes.
		<i>Failed</i> migration management. The reason for failure	Interviewees disclose instances of overlap in the

		can be summarized in the role of migrant agencies and the hidden agencies in national and supra-national policies which reveal to be inadequate to resolve the core problem (Castle, 2018).	implementation of operations within the hotspot parameters and recognize a detrimental atmosphere in which competition takes precedence over effectiveness for the collective good (both inside and outside the hotspot facilities).
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## Methods

This research uses qualitative research methods, which include a content analysis of policy documents and a series of semi-structured interviews. The intersection of two sources of analysis allows for a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

## Case selection

The chosen case study for this research is Lampedusa as it has been categorized as a ‘hotspot’ by the European Union (EU Commission, 2015). It is the first Italian reception hotspot, where migrants receive their first medical assistance, and are identified and registered in the EURODAC (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020). For the EU, this border constitutes a strategic area where migrants can be kept distant from the ‘mainland’ (Lo Verde, 2021). After 2015, the EU increased the funding and presence of EU agencies in all the classified hotspots (the ‘EU hotspot approach’), including Lampedusa, and took over the already established network of civil society associations and national actors who were at the forefront of receiving and assisting migrants support (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020). Since then, the cooperation between actors involved in migration management in Lampedusa has been rather complex and ambiguous. In light of this, the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the dynamics and

mechanism of the EU hotspot approach on the island, as well as to determine whether or not the European plan to manage migration at the border was as efficient as they believed it would be.

Given the considerations indicated above, it is necessary to engage in a deeper contemplation to emphasize the significance of Lampedusa's hotspot. Being the first and most solidified hotspot facility in Italy, it has served as the quintessential reference point for other hotspots constructed in subsequent years (Tazzioli & Garelli, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to thoroughly examine the circumstances of the mentioned case study in order to formulate recommendations that will improve the situation, which may then be implemented in various European situations.

To answer the research question of this study an abductive case study method is adopted. The case study is a strategic qualitative research methodology that allows for an in-depth analysis of how and why things happen at the European border. Moreover, it enables the investigation of events by contextualizing them and understanding the difference between the expected outcome and what happened in reality (Noor, 2008). Thus, since this study aims to comprehend the construction of social relations and complex real-life activities between different actors, the aforementioned strategies are suitable for this research.

### **Data collection**

To understand the extent to which these EU agencies work to improve the efficiency of migration management in collaboration with the other actors (or if they rather disrupt the interagency cooperation), a content analysis of the legislation is correlated with semi-structured interviews conducted with NGO staff, IO staff, and civil servants. More specifically, content analysis focuses on human communication and defines how people perceive certain issues (Babbie, 2016). The examination of policy documents serves as the backbone of this research because it lays the groundwork for how the institutions that have jurisdiction on the island perceive, understand, and manage the issue using their legal strategies. Moreover, it uncovers how national and supra-national legislation sets a legal framework that is interpreted differently by the parties involved. Especially considering the multi-level governance present in Lampedusa, the perceptions of such a framework are based on the differences in framing the migration management issues.

Thus, semi-structured interviews with representatives of the different actors are crucial to comprehend the underlying differences between actors' perceptions. Interviews for

qualitative research consist of a dialogue where the researcher sets the overall course of the conversation and explores the portrayal created by the interviewee (Babbie, 2016). Before conducting the interviews, the comprehensive interview guide was set forth and included open-ended questions, see Annex A. However, interviewees had the freedom to propose related subjects and initiate further conversations based on their work experiences and their positionality. The data collected through the interviews was transcribed on a protected file to ensure privacy for the participants of the research. Narratives are possibly the most effective method for portraying and comprehending experiences, as well as for elucidating the reasons behind people's behaviors and thoughts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Gaining insight into the experiences of each person in the field provided a genuine and multi-faceted understanding of the dynamics and mechanisms established in that environment. Hence, the data will accurately depict the multi-layered environment.

### **Sampling strategy**

To choose the document for the content analysis, this study uses a purposive sampling strategy. Since the focus is on national and supra-national legislation on the “EU hotspot approach” and migration management at the border, the documents include legislation, regulations, and policies implemented since 2015. Content analysis focused on policy documents published by the European Commission, the Italian Ministry of Interior, NGOs’ reports, and other relevant institutional documents. Including said information is necessary to set an overview of the legal background established by the institutional actors present on the island. The documents were found by searching for keywords related to the study: “EU hotspot approach”, “Lampedusa’s hotspot since 2015”, “institutional mandates”, and “migration management”. The documents with the above-mentioned notions were collected for analysis.

Nevertheless, the implementation of such policies and legal requirements needed to be guaranteed and verified by the personnel working in the field. Regarding the interviewees, a snowballing sampling strategy was used in order to reach multiple actors who might have been difficult to communicate with. Considering the necessity of including persons who were employed in the sector before and subsequent to 2015. Based on the multi-level setting described in the theoretical framework, the semi-structured interviews included individuals from each party: the Italian Red Cross, UNHCR, IOM, the Mayor of Lampedusa, Mediterranean Hope, Maldusa, the FORUM, and civil servants who partake in humanitarian

activities (see Table 2). Due to some interviewees' hesitation to provide their complete name or identity, certain information is kept private. Regrettably, conducting semi-structured interviews with the personnel of EUAA was not feasible due to their refusal to grant permission for the participation of the staff in the research. Nevertheless, by incorporating a diverse range of people, the findings accurately depict the environment and reveal the different perceptions of reality.

