



# 'It's a graveyard. What's happening in the Mediterranean ... we cannot pretend'



**Jade Wilson**  
in Lampedusa

On the Italian island of Lampedusa, the effects of a law restricting ships that help migrants are being felt

Dotted along the shore on Lampedusa island lie dozens of lifebuoys and old shoes, a green baby's lifejacket with small arm-bands and a cartoon smiling face, and bags of discarded thermal foil blankets previously used to warm the migrants who have arrived there after crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

"It's a graveyard. What's happening in the Mediterranean ... we cannot pretend we didn't know," says Pietro Bartolo, a former doctor who treated migrants on the island for more than 30 years.

Nearly 26,000 people have died or gone missing while attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea since 2014. Lampedusa, a 20 sq km island that is closer to north Africa than the Italian mainland, is one of the main arrival points for migrants coming from Libya and Tunisia, who disembark there before being moved elsewhere by authorities.

Before becoming an MEP in 2019, Bartolo met an estimated 250,000 migrants who arrived at the pier in Lampedusa and treated many of them for hypothermia, malnutrition, dehydration and injuries sustained from long boat journeys, as well as wounds from torture before they took to the sea.

While he has helped to save thousands of lives, he has also witnessed many deaths. It was the children who haunted him the most.

Bartolo was working on the island on October 3rd, 2013, when a boat coming from Libya sank off the coast of Lampedusa, killing more than 360 people, many of whom were children.

"I never could have imagined this kind of shipwreck could happen. There were so many bodies, hundreds of them along the shore in body bags," he says.

"I was standing there, prolonging checking them because my fear was there might be a child inside. The first one I opened was a child. He wore red shorts and a white T-shirt. His eyes were still open."

"I looked inside his eyes. I wish I had never done this. He was only this size," says Bartolo, holding his hands out to show how small the boy's body was.

his eyes fill with tears when he talks about the boy he found that day. "Sometimes I have nightmares about him. He is screaming at me because I didn't save his life."

The doctor had a bottle of water and a brush with him that day, which he used in an attempt to give the dead "some dignity".

"I cleaned their faces and combed their hair before the police took photos for identification, so they would be more recognisable if family ever came to look. We identify them with numbers, but they are people."

At the back of the island's cemetery, a small section is dedicated to the migrants who died attempting to reach Europe, with a monument made from some of the wood from shipwrecks over the years. "Here lie Muslims, Catholics, old, young, black, white. All migrants died in the sea seeking freedom," it reads.

The graves are mostly unmarked, except for one – that of a six-month old baby, Youssef, who died in a shipwreck off the coast in winter 2020. On the baby's grave lies a picture of him, above which "mummy and daddy love you forever" is written.

It is estimated that more than 30,000 migrants reached Lampedusa in 2021, representing more than half of those who arrived in all of Italy that year.

When the weather and conditions at sea are better in the summer, it is not uncommon for hundreds to arrive daily, a police source on the island told The Irish Times.

But to the 6,000 locals, the issue has been "made mostly invisible" in recent years.

Two people living on Lampedusa say they "sometimes only find out about migrants on television" because they're quickly taken to a reception centre and then bussed out to other parts of Italy.

The reception centre, initially designed for 350 people, is often overcrowded, with more than 1,000 people inside. The centre is blocked off by double fencing and a strong police presence.

"Completely locked inside" Giovanni D'Ambrosio, a social worker in Lampedusa for migrant support group Mediterranean Hope, says migrants have been "completely locked inside" since the Covid-19 crisis.

"Before, there was a hole in the fence from which they went to the town. The authorities tolerated this, but this hole has been closed since Covid. They are not criminals, but they are locked up," he adds.

Migrants can spend anywhere between a few days and a few weeks in the centre. In one week in February this year, more than 6,000 migrants arrived, half of whom went directly to the reception centre.

"It was more than 10 times its capacity," says D'Ambrosio. "People didn't have a space to sleep, many slept outside. They couldn't shower or use the toilet. The conditions were really ugly."

Three people have died at the centre in recent months, he says, deaths the authorities are now investigating.

"When migrants die in shipwrecks, it's described as tragedy, but it's not a random incident, it's a consequence of policy in Europe. And now a new law is criminalising the only people who dedicate themselves to rescuing people at sea."

D'Ambrosio is referring to a law passed in Italy this year, establishing a code of conduct for migrant charity ships.

Part of prime minister Giorgia Meloni's efforts to crack down on rescue vessels, the new law requires ships to request access to a port and sail to it "without delay" after a single

rescue, rather than remain at sea to look for more migrant boats in distress.

