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# OSRA Grant Cycle 2 Public Reports

**Project Title:**

**Unfamiliar Families: Syrian Refugees' Transnational Solidarity and Kinship Networks**

**LPI:** Sophie Richter-Devroe, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Hamad Bin Khalifa University

**PI:** Nada Ghandour-Demiri, American University of Beirut

**RA:** Veronica Buffon, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Hamad Bin Khalifa University

**PUBLIC REPORT**

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**LPI:**

**Sophie Richter-Devroe, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Hamad Bin Khalifa University**

**PI:**

**Nada Ghandour-Demiri, American University of Beirut**

**RA:**

**Veronica Buffon, Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Hamad Bin Khalifa University**

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## 1) Introduction

In this project, we followed an interdisciplinary, comparative and long-term ethnographic approach to study Syrian transnational refugee families in Greece and Italy. Syrian families have been impacted severely by the war in Syria. Family members are held up back home in Syria, have fled their homeland to neighboring countries, or crossed the Mediterranean to reach the shores of Europe. There, in 'Fortress Europe', many were stopped in periphery countries, such as Greece and Italy. Subjected to increasingly anti-immigrant, racist and Islamophobic, nationalist and EU border policies, the journey of many Syrian refugees aimed to Central Europe was cut short.

We chose Greece and Italy as our research sites, because they are part of the so-called 'periphery of Europe' with a long tradition of receiving migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa especially through the Mediterranean sea. Both are 'transit countries' where migrants, asylum seekers and refugees often live in smaller nuclear family units or alone, waiting to relocate and/or be reunited with their families elsewhere.

The Syrian war and the ongoing migration crisis has, without doubt, brought about profound transformations to the family, a core social and political institution in the Arab world (Joseph 2000): families have been fragmented, destroyed, dispersed, rethought and reconstructed in different ways. Forced migration and displacement not only have separated Syrian refugee families across borders; some migrants also might have formed new families, shortly before they left Syria or on the way, by marrying or taking legal guardianship for minors. Others might consider new-found friends, supporters, or solidarity activists their new 'family'.

Tracing one specific social and political institution - the family – we asked in our project: What does the Syrian refugee crisis mean for the Arab family? How are family and family-making practices changing as a result of forced migration and displacement? Who is considered family, and why? And what might policy-makers and development practitioners gain from a better understanding of the Syrian transnational refugee family and its reconfigurations?

The Syrian war and ensuing refugee crisis prompted massive political, demographic, and social challenges, especially in the neighboring countries of Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey (Ayoub 2014, Berti 2015, Oytun 2014), but also in Europe. Syrians today are among the largest displaced populations in the world, with over 5.6 million registered refugees, over six million people displaced within Syria, 3.4 million in Turkey, and 1 million in Lebanon (UNHRC 3RP 2019-2020).

In 2018, for the sixth consecutive year, Syria was the main country of origin of applicants for international protection in the EU with 85,575 applications in total (EASO, 2018). Italy and Greece have a long tradition of receiving migrants and refugees from the Middle East. But since the beginning of the Syrian war, many more have arrived by crossing the Mediterranean, or via the Greek-Turkish land border at Evros. A total of 32,494 persons arrived in Greece by sea in 2018, compared to 29,718 in 2017, 24% of whom were from Syria. Additionally, 18,014 persons arrived in Greece through the Greek-Turkish land border of Evros in 2018, compared to 6,592 in 2017 (AIDA-Greek Council of Refugees, 2018). Italy receives a high number of arrivals, but its

asylum applications from Syrians are less. While in Greece Syrians constitute the largest group of asylum applications, numbering 13.390 in 2018 (AIDA-Greek Council of Refugees, 2018), the Italian asylum service follows a different process for Syrian applications, which receive a high recognition rate of about 95% (AIDA-ASGI, 2018). Numbers are hard to track, given the volatile political context. For example, the EU-Turkey Deal might have deterred refugees crossing from Turkey to Greece initially, but this ‘deal’ is subject to political fluctuation. Just recently it was unilaterally suspended by Turkey, leading to a spike of migrant sea arrivals.