*Table 2*

<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Role and/or organization</b>	<b>Present on the island pre/post 2015</b>
Marianna Rinaudo	President of the Italian Red Cross in Lampedusa and Linosa	Pre - 2015
Abiel Ghebre Ghirmai	Senior Protection Assistant for UNHCR	Post - 2015
Mohammed	UNHCR	Pre - 2015
Federica	Vulnerability Project Management for UNHCR	Post - 2015
Flavio	Senior Public Information Associate for IOM	Pre - 2015
Filippo Mannino	Major of Lampedusa	Post - 2015
Vincenzo Catafia	Municipal Councilor	Post - 2015
Emma Conti	Mediterranean Hope	Post - 2015
Francesca D.	Mediterranean Hope	Post - 2015
Matilda	Maldusa	Post - 2015
Edoardo	Maldusa	Post - 2015

Francesca	FORUM	Pre - 2015
Anonymous	Resident in Lampedusa, volunteer and activist	Pre - 2015
Don Carmelo Rizzo	Parish priest of the local Church in Lampedusa	Post - 2015

### **Data analysis**

To analyze the data collected, two deductive methods are used: thematic analysis and process tracing. The former is used to detect, analyze, and synthesize patterns within the data gathered (Babbie, 2016). The latter permits verification of the theorized hypothesis that there is a counterproductive environment due to the implementation of the “EU hotspot approach”. By examining observable manifestation, the theory-testing process tracing permits inferences about whether a causal mechanism is present in a single case and whether the mechanism functions as predicted (Beach & Pedersen 2013). To combine the two processes of qualitative research, this study uses the procedures proposed by Pearse (2019). Firstly, the data collected is transferred to the Atlas.ti software to define and categorize recurring themes, by connecting the codes. When a recurring theme is identified, it needs to be further examined to finalize whether it can be used as evidence for the purpose of the research (Pearse, 2019). The objective of this coding is to consolidate all the occurrences of a specific subject (Babbie, 2016). The emerging themes have the explanatory power to prove or disprove the hypothesis.

### **Ethical considerations**

A reflection on ethical considerations is crucial to the development of qualitative research. Specifically in the direct involvement of people participating in the study, it is necessary to acknowledge factors that might influence the authenticity of the information given by the individual (Babbie, 2016). Political positioning and power relationships are two important factors when discussing migration management with parties that are directly connected to the issue (Tavory, 2020). Thus, during the fieldwork, particular attention to who/what the interviewee represented was critical to comprehend their positionality. In addition, it was

important to manage personal biases on the topic and focus on empathy and identification with research subjects.

More importantly, participants of the interviews needed to be well-informed about the researcher's objectives and their role in the study. This was possible by signing an information and consent form ahead of time, establishing confidentiality, anonymity (in case the participant refuses to share their name/specific occupation), and the protection of data.

## **Analysis**

This section will delve into the analysis of the collected data, followed by a discussion, and a conclusion for each chapter. The chapters include firstly, a comprehensive outline of the changing role of EU agencies since 2015. Secondly, an investigation on the interagency cooperation and coordination. Lastly, the development of migration management in Lampedusa since 2015 and a reflection on its consequences on the local community.

### **The evolving role of EU agencies in Lampedusa**

This part of the analysis examines how EU agencies have acquired jurisdiction following the implementation of the "EU hotspot approach" in 2015. The adoption of this strategy resulted in a substantial transformation in the way migration management unfolded in Lampedusa. There are two significant topics that require discussion: the augmentation of financial resources and the emergence of the EU migration agencies, as well as the impact they have had on other organizations on the island.

#### *Increase in funding and presence of EU agencies*

Understanding the reasons for the increase in financing and the emergence of EU agencies requires a careful examination of the context in which these developments occurred. The inauguration of the hotspots in Greece and Italy followed years of tension in the Middle East and North Africa due to two distinguished events: the Arab Spring and the Syrian War (Casolari, 2016). The Arab uprising of 2010 - 2011 saw hundreds of thousands of people protesting against their governments' anti-democratic practices. This phenomenon has led to significant transformations in the Arab world and its adjacent nations, with changes enduring in the subsequent years (Bani Salameh, 2019). These revolutions have typically been succeeded by prolonged periods of instability, lasting for years or even decades. The widespread insecurity had a critical impact on migration flows, asylum applications, and the

overall movement of people. Thus, influencing the policies implemented by governments (both in the Arab world and in the neighboring areas, including the EU) regarding migration-related matters (Hyvönen, 2014). In particular, the EU experienced a significant influx of migrants at its southern frontiers, which were insufficiently equipped to handle quite an unprecedented number of arrivals (Bousiou & Papada, 2020). Similarly, in 2015 the outbreak of the war in Syria resulted in the displacement of millions of Syrian refugees who escaped the war and tried to reach safer territories, particularly the EU (Zisser, 2017). Again, the southern European borders were found to be inadequate to receive such high numbers of people, which caused the European Commission to call a state of emergency (Bousiou & Papada, 2020). Simultaneously, a sense of “invasion” and increasing islamophobia permeated Europe, namely in Greece and Italy, where numerous political parties (both from the left and right) seized the opportunity to promote the externalization of migration policies and demanded concrete assistance from the EU (Artero & Fontanari, 2021).

Amidst the heightened tensions at the European borders, another significant concern emerged: the inadequacy and absence of infrastructure in Southern European nations. Data collected through the interviews confirmed the critical circumstances that followed the 2011 Arab Spring and the 2015 “Refugee crisis”, where private corporations were found guilty of corruption and fraud in the management of refugee camps (Francesca, personal communication, April 2024). With the stipulation of the “EU hotspot approach”, the European Commission proposed a tool to help front-line member states to manage migration, as it was identified as the core challenge (Bousiou & Papada, 2020). De facto, the approach saw an increase in funding for EU migration agencies because these member states were not considered to be qualified to manage the volume of incoming people.