Previously, some of these vessels would complete an average of four rescues per trip, with an average of 280 people rescued, says Caroline Willemen, deputy head of mission at the charity Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

"Now, we can only rescue about 100 people per rotation."

"One man we rescued said he had tried to cross the Mediterranean 11 times – it's a vicious cycle. I've never met someone who would leave if they did not have to. When you see people with small kids, it makes you think of all the people you know with small kids, and what it must take for a parent to make that journey," says Willemen.

The Italian government has repeatedly claimed that the presence of rescue boats in the Mediterranean is encouraging people to make the perilous journey. It has accused NGOs patrolling the Mediterranean of incentivising illegal migration and rewarding people smugglers who charge migrants hundreds of euro for help with the crossing.

The decree restricting the activities of the rescue boats was introduced in December and passed into law by a parliamentary vote in February.

Speaking ahead of the vote, Nicola Molteni, a deputy interior minister and member of the

right-wing League party, told the senate: "If immigration is not controlled, it creates exploitation, forced labour, illegal labour."

The Italian embassy in Ireland declined to comment when contacted.

MSF was the first NGO to have its vessel, Geo Barents, detained under the new law, for a period of 20 days, and with a fine of up to €10,000 for "failing to provide the voyage data recorder to authorities on arrival" at a port city on Italy's Adriatic coast in February.

NGOs are also being assigned "very distant ports that can add 1,000km to our journey", she says. The official explanation given by authorities is that reception centres in the south are overcrowded.

However, two other NGO workers say they have come across many migrants who disembarked in the north, only to be transported farther south again.

Scrapping The Council of Europe has urged Italy to scrap the new decree, describing it as a breach of international law.

In a letter to the Italian interior minister Matteo Piantedosi, the council's commissioner for human rights, Dunja Mijatović, said she was "concerned the application of some of these rules could hinder the provision of life-saving assistance by NGOs in the central Mediterranean and, therefore, may be at variance with Italy's obligations under human rights and international law".

"It is a pity, because Europe has so much to gain from opening its doors to migrants," says Pietro Bartolo.

Every year, on the anniversary of the 2013 shipwreck, survivors come back to the island to celebrate their lives in Europe and to remember those who died.

The participants toss flowers into the waters off Lampedusa, and pray for those who continue to attempt the journey.

Bartolo attends the ceremony each year as a reminder of the need "to make things better".

One of "the most beautiful moments" of Bartolo's life was at the ceremony three years ago. He got off the plane at Lampedusa to see a woman coming towards him with a bunch of flowers.

"She was pregnant. She was one of the women I saved from a shipwreck many years ago, and she came all the way from Sweden just to thank me."

"I have seen so many bad things in my life that nobody should see. But there are many success stories of migrants in Europe, too," he says.

■ **Above: Migrants on Lampedusa wait for a boat transfer to Sicily last year. Below: A dinghy with migrants off the coast of Lampedusa in 2017 and migrants waiting to be processed on the island.**

PHOTOGRAPH: FILIPPO MONTEFORTE/ AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES, PATRICK BAR/SOS MEDITERRANEE VIA AP, AND ALESSANDRO SERRANO/ AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

# Rugby-loving Albanese has chance to kick on



**Jonathan Drennan**  
**Sydney Letter**

When faced with a difficult decision Australia's leader considers what his mother would do

To understand Australian prime minister Anthony Albanese fully, you have to visit his childhood home in the inner city Sydney suburb of Camperdown. Albanese grew up with his single mother, Maryanne, and her disability pension funded a small, spartan council property facing a narrow busy road filled with lorries bringing deliveries to the nearby Sydney fish market throughout the night.

Albanese's politics and leadership are constantly informed by his past and present. Today, he lives in the luxurious prime minister's residence by Sydney harbour in Kirribilli, but his late mother is never far from his thoughts. Arthritis robbed her of the ability to use her hands and the chance of a job.

Albanese was selling newspapers after school from the age of 12 to augment the family budget. He remembers his youth vividly. He has often said that he will ask himself what would his mother do when he is challenged with a difficult decision.

Albanese grew up attending Labor Party meetings on a Wednesday and rugby league matches on a Saturday. Mass was a non-negotiable every Sunday. His mother was always with him. He was inspired by Labor prime ministers such as Gough Whitlam and Bob Hawke, with Hawke ultimately having the strongest influence as a pragmatic dealmaker across the political divide with a broad appeal to the average Australian.

Like Hawke, Albanese is extremely bright, but also easily engages with everyday Australians, a stark contrast to the often bumbling previous prime minister Scott Morrison from the conservative Liberal Party who decided to take a holiday to Hawaii in 2019 while Australia faced some of its worst bushfires in history.

Albanese in contrast was seen driving to the worst-hit areas in his car with supplies to help those affected.