Greece and Italy have traditionally been countries of passage for refugees. Refugees enter and often register their asylum in these two countries, but then they hope to move on through relocation or family reunification. This situation changed drastically after the 2003 Dublin Regulation II (see ECRE 2013, 2016; Freedman, 2015: 138-141), which obliges asylum seekers to register their asylum claim and stay in the first European country they enter, until their papers for relocation or family reunification are processed. This basic principle is maintained in the 2013 Dublin III Regulation. While the Dublin Regulations might initially have aimed at harmonizing EU legislation across the different countries, they have effectively put untenable pressure on states situated along Europe’s borders such as Italy and Greece. Combined with the harshening of the institutional crisis among EU members, Dublin II and III have contributed to an increased stagnation and suspension in the legal and existential conditions of refugees. The media has also contributed through its representations of the refugee crisis in relation to security, echoing the division among EU member states in their positioning towards migrants.

More specifically, the precarious economic and political conditions in austerity-hit Italy and Greece, and increasing anti-immigrant nationalist policies - the controversial and contested Security Law in Italy which eliminated humanitarian protection, or the recent changes to policy in Greece under the newly elected New Democracy government - have made it very difficult for refugees to plan a stable life with their families in these two countries. Besides geographical and legal similarities between Italy and Greece as historically transit countries, a further element of analogy thus also rests in their precarious economic and political condition following the 2008 financial and economic crisis and EU austerity measures. This highlights that the refugee crisis needs to be understood in relation to the ongoing crisis in the EU. Our project traced these intersections.

## **2) Objectives and Significance**

The Syrian war and the ongoing migration crisis have brought about profound transformations to the family, a core social and political institution in the Arab world (Joseph 2000): families have been fragmented, destroyed, dispersed, rethought and reconstructed in different ways.

In this project, we followed an interdisciplinary, comparative and long-term ethnographic approach to study Syrian transnational refugee families in Greece and Italy. We chose Greece and Italy as our research sites, because they are part of the so-called ‘periphery of Europe’ with a long tradition of receiving migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa, especially through the Mediterranean sea. Both are ‘transit countries’ where migrants, asylum seekers and refugees often live in smaller nuclear family units or alone, waiting to relocate and/or be reunited with their

families elsewhere. Forced migration and displacement, however, not only separated Syrian refugee families across borders; some migrants also might have formed new families, shortly before they left Syria or on the way, by marrying or taking legal guardianship for minors. Others might consider new-found friends, supporters, or solidarity activists their new 'family'.

Tracing one specific social, economic, and political institution - the family – we asked in our project: What does the Syrian refugee crisis mean for the Arab family? How are family and family-making practices changing as a result of forced displacement and migration? Who is considered family, and why? And what might policy-makers and development practitioners gain from a better understanding of the Syrian transnational refugee family and its transformations?

The study advanced and achieved seven core objectives:

- Objective 1: Collection of original empirical data on Syrian refugee families in Italy and Greece
- Objective 2: Comparative analysis of Syrian refugee families in two EU ‘periphery’ countries
- Objective 3: Analysis of the role of ‘family’ in policy and legal theory and praxis pertaining to migration
- Objective 4: Analysis of the role of family and kinship in refugees’ practical and discursive migration strategies
- Objective 5: Analysis of constructions of fictive kin and unfamiliar families in civil society and solidarity activism
- Objective 6: Impacting and providing guidance to policy-makers and practitioners on the Arab transnational refugee family
- Objective 7: Advancing the state-of-the art in the study and theory of Arab families

### **3) Justification**

The Syrian war and ensuing migration crisis prompted massive political, demographic, and social challenges in neighboring countries, but also in Europe. Syrians today are among the largest displaced populations in the world, with over 5.6 million registered refugees, over six million people displaced within Syria, 3.4 million in Turkey, and 1 million in Lebanon (UNHRC 3RP 2019-2020). In 2018, for the sixth consecutive year, Syria was the main country of origin of applicants for international protection in the EU with 85.575 applications in total (EASO, 2018).