According to the European Commission’s document on managing migration, the increase in EU migration agencies' presence at the border represented a sentiment of solidarity from non-front-line member states to front-line member states. The definition and categorization of a hotspot are crucial when considering the geographical aspects of the problem (Bousiou & Papada, 2020). Essentially, an external border area should be designated as a hotspot for a temporary duration, only when there is an ongoing emergency or crisis scenario that requires the use of the hotspot technique (European Commission, 2015). The interviews revealed an essential inquiry about the time dimension and whether the hotspot should be a transitory measure or if the EU must acknowledge a state of enduring crisis at the border (Conti, personal communication, April 2024). In addition to the political consequences associated with such an acknowledgment, it would undermine the rationale for emergency

management and compel the European Commission to develop more durable, comprehensive policy strategies. Hence, the hotspot method views a specific migration event as a management problem that occurs at the border (Bousiou & Papada, 2020). It is seen as a problem that is too complex to be addressed by current migration regulations and is considered an urgent circumstance, although it has been ongoing for decades (Ghirmai, personal communication, April 2024).

Taking into consideration the hotspot facilities in Lampedusa, the EU funded the expansion of the buildings, allowing for a higher number of beds to host the migrants from 440 to 680 total capacity (Agolino, 2022). Nevertheless, these numbers are quite far from the reality of the island where only last year, 2023, in a span of a few days, 8.000 people reached the coast (Vassallo & Briguglio, 2023). The Italian government was compelled to declare a “state of emergency”, on top of the emergency strategy that is the “EU hotspot approach” (Mannino, personal communication, April 2024). Consequently, a dual crisis arose when the hotspot facilities became overwhelmed by the influx of people on the island and had to seek assistance from the local population, who provided food and temporary accommodation for the migrants for a week (Francesca, personal communication, April 2024). Therefore, the mechanism has already been proven to fail when under pressure, leaving uncertainty and doubts about its efficiency and capacity.

In other words, the EU's decision to alleviate pressure from front-line member states and transfer the responsibility to the EU and other member states by increasing personnel in regions like Lampedusa was initially intended as a temporary measure, but it ultimately became the standardized procedure (Mohammed, personal communication, April 2024).

#### *EU migration agencies' influence on other actors*

The hotspot approach can be considered original since it is the first instance where inter-agency collaboration across the EU agencies has been legally and expressly sought under a unified operational framework (Horii, 2018). In the last few decades, EU agencies have significantly expanded their representation inside the EU institutional architecture. Prior to the early 1990s, there were just two agencies. Nevertheless, the establishment of government agencies grew to develop over 35 agencies which are now operational and cover a wide range of EU issues (Horii, 2018). Despite these developments, EU migration agencies face multiple challenges during field operations due to the complex and interconnected context in which they operate. Furthermore, without a specific legal framework, the hotspot approach leaves freedom to these agencies to operate on their terms (Horii, 2018).

The policy document released for the hotspot approach by the European Commission outlines the functions of the European migration agencies, which includes: EUAA, Frontex, Europol, and Eurojust (European Commission, 2015). Although, these guidelines remain generic and unclear in regards to the agencies' role and responsibilities. Despite their major role in managing migration in Lampedusa, interviewees reported a clear power relation between EU agencies and other entities (Matilda, personal communication, April 2024). This claim questions the accountability of the European agencies, specifically, whether the behavior of said agencies is checked and monitored (Lisi & Eliantonio, 2019). Since the involvement of EU agencies, Frontex, in particular, has been at the center of the public debate because accused of violating the principle of *non-refoulement* by pushing back migrants' boats at sea (Horii, 2018). These concerns also apply to other EU agencies, a direct consequence of the absence of a unified and comprehensive legislative framework (Francesca D., personal communication, April 2024).

As mentioned in the policy document, the presence of European personnel is meant to guarantee the successful and righteous execution of the European regulations regarding migration management, such as identification and registration in the EURODAC Database (European Commission, 2015). Consequently, the personnel of EU agencies are perceived as "controllers" and in the position to establish the correct proceeding of processes both at sea and on land. This dynamic produces tensions and pressures among the different actors at play (Edoardo, personal communication, April 2024). In defiance of the policy document, which stated that EUAA "assist the EU relocation process, in particular through the provision of information on relocation, (...) and detection of possible document fraud" (European Commission, 2015, p.28), the participants in the research highlighted a different reality. Throughout the interviews, a clear emergence of a different role of EU agencies was pointed out. Indeed, because the duties and tasks of EUAA inside the hotspots have not been clearly defined, the organization has found it difficult to assess the meaning of 'help' and 'support' as stated in its mandate (Lisi & Eliantonio, 2019). Revealing that EUAA tasks include conducting admissibility interviews, drafting reflections, and stipulating recommendations regarding the decision to grant international protection. Moreover, EUAA is found to be responsible for compiling the migrant's dossier after the interview to "assist" in the decision-making process (Ghirmai, personal communication, April 2024; Lisi & Eliantonio, 2019). Leading to the reversing of roles, in which the Italian Asylum Service is the one assisting EUAA. As a result, the personnel deployed by EUAA not only provides support and

assistance to the national authorities, but they actually exceed them in number and carry out a significant amount of work on their behalf (Rinaudo, personal communication, April 2024).