Albanese arguably owes his election success in May 2022 almost solely to Morrison's follies. It took 12 years for Labor to unseat the Liberal Party at the national level, and Morrison was a key architect. Morrison's arrogance during the pandemic, manifested through a slow roll-out of vaccines and an inability to work with state leaders, cost

him votes and trust. But the damage was really done in 2021 when a former female Liberal staffer alleged she had been raped in Parliament House, highlighting a poisoned culture within the Liberal Party that asked uncomfortable questions about Morrison's ability to relate to women.

Albanese undoubtedly benefited from the disastrous last years of Morrison's government. The diehard fan of the South Sydney rugby league club knew all he had to do to succeed early in his term of office was to kick simple goals. Shortly after taking office, his government steered through a landmark climate change bill mandating that Australia reduce carbon emissions by 43 per cent from 2005 levels by 2030, and reach net zero emissions by 2050. It also increased the minimum wage.

Diplomatic relations with China had frozen completely under Morrison, costing the country billions of dollars in trade. Albanese met Xi Jinping in November and utilised his talented minister for foreign affairs, Penny Wong, to re-establish relations with Pacific neighbours that had soured under the previous government. Albanese also rebuilt trust with Emmanuel Macron, after Morrison's government had cancelled a multibillion dollar deal with the French to supply submarines to Australia.

Albanese's prolonged honeymoon period will likely end with his first budget

Last month, Labor won the New South Wales state election under Chris Minns and ended 12 years of Liberal leadership. The Liberal Party now has only Tasmania under its control. Albanese has an extremely strong platform on which to drive his policies forward.

One of his biggest challenges is to enshrine an indigenous voice to parliament in the Australian constitution, which would be voted on in a referendum. The voice would be a way for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to directly advise all levels of government about laws and policies that affect their lives. This is a serious challenge given the Australian constitution has been changed only eight times since it took effect in 1901.

Australia also faces a stark cost-of-living crisis, and Albanese's prolonged honeymoon period will likely end with the announcement of his first budget in May. One of Labor's slogans in the federal election was "everything is going up apart from your wages". It was strong rhetoric, but it prompts the question to Albanese: what are you going to do about it? Australians are waiting. He has made strong strides in rebuilding trust both nationally and internationally, but he had a very low bar to step over. The challenge for Albanese now is to set challenging goals and achieve them. Few will bet against him.



**Comhairle Contae Lú**  
**Louth County Council**

**Housing Estates Special Speed Limits 2022**

Louth County Council has prepared the above named Draft Bye-Laws. The purpose of these Bye-Laws is to provide for the introduction of Special Speed Limits in named Housing Estates in the County.

A copy of the Draft Bye-Laws is available for public inspection from 3rd April, 2023 to 4th May, 2023, via Louth County Council's Online Consultation Portal using the following link <https://consult.louthcoco.ie/> and during normal office hours at the Offices of Louth County Council at:

- County Hall, Millennium Centre, Dundalk, Co Louth A91 KFW6
- Town Hall, Crowe Street, Dundalk, Co. Louth A91 W20C
- Drogheda Civic Offices, Fair Street, Drogheda, Co. Louth A92 P440
- Mid Louth Civic Services Centre, Fair Green, Ardee, Co. Louth A92 RYT2

Submissions may be made in writing to the undersigned or via Louth County Council's Online Consultation Portal, using the following link <https://consult.louthcoco.ie/>, not later than 4.00 pm on 4th May, 2023.

A copy of the Draft Bye-Laws may be purchased on payment of the prescribed fee of €7.

**Anne Kieran**  
Acting Administrative Officer  
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Louth County Council  
3rd April, 2023.

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# Hitting the right musical note can move us in mysterious ways



**Maureen Dowd**

'Let's not forget that 'climax' is a common musical term

The orgasm heard around the world was reported by Magnus Fennes, a composer and music producer who is the brother of Ralph Fiennes.

After going to the Los Angeles Philharmonic in April, he tweeted about a woman sitting near him at Walt Disney Concert Hall who had a "loud and full body orgasm" during the second movement of Tchaikovsky's Fifth.

Some in the audience tweeted back, wondering if the moaning was due to a medical condition. But the woman, who stayed with her smiling partner for the whole concert, has not come forward to clear it up.

Whatever happened, the scream is a metaphor. As we discuss which musical genres are expiring – is rock 'n' roll dead, as Jann Wenner said? Is jazz fading away? – it seems that classical music is getting

hotter. Albert Imperato, a New York music promoter, said the idea is breaking through that classical music is not supposed to be safe and relaxing. It's supposed to tingle.