Greece and Italy have traditionally been countries of passage for refugees. Refugees enter and often register their asylum in these two countries, but then they hope to move on to other European countries through relocation or family reunification. This situation changed dramatically after the 2003 Dublin Regulation II, which obliges asylum seekers to register and stay in the first European country they enter, until their papers for relocation or family reunification are processed. Combined with the harshening of the institutional crisis among EU members, Dublin II (and its later reiteration, the 2013 Dublin III Regulation) has contributed to an increased stagnation and suspension in the legal and existential conditions of refugees in Greece and Italy. The precarious economic and political conditions in austerity-hit Italy and Greece, and increasing anti-immigrant nationalist policies - the contested Security Law in Italy which eliminated humanitarian protection (Decree-law no. 113 of 4 October, converted, with amendments, into Law no. 132 of 1 December 2018), or the recent changes to policy in Greece under the newly elected New Democracy government - have made it very difficult for refugees to plan a stable life with their families in these two countries.

Nearly a decade into the ‘refugee crisis’, the crisis thus remains as critical as ever. With large numbers of family reunifications and relocations to Central Europe unrealized, many migrants are stranded in Greece and Italy with minimum to no support. This is evident in the devastating situation in the camps on the Greek islands, but also is becoming more visible in the urban settings of Rome and Athens.

Our project responds to the urgency to research the impact of the ongoing refugee and EU crisis on the transnational Syrian refugee family, and provides guidance on how best to support families in the context of forced migration and displacement. More broadly, the project also opens up a wider debate and reflection on the roles and transformations of kin and family in national and neoliberal border regimes. As such, the findings go beyond the empirical case study, contributing knowledge to praxis and theory of gender, family and migration.

#### 4) Methodology

This project followed an interdisciplinary, comparative and long-term ethnographic study of Syrian transnational refugee families, involving researchers based between Qatar, Greece, Lebanon, and Italy. Given the specific predicament and context of Greece and Italy on the margins of Europe's border and neoliberal regime, we focused our fieldwork and data collection on the two urban capital spaces of Athens and Rome, both of which have become important refugee centers. These two capitals offered strategic and crucial sites of observation and access to the institutional and informal actors involved in shaping practices and discourses around Syrian refugee families. Overall, the researchers completed their research objective 1 through the collection of ca. 100 semi-structured open-ended interviews and informal conversations with refugees, institutional actors, NGO workers, lawyers, case workers, and solidarity activists, as well as rich data obtained through participant observations (see Annex I).

Ca. 80% of these interviews were conducted with refugees and asylum-seekers who were residing at the time of the interview in Greece and Italy. The length of their stay in the country varied from a few weeks to several years. All maintained connections to other family members, who were either residing with them in Greece and Italy, had stayed in Syria, were in neighboring Arab countries or Turkey, or had moved further on their migration route to Central European countries (Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Luxemburg, among others) as well as the US or Canada. We conducted one-to-one interviews with individual refugees and asylum-seekers (of different generational, gender, ethnic, religious, political background) as well as group interviews with several family members. The remaining 20% of interviews were conducted with legal, humanitarian, policy and development practitioners. These centered on the specific programs, policies and/or legal frameworks that the interviewees were involved with, as well as the overall situation of refugees and asylum-seekers in Greece or Italy. In particular we discussed changes in national laws, asylum processes and family reunification programs with this group of interviewees.

The fieldwork was divided into two main phases. In the initial phase, the researchers set the ground for data collection via participant observation, semi-structured interviews and informal conversations with refugees, as well as with local authorities, social workers, solidarity activists and development practitioners. In this first part of the fieldwork the researchers established strong networks of contacts and collected initial data which helped to sharpen the research questions, scope and objectives.

