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tion of Elena Bosetti and Francesca Locatelli.

ISMU Foundation (www.ismu.org) is an independent research centre founded in 1991. It is com-
mited to conducting research, as well as providing consultancy, training and education, in the
area of migration and integration. To develop a better understanding of these phenomena, it
provides its expertise to research projects on all aspects of migrations in contemporary society.
It works with national, European and international organizations and institutions, in both the
private and the public sectors. It is inserted in academic networks, it cooperates with welfare
and healthcare agencies, and it exchanges with libraries and documentation centers in Italy and
beyond. ISMU organizes conferences and seminars on migration and produces a wide-range of
publications. It has its own Documentation Centre (Ce.Doc.) which, over the years, has built a
comprehensive collection of volumes, periodicals and audio-visual material to contribute to the
sharing of information on migration.

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The Twenty-sixth Italian Report on Migrations 2020
# Table of contents

1. 2020: The challenges of the pandemic  
   Vincenzo Cesareo  
   7

2. Statistical aspects  
   Gian Carlo Blangiardo and Livia Elisa Ortensi  
   21

3. The legal framework  
   Ennio Codini  
   37

4. The labour market  
   Laura Zanfrini  
   47

5. Education  
   Mariagrazia Santagati  
   59

6. Health  
   Nicola Pasini and Veronica Merotta  
   73

7. New perspectives in European migration policies: public opinion and the Union’s budget  
   Pierre Georges Van Wolleghem  
   85

8. The politics of immigration in 2020: regularization and regional elections  
   Nicola Pasini and Marta Regalia  
   99

9. Politics, immigration and the media: a troubled relationship  
   Paola Barretta, Nicola Pasini and Giovanni Giulio Valtolina  
   115

10. Racism and discrimination in the pandemic  
    Veronica Riniolo  
    135
1. A new regularization measure for immigrants

The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 worldwide has understandably drawn all attention to itself. The pandemic has affected each and every one of us, changing our daily lives, spreading fear and concern, and posing objective problems in terms of public health, economic turmoil, and social cohesion. This dramatic situation – no doubt the harshest after WWII – has become the main focus of public opinion and the media. Consequently, other issues of public relevance have inevitably been put on the back burner. One such issue is immigration, which had before been at the centre of the political agenda and of the public opinion’s attention for a long time. Traditionally, two camps can be distinguished: those against immigration – the “apocalyptic” – and those in favour of it – the “irenic” (Cesareo, 2020: 75-77).

Although immigration may have lost much of its relevance, it has not lost its objective importance: its problems are still relevant and open. In fact, one may go so far as to claim that such problems have become even more relevant and open as a result of the corona-crisis, which has directly or indirectly impacted immigrants in many important respects. To some extent, the pandemic has forced us to urgently rethink the issue of migration. The pandemic has highlighted how vital immigrants are to our society, including irregular ones. They are highly requested in the agricultural sector (especially during the harvest season), in home care for the elderly and the disabled, as well as in catering and in construction. Because of the virus, however,
many immigrants have not been able to work, partly because they were locked down in their home country. This forced leave provided evidence of just how necessary their contribution is to the country’s economy.

These utilitarian considerations, together with others regarding the need to contrast irregular work and labour exploitation, reopened the debate on immigration in Italy. In the period between March and April 2020, the debate led to the decision to issue a new regularization measure for immigrants without a valid permit to stay. Although 2020 has certainly been characterized by other important innovations in terms of immigration law, for the present purposes we shall focus specifically on the “regularization decree” adopted by the Italian government. We consider it to be one of the most significant decisions made in 2020, especially in comparison to other such measures implemented in the past.

Before turning to its content, we must recall that, as the regularization process was taking place, two relevant events occurred in Italy: a significant rise in the number of immigrants entering Italy both by land and by sea, and the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic among some of those immigrants. The combination of these two events immediately led to protests and concern among the population, which had already gone through a first wave of the pandemic and was being hit by the consequences of the crisis. Thus, the issue of migration quickly acquired new prominence in the media and in social networks (see Ch. 9). Sovereignist movements immediately took advantage of the distress of the Italian population, seizing the aversion that such events generate in many people to rekindle their anti-migrant campaigning.