"Let's not forget that the word 'climax' is a common musical term," said soprano Renée Fleming said. "It has to do with musical tension and its release." She said Rachmaninoff and Liszt "had it down" when it comes to sexy pieces.

To celebrate the scream, Norman Lebrecht, a British music journalist, ran "The 10 Best Orgasm Symphonies" on his blog, Slipped Disc.

Elim Chan, the 36-year-old conductor with the baton that night, said she watched the woman in her peripheral vision until she "calmed down." She said she likes when audience members audibly react – "I don't want to be a piece of museum art." After the dark

years of Covid and everyone at home streaming, she said, people are coming out to concerts to "feel something" that will exist only in that time – "and if you miss it, you miss it".

**Golden era**

The scream reminded me of the golden era in Hollywood when moguls put their biggest stars – Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Elizabeth Taylor, Ingrid Bergman – into passionate tales about classical musicians. There has been a revival of that recently, with Cate Blanchett in *Tár*, Kelvin Harrison jr in *Chevalier* and the upcoming Netflix movie *Maestro*, with Bradley Cooper as Leonard Bernstein.

Several recent surveys have clocked a rise in the popularity of classical music in the past couple of years. In America and England, the genre flourished during the pandemic, drawing

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**It seems that classical music is getting hotter. Albert Imperato, a New York music promoter, said the idea is breaking through that classical music is not supposed to be safe and relaxing. It's supposed to tingle**

more women and younger listeners, and it's soaring among content creators on social media. "Maybe that old orchestral and operatic music now sounds fresh to ears raised on electronic sounds," mused music critic Ted Gioia on his Substack, or "maybe young people view getting dressed up for a night at the opera hall as a kind of cosplay event".

**Big draws**

Peter Gelb, the general manager of the Metropolitan Opera, agreed. "The average age of our audience used to be in the 60s; now it's in the 40s," he said. He added that new operas by living composers – Terence Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* and *Champion* and Kevin Puts's *The Hours* – are big draws. Gelb said that *Champion*, based on the life of Emile Griffith, a bisexual boxer, is the first time the Met

has featured two men kissing or drag queens. New York is the epicentre of the electricity. Cue *Dudamani*. Gustavo Dudamel, the 42-year-old curly-haired conductor who looks for "blood" in the music, is moving from Los Angeles to take over the New York Philharmonic in 2026. He promised to "keep that wild, wild animal Gustavo," giving audiences a preview this weekend at David Geffen Hall, conducting Mahler's Ninth.

At the Met, the 48-year-old conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin is a bolt of lightning with bleached-blond hair and a diamond earring. In elaborate costumes inspired by whatever opera he is conducting, he shakes off classical music's conservative air.

Keri-Lynn Wilson, the 6ft glamazon who conducts in black Armani pantsuits with her ponytail swinging – and

who is part of a classical music power couple with her husband, Gelb – sparkled in her debut at the Met last fall with Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*.

"I actually conducted an orgasm in it," she said about the climactic sex scene.

"Shostakovich achieved it through the sequencing of a relentlessly building and sliding trombone lick in unison with the entire orchestra in a pulsating crescendo." She said Josef Stalin bannich the work and Shostakovich narrowly avoided the gulag.

New York is also home to Yuja Wang, the 36-year-old pianist who wears high-fashion miniskirts and stilettoes for her bravura performances of Rachmaninoff.

Nézet-Séguin said he thinks we are "beginning another golden age for our art form". – *New York Times*.

# Fast track for Ukrainians, slow train for other migrants in Italy



**Jade Wilson**

in Milan

Italy trying to stem flow of migrants, but has welcomed 150,000 Ukrainians

Kabinet Camara says he fled in fear from the west African state of Guinea six years ago after receiving threats because of his work at an organisation fighting child exploitation.

"The government started opposing me and it was very hard to defend myself from the attacks. Eventually, I was forced to flee," he said.

But seeking asylum in Italy, where he has lived since 2017, was "very different from what I expected", Camara said, describing overcrowded conditions at the reception centre where he was sent and poor staffing leading to delays.

"In the reception centre, there were 10 people to take care of 1,000," he said.

The asylum application process in Italy is hard to navigate and can be arbitrary, refugee advocates said. But Camara was lucky.

"In less than two years I obtained the necessary documents. I have friends who after seven years are still waiting," he said.

**Sheer numbers**

As a main European arrival point from Africa, Italy has long been overburdened by the sheer numbers of refugees reaching its shores.

The interior ministry said 105,000 arrived in 2022. This year has seen a surge in arrivals to 34,715 between January 1st and April 19th, compared to 8,669 in the same period last year.