After this initial scoping phase, the team members chose specific projects, which they studied in-depth through participant observation (including volunteering in the projects), interviews, and informal conversations. They also continued their interviews with lawyers, policy-makers and development practitioners, and attended several migration-related events in the two field sites. Additionally, they collected and analyzed extensive primary textual and visual material on the situation of refugees in Athens and Rome. This material included street art and graffiti, as well as brochures, leaflets op-eds and manifestos (in English, Greek, Italian, Arabic and Farsi) by different actors in the humanitarian aid and migration scene.

Through their long-term ethnographic work the researchers gained original insights into the practices, meanings, discourses and policies on Syrian refugees, family and migration in Europe

from different angles: the perspective of official state and relief agencies, of refugees and asylum-seekers, and of civil society and solidarity activists.

During their fieldwork, the researchers faced several challenges. These included, firstly, a rise in anti-immigrant racist discourse in both countries, which, by securitizing and criminalizing migration, sometimes complicated the researchers' mobility and general operationality in the field. Secondly, the researchers initially faced difficulties in establishing trust and reciprocity with refugees and asylum seekers, due to their often-irregular legal status and the aforementioned rise in right-wing nationalist discourse. Thirdly, the researchers had to operate in a volatile and quickly changing context. Laws and policies related to migration, refugee and asylum cases were changing regularly, particularly in their practical application. Moreover, research participants sometimes had to leave the country suddenly, when their relocation or reunification claims were granted. Such challenges should be expected in research with migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeker communities. They highlight the need for flexibility, ethical awareness, patience and sufficient time in field research on the topic.

As a research team consisting of three researchers with ample fieldwork experience, we were fortunate to be able to exchange ideas, constructively discuss and find ways to tackle these challenges.

## 5) Results and Findings

### 5.1. Similarities and Differences between the Greek and Italian Case

(Completing Objectives 1, 2 and 7)

Our comparative, multi-sited analysis of Syrian refugee families' predicaments in Greece (Athens) and Italy (Rome) offered fascinating insights into the different forms of agency that refugees employ when they maneuver through the various enabling and restricting structures they face during processes of displacement and forced migration. As legal and political structures change and fluctuate, refugees' different forms of agency also shift and adjust.

Situated at the margins of Europe, hard-hit by the EU's austerity measures, and traditionally perceived as countries of passage, the two field sites of Greece and Italy displayed several similarities, but also some important differences.

At the structural level, we identified not only geographical and legal similarities between Italy and Greece, but also in their current precarious economic and political condition, following the 2008 financial and economic crisis. Tracing the dynamics and intersections between the refugee crisis and domestic and EU policies in the two countries over a period of three years demonstrated the close links between the refugee and EU crisis. The re-assertion of nationalist centre-right politics in both countries speaks to these intersections. Our research found that the two crises need to be studied and understood as a continuum.

At the level of refugees' agencies and maneuvering through these two intersecting crises, we also identified several similarities. In austerity-struck Greece and Italy, refugees and migrants carry a double burden of legal and economic disenfranchisement. With family reunification and relocations to Central Europe becoming more difficult, many migrants are stranded in Greece and Italy with minimum to no support. As a result, we found that an interesting similarity between the two contexts lies in the forms of solidarity work that have arisen between austerity-hit Italian and Greek citizens and dispossessed and displaced refugees and asylum-seekers in these two settings.

The comparative angle also brought to light several differences in the two systems, and the experiences of refugees therein. The number of Syrian refugees in Greece is dramatically higher than in Italy. While in Greece Syrians constitute the largest group of asylum applications, numbering 13.390 in 2018 (AIDA-Greek Council of Refugees, 2018), the Italian asylum service follows a different process for Syrian applications, which receive a high recognition rate of about 95% (AIDA-ASGI, 2018). Numbers are hard to track, given the volatile political context. In Athens, several informal networks, groups, and associations for Syrians exist, while in Rome, given the smaller number of Syrian refugees, networks are built on the common denominator of legal status (refugee/asylum-seeker), although nationality is increasingly becoming an important marker.