From the analysis of the policy document and the interviews, it can be concluded that the strategy adopted by the EU with the hotspot approach presented various challenges, particularly, a gap between the planned capacity and the actual needs of the island and the migrants. This re-enforces the findings discussed in the theoretical framework regarding the increased presence and heightened role of EU agencies in the field (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016). Moreover, the analysis revealed the impact of EU agencies on migration management. Rather than assisting and supporting the Italian Asylum Services (and all institutions that it entails), EU agencies overshadowed the local authorities, resulting in tensions and questions regarding accountability. The plan sought to reduce strain on front-line member states and boost operational capacity, but it also raised infrastructural concerns and inter-agency coordination challenges in providing migrants with basic humanitarian assistance. The simultaneous problems of handling great influxes and securing agency collaboration highlighted the need for a more comprehensive and legally defined framework for sustainable and successful EU migration management in the long term.

### **Interagency coordination and collaboration**

This section of the analysis aims to investigate how the multiple actors present in Lampedusa coordinate and collaborate to facilitate migration management processes. It will examine the circumstances, methods and rationales behind agencies' collaboration with each other, while taking into account their institutional mandates and objectives. The establishment of the hotspot led to a transformation in the functions of several international organizations, some of which were already present in Lampedusa prior to 2015. The chapter is divided into sections: firstly, the changing role and involvement of the different agencies, and secondly, the coordination and collaboration in the field.

#### *Changes in the role and involvement of the different agencies*

Six agencies are working with an institutional mandate on the island, and three main non-governmental organizations work outside the hotspot facilities but at the harbor. An intricate environment calls for an overview of each actor's tasks, to better understand each and everyone's role in the management procedures. The Italian Red Cross (CRI) is responsible for overseeing the operations of the hotspot facility and ensuring that the

migrants are welcomed with hospitality and that their human rights are respected in a dignified manner (Croce Rossa Italiana, n.d.). The EUAA dispatches professionals to verify the legitimacy of the papers submitted by those seeking refuge while supporting various operations of humanitarian assistance (Italian Ministry of the Interior et al, n.d.). The UNHCR is responsible for delivering legal counsel, assessing and classifying vulnerabilities among migrants and providing humanitarian assistance (Italian Ministry of the Interior, n.d.). IOM is charged with advocacy for migration problems, supplying legal assistance, and guaranteeing equal treatment for migrants (Italian Ministry of the Interior et al, n.d.). Save the Children (SCI) focuses on assisting unaccompanied minors and carrying out programs to help disadvantaged groups (Save the Children, n.d.). In addition, Unicef is actively involved in supervising the safety and smooth flow of migration procedures, while also pushing for equitable treatment (Unicef, n.d.). These organizations clearly have similar goals and responsibilities, resulting in overlapping tasks that can introduce competition among them (Zhong, 2024).

The aims of non-governmental organizations, namely Mediterranean Hope, Maldusa, and the FORUM, focus on advocating against the hotspot strategy (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016). However, they also engage in activism, execute humanitarian efforts and file appeals to the ECtHR and/or the Italian Government when they witness human rights violations or breaches of international law (Quagliariello, 2021). Although these NGOs may not have a formal mission like international organizations, they play a crucial part in harbor operations by delivering vital supplies such as food, bottles of water and heating blankets, which are not always guaranteed by the aforementioned international organizations (Conti, personal communication, April 2024; Ghirmai, personal communication, April 2024).

A clear difference in the role and involvement of these agencies arose with the implementation of the “EU hotspot approach” and the end of the “Praesidium project”. The Italian Ministry of Interior for Civil Freedom and Immigration initiated the project in 2006 and signed individual cooperation agreements among IOM, UNHCR, CRI, and SCI (Italian Ministry of Interior, 2011). The European Commission assessed the project’s success and provided funding for its continuation until 2015, together with the Italian Ministry of Interior. The project was based on a multi-agency cooperation scheme and common resources which guaranteed the smooth execution of management processes for a common goal: to ensure the righteous treatment of migrants (Mohammed, personal communication, April 2024). Whereas the “EU hotspot approach” revolved around designing a strategy to relocate migrants, ensure the effective return to their home countries, and, by extension, improve border management

(European Commission, 2015). Moreover, the policy fails to procure common resources nor does it clearly assign tasks and responsibilities. This allows agencies to expand beyond their institutional mandate and operate to achieve their organization's goals (Conti, personal communication, April 2024; Zhong, 2024). As confirmed by the accounts of interviewees, the lack of common resources and a delineated division of labor resulted in a turf competition to meet each organization's targets causing them to forget the purpose of their presence on the island altogether.

### *The functioning of coordination and collaboration*

The European Commission's strategy to implement the hotspots lacked specificity. The approach proposed in the European Agenda of Migration consisted of a concept, which failed to clearly define mechanisms. The absence of a legal framework that delineated the duties of actors might be attributed to the EU's inability to unilaterally impose a notion on a sovereign state. The responsibility lies with each individual Member State to choose the particular methods that they are willing to allow inside their territory (Neville et al., 2016). However, the European Commission's Communication on Managing the Refugee Crisis and its annexes provide certain suggestions that might be referred to. In this document, the Commission provides more details on important initiatives, operational measures, financial assistance, planned legislative steps and the roles of the parties involved (European Commission, 2015a). In September 2015, the Italian authorities created a detailed plan outlining their intentions for the hotspots. They then provided an updated version of this plan to the Commission in March 2016 (Neville et al., 2016). The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were issued in February 2016 as the ultimate structure for the hotspots. The document gives an overview of the roles of each actor, it reiterates their institutional mandate and provides an operational sequence of the management procedures, which includes ten steps. These tasks are not allocated among the agencies, nor are there any instructions on how the agencies should collaborate with each other to carry out these procedures (Mohammed, personal communication, April 2024). The execution of these operations is overlooked by the Regional Task Force (EURTF) in Catania, which is meant to coordinate activities in the hotspot, convene meetings, and, by extension, facilitate collaboration among the actors working inside the hotspot (Italian Ministry of Interior et al., n.d.). Nevertheless, the EURTF is not located on the island and can only intervene when there is an exchange of information from the island (Rinaudo, personal communication, April 2024).