Prime minister Giorgia Meloni's right-wing coalition is making the already perilous Mediterranean crossing harder by forcing boats run by non-governmental organisations that pick up migrants to dock at mainland ports in northern Italy, thus increasing their costs.

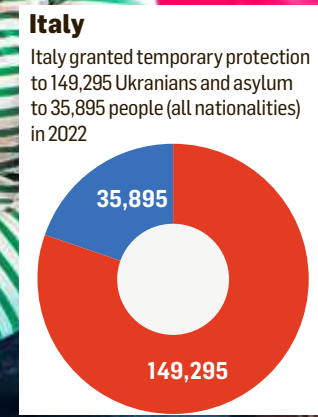
It has also introduced jail terms of up to 30 years for people smuggling that leads to the death of migrants.

But Italy was quick to give 150,000 Ukrainians who fled Russia's invasion last year immediate access to support services under the European Union's temporary protection directive.

The directive, not used since it was adopted in 2001, is "the sleeping beauty of European asylum legislation", Sara Consolato, immigration expert at Refugees Welcome Italy, a non-governmental organisation helping displaced people find housing, said.

Consolato said the freedom of movement within the EU that gave Ukrainian refugees was an "astonishing U-turn in the policy of the EU, where the Dublin Regulation establishes that the first state of arrival is the one responsible for processing the asylum claim".

The Association for Juridical Studies on Immigration (ASGI), a group of lawyers, academics, consultants and civil society representatives focusing



**■ Clockwise from main photograph: Kabinet Camara and Claudia de Lillo; He fled Guinea six years ago for Italy. Yulia Gavryliuk (centre) with her Italian host family. And Laura Boldrini an Italian centre-left member of parliament.**  
PHOTOGRAPHS: REUTERS

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**Italians were very generous in offering assistance and receiving Ukrainians. They were well-received because the far-right in power decided they were the real refugees**

countries and Tunisians are among the main nationalities crossing the Mediterranean to Italy by boat. The vast majority are sent back home.

A report by a database managed by the non-profit European Council on Refugees and Exiles said it had become common for some nationalities, including Tunisians, not to be allowed to seek asylum.

Of the 12,883 Tunisians who disembarked in 2020, only 918 were registered as asylum seekers, the report said.

The Dublin Regulation states EU state where they would like to live, as their claim must be processed by the first state in which they arrive.

"But Ukrainians could enter EU member states in a safe and legal way and choose their destination freely, according to their family and cultural links," Consolato said.

Asylum seekers can apply to join only immediate family members elsewhere in the EU, but rights groups say there are often delays processing applications in a number of EU countries.

Laura Boldrini, a centre-left member of parliament and former spokeswoman for the United Nations refugee agency, said

the Dublin Regulation could be unfair for refugees who arrive in Italy by sea but want to join family elsewhere in the EU.

"You also have two categories now in Italy," she said, referring to asylum seekers and Ukrainians benefiting from temporary protection.

"Italians were very generous in offering assistance and receiving Ukrainians. They were well-received because the far-right in power decided they were the real refugees."

"While according to this narrative, Syrians and Afghans or Iranians, according to them, are not real refugees," she said.

**'The lesson is to be ready'**

Yulia Gavryliuk, from Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, said integration had been difficult, but had been helped by the welcome she received from her Italian hosts, and because of her job as a mediator with the non-profit Refugees Welcome Italy.

"I'm helping those fleeing the war like me," she said, adding that her two children are settling well into school in Milan.

In theory, asylum seekers are able to work 60 days after filing their application, and Ukrainians can work immediately, but there are barriers such as lan-

guage and finding childcare.

Only 22 per cent of Ukrainians have found a stable job, a survey by the UN refugee agency in Italy said.

Language is the main obstacle for all new arrivals, hindering access across all levels of education with some refugees reporting struggling to understand the paperwork needed to enrol their children in school, Consolato said.

Only a small percentage of Ukrainians are living in state-run facilities.

Italy had the biggest Ukrainian community in western Europe before the war and most newcomers went to live with family and friends.

Of the more than 150,000 Ukrainians in Italy under the temporary protection directive, 11,000 ended up staying in state-run reception centres and 8,000 in hotels.

Lamberto Bertole, Milan's deputy mayor for health and welfare, said 80 per cent of Ukrainians in the city relied on contacts to find housing and his department helped the remainder.

The directive, he said, "has allowed us to give the Italian

health card to them in a quick way".

Both Ukrainians and asylum seekers have been treated equally by the healthcare system.

Camara said he never had a problem accessing healthcare. "I have been to the hospital twice – the first time when I had just arrived in Italy after drinking a lot of sea water – and they always treated me carefully," he said.

Nadia Kazakova, a Ukrainian woman, said Italian doctors "saved my husband's life with free heart surgery".