Overall, the comparative angle provided fertile ground for analyzing how, whether and why different national implementations and interpretations of EU legal guidelines, and different forms of solidarity affected the ways in which refugees and asylum seekers mobilize, live and narrate the family.

## **5.2. Marginalization of the Extended Family in Legal Theory and Praxis**

(Completing Objectives 1, 3 and 7)

Our critical review of legal structures at international, EU and national level, and their applications in Greece and Italy, highlighted that the law not only constructs the individual subjectivities and categories of ‘citizen’ and ‘refugee’ (Foucault, 2003; Agamben, 2003), but it also defines the boundaries of what constitutes (or not) the family. Refugee and asylum law, as the negative other of citizenship law is based on the notion of the individual citizen/refugee-self. Family, particularly in its extended formations, remains insufficiently considered in the legal theory and practice of the state.

These findings were also confirmed through our interviews with lawyers, case-workers, refugees and asylum seekers in Greece and Italy who stressed that, in practice, large numbers of family reunifications to Central Europe remain denied. A narrowing interpretation of the law, delays in processing, red tape and other bureaucratic measures thus are practices that pose often-insurmountable obstacles for refugees and asylum-seekers in claiming their and their family’s rights. Our qualitative research found that, despite an attempt to standardize legal procedures, concrete legal practices produce widely varying outcomes, and, more often than not, families remain separated.

## **5.3. Family and Kin offer Crucial Practical and Discursive Support Strategies for Migrants, Asylum-Seekers and Refugees**

(Completing Objectives 1, 4 and 7)

Our long-term ethnographic fieldwork with different refugee families in Rome and Athens highlighted that family relations function as crucial transnational support networks for migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers by offering important coping and survival strategies. We found that it is usually these informal kinship networks, rather than official channels put in place by international organization, NGOs or states, that influence refugees’ decisions of where to cross the sea, where to apply for asylum or where and from whom to seek support.

Secondly, our findings show that families undergo severe transformations in the context of migration and displacement. We interviewed individual male and female refugees, and refugee families, about their migration routes and experiences, collected data on how they combined the personal and political (e.g. questions of marriage, divorce, childbirth, etc.), and followed their lodgings and processing of family reunification claims. This data revealed that families are torn apart by war and displacement, but new families might also be formed. Indeed, migrants are often forced to carefully employ kin-based strategies and family-making practices, such as marriage, adoption, divorce, guardianship of minors, family reunification, etc. in their maneuvering through the EU’s legal requirements. We spoke to refugees who were in the process of securing their relocation through recently formed marriages, or had to postpone a marriage to secure residency rights. Our findings highlight that the institutional and legalist aspect of the marital bond, and its relations to residency, asylum and family reunification rights took center stage in most refugee narratives.

Refugees thus mobilize notions and practices of ‘family’ in their migration strategies. Given that personal status documents often ‘make or break’ refugees’ asylum claims, it should not come as surprise that refugees are forced to strategize their private lives within and vis-à-vis the legal framework. Our research confirmed that for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers the personal always is political.

#### **5.4. ‘Unfamiliar Families’ and Fictive Kin are Imagined and Enacted through Refugee Solidarity Activism**

(Completing Objectives 1, 5 and 7)

Through our long-term ethnographic participant observation in solidarity movements and interviews with activists, we found that solidarity activism between Syrians and Greek/Italian citizens can forge fictive kin ties, comparable to that of family.

Given the EU’s insufficient response to the refugee crisis, NGO and humanitarian workers, but also solidarity activists have played a primary role in Italy and Greece in supporting refugees and providing livelihood strategies. Through solidarity activism strong relations and bonds can be built. These relations are often narrated through the language of kin, and solidarity groups themselves might take on functions of family, even if they are not based on blood or descent lines. Our fieldwork highlighted that in the context of displacement new, alternative patterns of what might be termed ‘unfamiliar families’ are formed. Interestingly, some of the humanitarian programs and initiatives we observed similarly rely on gendered notions of family and kin in their programming. Yet, our research findings indicate that these differ significantly from those employed and mobilized by solidarity groups.