More interestingly, interviews with staff members working inside the hotspot disclosed a contrasting reality, where the functioning of coordination and collaboration is determined by the members of the staff present during the disembarkation (Filippo, personal communication, April 2024; Ghirmai, personal communication, April 2024; Rinaudo, personal communication, April 2024). De facto, the hotspot has regular replacement of personnel. Every fifteen days, volunteers from the CRI, police enforcement officials and other field agents are replaced (Mohammed, personal communication, April 2024). This influences the interaction among agencies because there is a lack of stability within the network of people working in the field, causing distrust and skepticism among them (Conti, personal communication, April 2024). Thus, the unwinding of operations follows a “case by case”<sup>1</sup> method rather than a standard protocol (Filippo, personal communication, April 2024). Leading to serious consequences for the overall performance of the agencies. Firstly, failing to provide detailed guidelines on how and when coordination and collaboration should take place causes a higher rate of overlap of tasks and responsibilities (Ghirmai, personal communication, April 2024). Secondly, with the frequent turnover of staff members, those who have been employed for a longer duration on the island start depending on one another and create channels of informal communication, even with organizations that work outside the facilities (Francesca D., personal communication, April 2024). Thirdly, a competitive atmosphere permeates the hotspot facilities since individuals are accountable to their respective superiors within their organizations rather than to anybody within the facilities (Mohammed, personal communication, April 2024). The "EU hotspot approach" falls short of guaranteeing effective coordination and collaboration, disregarding its primary objective of facilitating migration management at the borders.

This chapter explores the intricacies of coordination and collaboration among different players engaged in migration management in Lampedusa. Especially considering the MLG settings, introduced in the theoretical framework, the empirical findings show the pivotal role of cooperation. The intricate relations among entities in Lampedusa constitute a layered governance system that functions through different arrangements and patterns of coordination and collaboration (Scholten et al., 2022). A comparison with the “Praesidium Project” revealed the inadequacies of the hotspot approach. The former project was initiated by the Italian Ministry of Interior to bring together international organizations that were thought to be qualified to improve migration management in Lampedusa. Its success allowed

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by the author, original quote: “caso per caso”.

for the extension of the project for four annuities, until the implementation of the “EU hotspot approach” (Italian Ministry of Interior, n.d.). Contrary, the latter raised concerns from various NGOs who question the efficiency of such an approach. Moreover, interviews with staff members working inside the hotspot testified to a significant challenge in the functioning of coordination and cooperation. As expected from the theory, different factors influenced the incapacity to guarantee a standard procedure: the continuous replacement of personnel, the lack of shared resources, and the unclear division of labor (Carrera & den Hertog, 2016; Horii, 2018). MLG involves various players, but the absence of defined coordination methods and resource sharing leads to overlapping roles and competition. Moreover, the shift from the “successful” Praesidium Project to the less clear hotspot plan has heightened these problems, resulting in inefficiencies and undercutting the main goal of supporting effective migration control at the frontiers.

### **The evolution of migration management in Lampedusa**

This chapter investigates how migration management has evolved since 2015, particularly how migration-related procedures have changed over the years. Despite the flawed legal framework, there are ten established steps included in the SOPs:

- SAR operations;
- health screening and identification of vulnerabilities;
- transportation to hotspot facilities;
- pre-identification;
- provision of information on the national immigration legislation to migrants;
- identification and registration;
- reception in hotspot accommodation;
- provision of information on the procedures to seek international protection;
- de-briefing by Frontex;
- exit from the hotspot to Sicily (Italian Ministry of Interior et al., n.d.).

To analyze the execution of these procedures, the chapter will be divided into three sections: firstly, an analysis of the receiving procedures at the harbor; secondly, insights into identification and registration processes inside the hotspot; and lastly, the consequences of migration management on the host community. The latter will reflect on the perception of migration issues among the island's residents. This has been found to be particularly critical to the progress of migration management due to the recurrent involvement of the residents in

welcoming migrants, especially when the hotspot approach faces crisis (i.e. September 2023) (Vassallo & Briguglio, 2023).

### *Receiving procedures at the harbor*

Following the SAR operations, conducted by Italian authorities, Frontex, and other humanitarian organizations, a series of identification processes takes place. With the advent of the “EU hotspot approach”, the identification procedures became undeniably faster (Sciurba, 2017). The increased presence of Frontex personnel both at sea and on land permitted the immediate screening of irregular migrants (EU Commission, 2015). Throughout the process of disembarkation, Frontex personnel provide the gathered intelligence to the authorized entities, allowing them to gain an advantage in the registration and identification procedures (Ghirmai, personal communication, April 2024). Nevertheless, this operation fails to include the arduous circumstances in which migrants find themselves, enduring days at sea under dire conditions, often deprived of sustenance and hydration, and facing significant mental and physical distress (De Vincenzo & Zamperini, 2023). The interviews with operators working at the harbor confirmed the distressing conditions of the newly arrived migrants, who oftentimes are in shock and unable to speak (Conti, personal communication, April 2024).