**'Extremely grateful'**

"We are extremely grateful," she said, praising the generosity of the Italian people. "They also performed an operation on our dog for free."

Bertole said it was right to apply the temporary protection directive, but it "must be the beginning and an example to be repeated in the future".

"This experience taught us that we must prepare for crises, as they will become more and more possible. The future will be made of emergencies. The lesson is to be ready."

This article is part of a series between The Irish Times and Thomson Reuters Foundation investigating the impact of the first application of the temporary protection directive (TPD) by the EU to Ukrainian refugees.

This article was developed with the support of Journalismfund Europe.

# EU's protection of Ukrainians offers lessons

**Jade Wilson, Joanna Gill and Sadiya Ansari Analysis**

Use of temporary protection measure a success that may never be repeated

Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year sparked the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since the second World War but also a wave of solidarity as thousands opened their homes to Ukrainians and EU states gave them rights and benefits akin to their own citizens.

The European Union swiftly granted temporary protection to millions of fleeing Ukrainians, giving them immediate rights to work and access to education, healthcare, welfare and housing, almost the same as local nationals.

Their treatment is in stark contrast to that received by refugees from other war-zones, but could provide lessons in how to deal with the contentious issue.

"Temporary protection has been the sleeping beauty of the European asylum legislation," Sara Consolato, an immigration expert with non-governmental organisation Refugees Welcome Italy, said.

"The decision to activate, for the first time since its adoption, has been ground-breaking," she said.

The EU's never-before-used 2001 Temporary Protection Directive aims to fast-track residency rights by waiving the need to examine applications individually and so avoid major bottlenecks and the possible collapse of asylum systems under the pressure of a mass movement of refugees.

But the measure, while largely hailed as a success, has created a two-tier system, refugee advocates say, in which non-Ukrainian refugees undergo a lengthy asylum application process and endure conditions that often appear designed to deter them from coming to the EU.

Asylum is provided to those not just fleeing war, but also to those experiencing persecution, but that is harder to prove and often leads to lengthy scrutiny.

While asylum regimes differ greatly across the EU, what they have in common is curtailing the rights of applicants for months and sometimes years while their claims are assessed.

**Arab Spring**

The EU had considered triggering the directive before. Italy and Malta called for it in 2011 when almost two million people were displaced as a result of the Arab Spring uprisings.

In 2021, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell suggested temporary protection be applied to Afghans fleeing the Taliban takeover of their country.

But some EU countries argued activating temporary protection in these cases might attract more migrants to Europe.

It was also hard for EU leaders to agree to trigger the directive when the influx

affected some countries and not the bloc as a whole.

When it comes to EU asylum and migration policy, geography weighs heavily on debates.

Frontline states such as Italy, Greece and Malta, which see the majority of arrivals, have a different perspective from destination countries, where most asylum seekers want to live, such as Austria, Germany or France.

In the case of Ukraine, geography also played a part and its proximity to Europe led to unusual unity within the bloc. Just six days after the first Russian tanks rolled across the Ukrainian border, the EU triggered the Temporary Protection Directive and it came into force on March 4th, 2022.

"It was a bit of a surprise," said EU MEP Birgit Sippel, who works on asylum policy. "This time the war started in our direct neighbourhood, and we saw the need to support the country that was being attacked."

**Shared border**

Ukraine shares a border with four EU countries – Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Romania. As well as a shared history and culture, Ukraine's neighbours feared that if Kyiv fell, they would have a new neighbour – Russia.

The shared border with the EU meant there was no safe country en route for refugees to shelter, unlike, for example, for Syrians fleeing the civil war and crossing into Turkey.

66 **This time the war started in our direct neighbourhood, and we saw the need to support the country that was being attacked**

However, the EU's first use of temporary protection may also be the last. In 2020, well before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the bloc proposed repealing the directive, but it has yet to agree on an alternative. The benefits of swift processing, access to protection and routes to integration via education and employment are elements to consider when reforming asylum rules, experts said.

"The ability to apply for jobs right away means many thousands of Ukrainians are in work within the EU, easing the financial cost to member states."

"The humanitarian spirit and solidarity that EU states have shown over the past year or so to refugees fleeing Ukraine should set the example for all refugee crises globally," said Maeve Patterson, a spokeswoman for the United Nations refugee agency.

"The EU can better protect refugees wherever they may come from by ensuring a comprehensive, well-managed and predictable approach to asylum and migration in the EU."

But some EU countries argued activating temporary protection in these cases might attract more migrants to Europe.

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This article is part of a series between The Irish Times and Thomson Reuters Foundation investigating the impact of the first application of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) by the EU to Ukrainian refugees. The article was developed with the support of Journalismfund Europe.