Our comparative approach highlighted that solidarity activists employ “fictive kinship” (Carsten, 1995; Turner, 1969; Sahlins, 2013), stretching the notion of family and kin to include also those not related by blood, descent or (legal) affinity. Humanitarian initiatives, on the other hand, such as that of the humanitarian corridors in Italy, tend to rely on a more traditional notion of the biological and/or legal base of the family.

The research into different solidarity, civil society and humanitarian programs in Italy and Greece thus confirmed the central, but differently articulated, position of kin and family in political and social discourse related to migration, integration, and communal belonging.

#### **6) Impact**

Following our research objective 6, the study provides guidance for policy-makers, humanitarian workers, legal practitioners, solidarity workers, as well as researchers on questions of the transnational refugee family. A better understanding of the informal mechanisms, practices and knowledges, which refugees mobilize, rely on and share, needs to inform those who institutionally or societally support migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. Our findings on how migrants rely on family and kin structures, and how these are reshaped in processes of forced migration, should impact practitioners in their work to support refugee family’s needs.

Particularly for policy-makers and legal, humanitarian and development practitioners who work with refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants in Europe (including professionals in International Organisations, such as the International Organization for Migration or UNHCR; in different local, national or international NGOs; at EU level (such as EASO); as well as in the relevant government offices and ministries, such as the Ministry of Interior and/or Refugee Affairs it is crucially important to adopt a culturally-sensitive understanding of the different dimensions of the Arab family, both in its nuclear and extended formation. During the project, we held several formal and informal information-sharing and awareness-raising sessions with practitioners in the field, discussing different dimensions and challenges faced in family reunification, resettlement, integration and relocation programs.

Establishing a dialogue between researchers and practitioners, highlighted the need to re-evaluate refugee and asylum laws and policies, and their applications and implementations, through a wider definition of the family, that goes beyond the notion of the refugee as an individual, bounded agent, and beyond the nuclear family. Moreover, it was stressed that existing refugee and asylum law needs to be applied in an unprejudiced way, facilitating refugees' protection, family reunification, and relocation processes. Given the discrepancies that exist between legal stipulations and their actual applications on the ground, policy-makers, ranging from EU officials to NGO representatives, have recently asked for the Dublin Regulations to be reformed and rigorously implemented to protect the rights of the family and child (see, e.g., Danish Refugee Council, 2018, European Parliament, 2016, 2017, 2019; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2016, ECRE, 2016). Our findings support this call.

We also engaged civil society actors, more generally, through our work. The research focus and findings on refugee solidarity activism demonstrate that refugee integration in the EU needs to go beyond technocratic top-down measures, and, instead, should actively engage all sectors of society, raising awareness and encouraging debate on societal and political issues. The refugee issue intersects with other gendered, classed, and raced dimensions of disenfranchisement, precarity and inequality. Our findings indicate that the refugee crisis must be understood and analyzed in relation to the ongoing crisis in the EU. As such, our research on and with refugees also affects society and communities, be they refugee communities or 'host' societies, more broadly.

To conclude, our project has provided and disseminated original and crucial knowledge on the role of family and kin in migration processes to different stakeholders. Policy-makers, lawyers, case-workers, NGO workers and solidarity activists have stressed the need for such knowledge and awareness on the Arab family, and have indicated that they aim to reflect our project's findings in their respective programming, legal practices and solidarity work.

## **7) Benefits to Arab countries in terms of issues related to the Arab Family**

Our research provides several potential benefits to Arab countries and contributes to a better understanding of issues related to the Arab family.