The European Commission provides an extensive description of screening procedures, the required steps for the registration of biometric data on the database, and the coordination for the “swift” return of migrants to their home country (EU Commission, 2015b). De novo, it lacks clarity in specifying the allocation of tasks among the institutions involved in the disembarkation process, such as determining who is responsible for providing food, water, heating blankets, or assisting the doctors in transporting the patients (Matilda, personal communication, April 2024). The text merely states that entities present in the harbor must assist in humanitarian activities (EU Commission, 2015b).

Once again, the absence of comprehensive guidelines on coordination and collaboration among the parties involved can result in the mismanagement of procedures, particularly in a situation where efficiency is crucial for ensuring the survival of human lives (Francesca D., personal communication, April 2024). Data collected through the interviews revealed instances in which international organizations, operating at the harbor, would find themselves with insufficient first aid items (i.e. food, water, heating blankets, etc.) during the disembarkation procedures, due to inadequate exchange of information. In order to provide migrants with these essential supplies, IOs would reach out to the local NGOs that operate

without an institutional mandate and, thus, are not legally required to participate in humanitarian action (Ghirmai, personal communication, April 2024). This tactic perpetuates a deficient mechanism that fails to guarantee the successful execution of receiving procedures. Especially considering that before 2015 these international organizations had a minor role in Lampedusa, but with the implementation of the EU hotspot approach they were tasked with crisis management and improving the situation due to their success of the “Praesidium projects”. Yet, after almost 10 years, the migration management in Lampedusa proves to be flawed. Furthermore, this re-affirms the essential need for a comprehensive guideline to facilitate the coordination and collaboration among actors, who otherwise are in a position of insecurity and inadequacy.

### *Identification and Registration*

The aforementioned procedures continue upon the arrival at the hotspot facilities, where the Italian State Police, Frontex, and cultural mediators have the technology to register migrants on the EURODAC database (Italian Ministry of Interior et al, n.d.). Following the registration, migrants are provided by UNHCR with an explanatory video (translated into ten languages) explaining the national legislation on immigration and international protection (Ghirmai, personal communication, April 2024). A psychological and physiological screening is conducted by experts from the numerous organizations to evaluate the well-being of migrants and the possible classification of vulnerabilities (Federica, personal communication, April 2024). The latter is a crucial step to guarantee the safeguarding of vulnerable migrants, who will have to be transferred to any available reception facilities in Italy. In practice, Lampedusa's hotspot serves as an intermediary location where migrants are intended to stay for a period of twenty-four to forty-eight hours before being transported to Agrigento, in Sicily (Dimitriadi, 2017). Consequently, the acquired information must be shared with the central authority in Sicily, where migrants are either permitted or refused admission into the country.

The interview with Federica, one of the members of the UNHCR vulnerability project, disclosed the challenges in sharing the information, within the hotspot and with the Agrigento's authorities. These difficulties arise when tasks are coinciding and there is insufficient capacity for the personnel to share data or coordinate efforts to expedite the operations (Mohammed, personal communication, April 2024). Furthermore, during periods of intense demand, when the hotspot facilities are nearing capacity, it is preferable to expedite the transfer of migrants without waiting for all procedures to be completed. Consequently,

there is a higher chance of neglecting the circumstances of vulnerable migrants (Federica, personal communication, April 2024).

Nevertheless, since 2015, international organizations in Lampedusa have been working to develop a reliable network of services for vulnerabilities. Notably, before 2015, there was no categorization of migrants whose physical or mental conditions were precarious and in need of assistance (Calarco, 2024). Hence, it is important to acknowledge an enhancement in the operational protocols inside the hotspot facilities. However, it is imperative that collaboration and coordination form the foundation for a secure and organized migration management.

#### *The consequences on the local community*

The historical background of migration on the island created an interesting relationship between newly arrived migrants and the residents. Particularly, the financial side of border surveillance and the economics of “encampment” influenced the perception of the residents on migration issues (Bassi, 2015). The development of migration management on the island and its influence on the economy have progressively caused tensions and concerns among locals (Federica, personal communication, April 2024). These concerns are connected to the economy of Lampedusa, which relies mostly on tourism and a diminishing fishing sector (Bassi, 2018). Since the late 1990s, the summer tourism industry has grown, resulting in a predictable seasonal economic pattern. The interview with Mayor Mannino explained that every year, during the period from May to September, which aligns with the height of migration, around 20,000 to 50,000 visitors choose to vacation on Lampedusa, a small island with a population of 3,000. Conversely, throughout the winter season, the island experiences a state of inactivity (Mannino, personal communication, April 2024).

In addition, Lampedusa is distinguished by its absence of fundamental public amenities. For instance, it lacks a hospital (with only one health facility available), lacks maternity care (resulting in pregnant women being airlifted to Sicily for childbirth two months prior to the due date), and has only one vocational school (Francesca, personal communication, April 2024). Ultimately, the island is heavily reliant on importing potable water and substantial quantities of food from Sicily. Consequently, during periods of bad sea conditions, the island experiences a severe scarcity of essential goods (Bassi, 2015). Due to these factors, the Municipal Councilor Catafia argued that those involved in the tourist sector and residents at large express concerns that if Lampedusa becomes exclusively linked with

immigration, it would adversely affect the island's primary revenue stream, namely tourism (Catafia, personal communication, April 2024).