## Israel kills five militants in raid in West Bank

Palestinian president's spokesperson describes deaths as 'a war crime'

Israeli security forces on high alert fearing revenge attacks following raid

MARK WEISS  
in Jerusalem

The Israeli security forces have gone on a high state of alert, fearing Palestinian revenge attacks after five militants were killed in a West Bank raid.

The raid in the early hours of yesterday morning in Nablus, the West Bank's largest city, targeted the ancient casbah market, home of the militant Lion's Den group.

More than 20 Palestinians were also injured in the fierce exchanges of fire that began after a large convoy of military vehicles, led by the Yamam anti-terror unit, arrived at the narrow casbah alleyways.

Israel said all of those killed were Lion's Den fighters and included the group's leader. A makeshift bomb factory was also destroyed during the operation.

Despite the heavy exchanges of fire there were no Israeli casualties.

A sixth Palestinian was killed in clashes elsewhere in the West Bank.

Palestinian Authority security forces have nominal security control over Palestinian cities, militants operate with impunity in Nablus and nearby Jenin, in the northern West Bank.

Israel imposed a lockdown on Nablus two weeks ago after it became convinced that the Palestinian Authority security forces were either unable or unwilling to reassert control.

The Lion's Den, a small group of two dozen gunmen, has claimed responsibility for a number of lethal attacks on Israeli troops and Jewish settlers and has also planned attacks inside Israel.

After 17 Israelis and two Ukrainians were killed in militant attacks earlier this year, Israel has carried out an ongoing military operation, dubbed Break the Wave, with almost nightly West Bank raids. More than 100 Palestinians have been killed since January, making it one of the deadliest periods since the start of the Israeli occupation in 1967.

The Lion's Den group was formed in Nablus, primarily to



## 'There are so many sanctions on Russia but not a single sanction here'



Jade Wilson

in Ein Samiya Bedouin, West Bank

Conditions becoming 'worse every year' across the West Bank as Palestinians endure Israeli settler expansion

"Our lives have been turned upside down. But we have no other place to live, we have been displaced too many times," Khader Salamah says, standing next to the ruins of the structure where he housed his livestock, just a couple of hours after it was demolished by Israeli authorities.

Salamah and his family live in Ein Samiya Bedouin, a small agricultural community of about 180 people in Area C of the West Bank, which is under full Israeli control.

The area is abundant in water resources and is targeted by illegal settlement expansions and Jewish-only bypass roads.

The livestock are the farmer's only source of livelihood, and he's worried he'll now spend "sleepless nights trying to keep watch over them".

"We are very simple people. We don't like a fancy life," he says. "Our people moved from the Negev desert after the 1948 war, and were displaced again in 1967. We have lived here in peace with our goats and sheep for decades, depending on our livestock without any problems."

The community depended on grazing for their animals, but have been "attacked when

we try to access the grazing land" in recent years, since Israeli settlers began to occupy the surrounding hills.

"Now we totally depend on buying food for the animals. It costs us a lot so we have to sell them. We live in inadequate shelters because we cannot get permits from the Israelis to build. One of the good things we still have is the school, but it is threatened now," he says.

The local school was built in January this year with funding from the EU and serves 30 pupils aged between 6 and 12, addressing the long-standing lack of education in the area and for neighbouring herder communities. However, it is now under "serious risk" of demolition, says Salamah.

"The school was our only hope for our children to have a better life. If it's demolished, they will have to walk 15km to the next one. It would not be a safe distance, there is no public transportation, and we are afraid they could be attacked or arrested."

'As bad as it's been since 1967' Conditions are becoming "worse every year" in the community and across the West Bank, says Christopher Holt, a representative of the West Bank Protection Consortium, a partnership of international NGOs and EU donors, including Ireland, that works to stop the forcible transfers of Palestinians.

"In this community, two structures were destroyed this morning - a storage unit and an animal shelter for their livelihood business. Now the school is at imminent risk, and their homes."

"Last year saw the largest number of settler attacks on record since the UN began keeping records. This year is set to overtake last year's level of violence. The situation today is as bad as it's been since 1967," he adds.

According to United Nations data, Israeli authorities had demolished more than 400 Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank this year by the start of September,



displacing hundreds. These include both punitive demolitions and demolitions ordered due to a lack of construction permits, which are almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain in Area C.

The EU has urged Israel to halt demolitions on occupied Palestinian land, citing a violation of international law and an undermining of the viability of the two-state solution.

However, settlements continued to increase "exponentially" in 2021 and 2022, according to an EU report in July, with settlements in occupied East Jerusalem more than doubling from 6,228 housing units to 14,894. The rise in settlement expansion plans by the Israeli authorities was also accompanied by a "worrisome trend in rising settler violence", the report said.