From a socio-cultural point of view, through the collection of ethnographic material we provide a vivid insight into the current situation of Arab families by looking at the experiences of Syrian asylum seekers and refugees in the EU. In our research, the current reconfigurations of the Arab family and its transnational dimension are recorded, analyzed and narrated. This ethnographic material values the Syrian refugees' narratives and contributes to a multi-voice 'history of the present' of transnational Arab families. In addition, by involving several actors in the conceptualization of the 'Arab family' and its transformations within a specific timeframe and across multiple locations, we bring to light the actual needs of Arab refugee families. We believe that aside from the importance of conducting research that contributes to tracing and reconstructing the history of displaced people, and in particular Arab families, the multi-voice 'history of the present' that we collected also is beneficial for Arab countries in addressing issues related to the provision of support, policies and future programs for refugee families.

A second aspect of value for Arab countries concerns citizenship. Our project traced the various strategies that Syrian refugees adopt to navigate legislative and executive procedures by mobilizing both their individual citizenship status (as Syrians or Palestinian-Syrians seeking asylum), and their social gendered role as members within a larger Arab family (unaccompanied minors, mothers, sons, fathers, but also non-nuclear kin, such as grandparents, sister-in-law, etc.). In the Italian case, citizenship is structurally linked to the state's reliance on an exceptional legal tool, humanitarian corridors, which bypasses the ordinary procedure of the individual asylum application and establishes an immediate transferal of selected refugee candidates into EU territory. This tool thus entails a high level of discretion, as candidates are chosen by non-state actors which privilege the concept of family bond as a principle of citizenship and state inclusion. Given that this model is likely to play an increasingly central role in EU, and possibly international, refugee policies, our research in Italy and Greece offers an important vantage point from which to observe the impact of this new legal tool.

Thirdly, the research project can also contribute to the question of returnees, which impacts Arab countries directly. In the last years, the number of Syrian returnees has increased. This has various reasons, ranging from lack of support, or indeed xenophobic hostility, in receiving countries, political developments that encourage return, an increasingly tightening asylum process, to also some refugees' own desire (and right, of course) to return. Our conversations with refugees and asylum-seekers on this issue are complex, reflecting conflicting agendas, and a highly volatile, instable context that impacts on refugees' positions on return. We believe, however, that our ethnographic material sheds novel light on the dynamics and politics of return and, as such, has the potential to inform Arab countries' future policies and programs facilitating and supporting refugee sustainable reintegration in Syria.

Finally, our research highlights the need for refugee and asylum laws to be applied in an unprejudiced way, guaranteeing refugees' protection, family reunification, and relocation

processes. There also is potential in rethinking and re-evaluating legal frameworks (at international, regional and national level) through a wider definition of the family which goes beyond the notion of the refugee as individual, bounded agent, and beyond the nuclear family. More specifically, we urge policy and law-makers to unite in their initiatives at EU level to revise the Dublin Regulations so that they can better protect the rights of refugee and asylum-seeking families and children.

## **8) Conclusion**

- Family and kin act as crucial support systems for migrants, often more so than the institutional channels provided through NGOs, International Organization or governmental services.
- The personal is political in contexts of migration and displacement. This means that migrants are often forced to strategically plan personal status decisions pertaining to marriage, guardianship for minors, divorce, etc. within and vis-à-vis the legal and political constraints they find themselves in.
- The ‘refugee crisis’ needs to be understood and analyzed in relation to the ongoing crisis in the EU. The two crises form a continuum, and intersections between the two need to be traced in both, actual empirical praxis and discourse.
- Refugee and asylum laws needs to be applied in an unprejudiced way, guaranteeing refugees’ protection, family reunification, and relocation processes. There also is potential in rethinking and re-evaluating the law through a wider definition of family that goes beyond the notion of the refugee as individual, bounded agent, and beyond the nuclear family.
- Researchers, policy-makers and development/humanitarian aid workers need to recognize, further investigate, and support the important role that the family and kin play in migrants’ lives. More specifically, a deeper and culturally-sensitive understanding of the different dimensions of the Arab family as a core social, political and economic unit is needed.
- Kin-based language is employed in humanitarian as well solidarian settings. While the former tends to uphold more traditional notions of kinship as blood and descent, the latter advances wider, and more radical conceptualizations of kinship as performed, fictive and symbolic.

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## 8) Appendix I: Interview Sample