Before 2015, the island witnessed the mismanagement and corruption of the migration center (Martone, 2016). This provoked numerous criticisms of the migration management on the island, thus perpetuating distrust (Rizzo, personal communication, April 2024). Still, the parish priest of the local church, Don Carmelo Rizzo, highlighted the spontaneous solidarity that residents showed during times of crisis, by giving shelter, food, and water. Hence, despite increased tensions, the locals sympathize with the migration phenomena and provide assistance when necessary. However, they recognize the inability of the receiving system to ensure the proper implementation of migration management protocols (Rizzo, personal communication, April 2024).

The development of migration management in Lampedusa since 2015 reflects both progress and persistent lacunae. The receiving processes at the harbor exemplify a major conflict between the necessity for prompt identification and registration of migrants and the difficult humanitarian conditions. The participation of Frontex and other international organizations has unquestionably accelerated these procedures. As expected in the theoretical framework, the absence of detailed guidelines for the distribution of responsibilities among various bodies has resulted in coordination issues, inefficiencies, and even an inadequate supply of necessary resources to migrants (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016). Similarly, in the hotspot facilities, challenges persist in regard to the sharing of information and coordination efforts. These problems are worsened during times of high migration flows, which might put the safety and well-being of vulnerable migrants at risk. Moreover, the response of the local community to migration management highlights the intricate relationship between the economic reliance on tourism and the moral need to assist migrants. A recurring theme was “trust” on the work of institutions, which was often called into question by the residents, confirming Horii’s (2018) theory. The people's varied sentiments, encompassing both unity and apprehension on the economic consequences, exemplify the wider societal obstacles in properly tackling migration.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

This thesis has both theoretical and practical significance. The objective of this work is to contribute to and enhance the critical discourse surrounding the "EU hotspot approach" and interagency cooperation by integrating research findings with a well-developed theoretical

analysis. This part starts by examining the main research question and discussing, in relation to the theories and concepts presented in the theoretical framework, some recurring themes that arise from the empirical data. This is followed by a section on the limitations of this thesis and possible future research initiatives.

It is crucial to reflect on the subquestions this thesis explored in order to offer a concrete and coherent answer to the research question: *How has the increase of funding and presence of EU agencies shaped migration management for the actors involved in Lampedusa since 2015?*

Firstly, regarding the increase of funding and presence of EU agencies, the analysis confirmed that the implementation of the “EU hotspot approach” fundamentally changed their role in migration management procedures, which granted them greater authority, raised the budget and expanded the personnel (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2016). Moreover, as stated by Casolari, the performance of EU agencies, particularly Frontex, demonstrated a focus on prioritizing the expedition of the mechanisms of identification and registration to facilitate relocation and returns (Casolari, 2016). This is made possible via the heightened deployment of police enforcement, who ensure the segregation of migrants from the local population and foster a feeling of insecurity among the residents (Papoutsi et al. 2019).

Consequently, the analysis illustrated the evolving roles and responsibilities of international organizations, NGOs, and national authorities since 2015. The MLG created a context in which the numerous actors at play must collaborate to achieve the successful execution of migration management operations (Kushminder, 2021). However, over the last few decades, many projects and governing bodies have replaced one another, revealing the weakness of the reception system and the difficulties associated with interagency cooperation. The “EU hotspot approach” failed to address these pre-existing shortcomings and continued to maintain an ambiguous legislative environment that lacked clear protocols for coordination and cooperation. Thus, empirical data uncovered the formation of informal channels of communication among entities (especially between international organizations working inside the hotspot facilities and NGOs) and the inability to guarantee the successful execution of procedures at the harbor, leading to the need for NGO involvement in humanitarian assistance. An area of responsibility that NGOs are not obligated to address.

Regarding coordination and cooperation, the research’s analysis confirmed the expectations speculated in the theoretical framework. Horii's (2018) claim on member states' concern about becoming dependent on EU agencies was validated when interviewees acknowledged that the agencies' growing presence in the field resulted in their participation

in decision-making processes regarding asylum applications. Furthermore, trust emerged as a prevalent topic, particularly in discussions on cooperation. The study revealed that due to the frequent turnover of staff at the hotspot facilities, there was a limited interchange of data and resources, which further promoted competition rather than fostering solidarity. In addition, the spread of distrust and skepticism results in the mismanagement of operations, miscommunication among entities and the strengthening of informal channels of communication. This intricate MLG goes to show the fundamental role of a detailed legal framework – a common goal and shared resources in the functioning of migration management.

Following the work of Kourachanis (2018), the analysis investigated the roles, responsibilities and goals of the actors working on migration in Lampedusa. For international organizations, a suited institutional mandate was subscribed considering the overall structure and “raison d’être” of such organizations. Differently, NGOs were excluded from the stipulation of policy documents related to the execution of operations. Nevertheless, NGOs were found to be crucial in assisting international organizations during disembarkation procedures at the harbor, which again proved the flawed mechanism of the “EU hotspot approach”. The reason behind such inefficiency was first argued by Kourachanis and then verified by empirical findings, the heterogeneous nature of the actors and the limited guidelines on policy documents caused overlap of tasks, coordination issues and, by extension, competition.

Finally, the research provides an analysis of the evolution of migration management since 2015. Based on the theoretical framework, this thesis defined “migration management” as the concept comprising implemented policies, practices and strategies used by governing actors and narratives used to spread a specific view of the migration. Therefore, the discussion resulted in a meticulous analysis of policy documents published by the EU Commission and the Italian Ministry of Interior together with the experiences of the research’s participants. This exposed a significant disparity between the policy documents and their implementation on the field. During the receiving procedures, a clear acceleration in the screening procedures was possible due to the increased presence of Frontex at sea. Yet, NGOs claim that basic needs are not always guaranteed by international organizations, posing a great risk to the well-being of migrants. Similarly, inside the hotspot facilities, projects for vulnerabilities have been improved since 2015, but difficulties in communicating with Agrigento’s authorities undermine these initiatives. Hence, if some aspects of migration management developed for the better, others bolstered long-existing problems.