For Salamah and his community, things have been "really bad" for the past year, with "frequent attacks" by the Hilltop Youth - a group of hardline, extremist religious-nationalist youth who "come at night with weapons".

Less than an hour away in Ramallah, Ahmed (26) and his friends come to a youth village to "camp, study, and do things to improve our lives" but they have also recently begun to experience threats of violence from settlers.

"We built this place ourselves. We made a treehouse, and we planted olive trees. We just sing, watch films, and

resentment towards Europe now when you compare what happened in Ukraine. There are so many sanctions on Russia but not a single sanction here."

Amal Jadou, Palestinian deputy minister for foreign affairs, expresses a similar sentiment.

"Settlers control the lives of 3.5 million Palestinians here now," she says. "The two-state solution is a European invention, and since the late 80s we have become fervent advocates, but it is being completely undermined by the Israelis and the world is silent. The EU and member states issue statements of condemnation but what have they done to stop it? It is time for action."

"We always say the situation can't get any worse, but then it does. Now it's the worst it's ever been. What is happening here today is only a glimpse of what will happen in the future. The Israelis are blurring the 1967 border and expanding. If something doesn't change, Palestinians will revolt and it will be bloody."

'Almost daily incursions' Refugee camps are often the most vulnerable to targeting by both settlers and Israeli forces, Jadou says. At Aida refugee camp, in Bethlehem, Israeli forces enter at least once a week to make arrests, and there are "almost daily incursions".

"These include shots fired, and a massive use of tear gas. It's highly traumatic for the kids. We had to close two schools in the north because there was an escalation of violence," says Adam Bouloukos, director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which provides support for Palestinian refugees.

Aida is one of 19 refugee camps located in the West Bank and is home to almost 6,000 people, most of whom are under the age of 18. So far this year, there have been 33 Israeli operations and 26 detentions at the camp.

"The checkpoints and permit systems mean our own staff sometimes take three

hours to get here in the morning on a trip that should take 30 minutes. It's an occupation force that is largely acting with impunity," says Bouloukos.

Abdelfattah Abusrour, who runs an arts centre nearby, was born in the camp in the 1970s. "It has been decades and we are still being born in refugee camps in our own country," he says. "We were not the cause of the suffering of the Jews. To blame us for the crimes of the Nazis is a burden we cannot carry. It is difficult to continue on when everything is only becoming worse and worse."

"I've heard from children I work with who are just 11 or 12 that they have no hope, that they want to die. It's devastating. We want our children to want to be doctors, journalists and artists, not to aspire to die. What will the world do about it? Miracles will not happen alone, we have to provoke them."

In response to a request for comment from The Irish Times, Adi Ophir Moaz, deputy ambassador and spokesperson for the Embassy of Israel in Ireland, said Israeli police "sometimes" remove "illegal construction" because "Israel is a law-based state; everything is supervised by the authorities and is decided either by the legislature or under the instruction and supervision of the judiciary".

"The Israeli police is handling and acting on every case of violence it encounters (investigating, arrests etc.) by extremists on both sides who act illegally."

It was "not in Israel's interest to help foment a state of lawlessness, since history shows this always has a spill-over effect. There are constant attacks against Israelis - rocks, fire arms and murders," he said.



■ A Palestinian looks at a vehicle damaged during yesterday's Israeli raid in the West Bank city of Nablus in which five members of the militant group Lion's Den were killed. PHOTOGRAPH: ALAA BADARNEH/EPA-EFE

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas's spokesperson Nabil Abu Rudeineh described the deaths as "a war crime" and warned "the Israeli government bears full responsibility for its consequences".

Israeli prime minister Yair Lapid defended the raid, describing it as a precise and lethal blow at the heart of terrorism. "Israel will never be deterred from acting for the sake of its security," he said.

Similarly, defence minister Benny Gantz said Israel will not tolerate "cities of refuge for terrorists and will continue to act against anyone who tries to harm the citizens of Israel wherever and whenever necessary".

Even though Mr Abbas's

fight the Israeli troops, and they resisted calls from the Palestinian Authority to lay down their weapons and merge with the Palestinian security forces.

A few days ago another Lion's Den leader was killed when a stationary booby-trapped motorcycle was detonated as he walked past it in the casbah, marking the renewal of Israel's policy of targeted killings of West Bank militants.

Hundreds attended the funerals of the those killed in Nablus yesterday afternoon as armed militants shot in the air and threatened revenge attacks. Israel fears the militant groups will aim to carry such an attack ahead of the Israeli election, next Tuesday.

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