All and all, the increase of funding and presence of EU agencies did shape migration management for the actors involved in Lampedusa since 2015 by perpetuating lacunae at multiple levels and strengthening border control. Based on all these findings, it may be deduced that the EU and the Italian government's policies are increasingly divided between what they wish to represent and what they actually promote. Much research still needs to be conducted to fully understand the intricate relations of interagency cooperation. Furthermore, it is imperative to conduct inquiries into the implementation of the "EU hotspot approach" to guarantee that the EU is proceeding with the highest level of caution in formulating migration policies. Especially considering the consequences these will have on the lives of thousands of people who try to reach European territories every year.

### *Limitations*

Although this work provides a detailed and comprehensive response to the research question, there are certain constraints to this thesis.

Regarding data collection, this article would have been improved by conducting additional interviews with EU personnel. This would provide and demonstrate their perspectives on the subject matter that cannot be obtained from official policy texts. Furthermore, the participation of interviewees may have increased the chances of biases.

Due to time and space constraints, several subjects and inquiries that were discovered during the fieldwork were not included in the production of this research.

### **Recommendations**

After a thorough research, the paper highlighted areas in which the EU and the Italian government could improve. Given the EU's objective of reducing the influx of irregular migrants into the EU, it would be oversimplified to suggest that the EU should completely alter its migration approach and emphasize human rights over its perceived need for territorial security. Instead, this section wants to provide feasible recommendations on how to improve migration management processes in order to achieve the safe and orderly migration that the EU fantasizes about. These are addressed to the different actors involved in migration management processes.

First, the EU Commission, in accordance with the right of sovereignty of member states and the Dublin III Regulation, must provide a clear legal framework for the division of

roles and responsibilities among EU agencies, member state authorities and other international organizations to avoid overlap and minimize competition among entities.

Second, the Italian Ministry of Interior must prioritize the recruitment of specialists in the field to preserve its sovereignty over migration management processes. This will strengthen the member state's role in making decisions on asylum claims, rather than relying solely on the EU agencies.

Third, the EU Commission and the Italian Ministry of Interior must establish a legal framework that clearly defines the structure and procedures for coordination and collaboration among the many bodies operating within the hotspot facilities and at the harbor.

Fourth, within the hotspot facilities, CRI, the managing authority, must provide a space in which all entities can convene, discuss operating procedures, and exchange data.

Fifth, although NGOs are unable to access the premises of the hotspot, the research uncovered their crucial role at the harbor and informal channel of communication between them and operators within the hotspot. This recommendation proposes the creation of a collaborative space where all stakeholders may work together to improve migration management operations and collaborate to enhance procedures at the harbor.

Finally, the research discovered challenges in developing a reliable network of services for vulnerable individuals between Lampedusa and Agrigento. Hence, it is imperative to surmount these obstacles by augmenting resources and fostering cooperation to ensure the protection of migrants' welfare and, consequently, the preservation of human rights.

These recommendations propose feasible measures to enhance the functioning of the "EU hotspot approach". Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize a need for a substantial change in the EU migration policy framework in order to guarantee a future in which the Mediterranean Sea does not pose a fatal risk for migrants attempting to reach European territories.

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## **Annex**

### **Annex A. Interview guide**

#### **General questions**

1. Could you please introduce yourself and your job?
2. Could you please tell me about the organization you work for?
3. Could you please tell me more about your work? How does your regular day look like?
4. In your opinion and based on your observations, what are the reasons behind the categorization of Lampedusa as a “hotspot”?

#### **Questions for CRI / UNHCR / IOM**

1. Could you tell me about the mandate of your organization in Lampedusa?
2. From your personal experience, what would you say the role of your organization in Lampedusa is?
3. How would you define/describe the “hotspot”?
4. From your personal experience, do you perceive a “state of emergency”?
5. Based on your observations, how would you describe the interactions/collaborations among the different organizations present inside and outside the hotspot? Do you share data?
6. How and when do you collaborate?
7. With the increased presence of EU agencies and the implementation of the “EU hotspot approach”, do you perceive a change in the interactions among the organizations?
8. Taking into consideration the numerous organizations present, how do you ensure a clear division of labor?

#### **Questions for NGOs**

1. Could you tell me about the mandate of your organization in Lampedusa?
2. From your personal experience, what would you say the role of your organization in Lampedusa is?
3. How would you define/describe the “hotspot”?
4. From your personal experience, do you perceive a “state of emergency”?

5. How and when do you collaborate?
6. With the increased presence of EU agencies and the implementation of the “EU hotspot approach”, do you perceive a change in the interactions among the organizations?
7. Based on your observation, how would you say your work has changed since 2015?
8. Based on your observations, how do EU agencies influence your work?

**Questions for the Major / civil servants**

1. How would you define/describe the “hotspot”?
2. Do you perceive a “state of emergency”?
3. How do you perceive the presence of numerous international organizations on the island?
4. Since the implementation of the “EU hotspot approach”, how has migration management changed?
5. Considering the increased presence of EU agencies, how would you assess the efficacy of their efforts?
6. Based on your observations, how would you describe the interactions among the organizations working in the field?
7. Since the implementation of the hotspot, how would you say the situation on the island has changed?
8. Based on your observations, how would you evaluate the degree of coordination and collaboration among international organizations and national authorities?

**Final question**

Based on your observation, what do you think should change in order to improve migration management processes in Lampedusa?