Regularization must be understood against this background, in which migration had once again become centre stage. The ISMU Foundation devoted particular attention to this issue through a specific multi- and inter-disciplinary study on the debate, the norms adopted, and their consequences. Chapters 3, 4, and 8 examine the measure and its effects in detail. In this chapter, we shall reconstruct the case for regularization as made in public and political debates, and consider the consequences of the measure in the light of the debates that preceded its adoption. Finally, we shall contribute to evaluating the measure by comparing it with similar measures adopted by other states.

1.1 The different stances in the public debate

In Italy, attention to irregular immigrants had never truly waned and demands for the adoption of a new regularization measure have been repeatedly made over time. As soon as the government began to work on a new measure, a wide and spirited debate ensued. This confirmed the extent to which immigration continues to be a divisive issue both in the political establishment and among the Italian population. While some immediately put pressure on the government to extend this opportunity to as many people as possible, others staunchly opposed it. Between these two polarised and contrasting extremes, a third way emerged with the aim of limiting the opportunity for regularization only to specific classes of immigrants. Hence the need to identify the addressees of what could have been a generalized regularization. To this end, various estimates of their number were made. The ISMU Foundation estimated that the total number of immigrants potentially affected by the measure would be 648,764, as illustrated in the following table.

Table 1. Number of individuals to be regularized if the restrictions introduced by the requirements had not been in place

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISMU estimate of irregular migrants in Italy as of January 1st 2020</th>
<th>517,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rejected asylum applications 2019</td>
<td>76,798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejected asylum applications from January 1st 2020 to July 31st 2020</td>
<td>19,942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pending asylum requests on July 31st 2020</td>
<td>35,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total presences</td>
<td>648,764</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of the Interior; ISMU Foundation

Faced with this hypothetical pool of applicants, the question then arose: who should regularization address? Should it benefit all irregular immigrants or only specific classes of migrants? As it had already occurred on comparable occasions in the past, two camps emerged: supporters of a widespread measure, who invoked a generalized regularization, and opponents to any form of regularization, even if it were limited only to certain classes of immigrants. The latter feared that such a measure would incentivize more migrants to come to Italy, eventually leading to a migrant “invasion”. They further argued that the economic crisis and the consequent rise in unemployment made it necessary to preserve jobs for Italian citizens first.

On the other hand, those who supported the measure were a fairly divided group. In particular, ISMU detected a variety of criss-crossing arguments in the debate, of which three are the main cases for regularization. These reflect different needs and therefore made the identification of the class of people to be regularized less straightforward.

1) The first argument in favour of regularization was put forth by people in agriculture who worried that their business would be in jeopardy as the harvest season grew closer. Restrictions on free movement as a result of the pandemic might make it impossible for seasonal workers in the agri-food chain to enter

2 People with expired permits have not been included in this table. The estimate also does not consider forced or voluntary repatriations. Some of the individuals included in the count are regular migrants who nonetheless may soon become irregular and therefore find themselves in need of regularizing their status. The total number of irregular migrants as of 1st January 2020 was lower than the total number of irregular migrants as of 1st January 2019, as detailed in Ch. 2.
As ISMU has been arguing for years, since the Turco-National health crisis has made them more pressing and their solution more urgent. These issues had already acquired prominence in the past few years; the need to regularize job contracts in order to strengthen health care and so on. The National Association of Farmers – for instance feared losing 35% of the harvest.) The idea of a regularization measure thus began to take shape in order to enable farmers to “hire” irregular immigrants residing in Italy via regular work contracts while travel restrictions were still active. Such a measure would thus imply new jobs.

2) Another argument in favour of regularization, strictly connected to the first, focused on the opportunity to regularize the many farmhands currently employed in the agricultural sector, who are often irregular immigrants with undeclared contracts. These often suffer extreme exploitation bordering on slavery to gangmasters. Regularization would therefore benefit employers and workers who already have a job, albeit an undeclared one: in other words, the measure would affect existing jobs.

3) The third and final argument in favour of regularization in its broadest form was connected to the need to contain the pandemic and secure public health. Regularization, in this perspective, could prevent the spread of COVID-19 among more marginalized groups, such as irregular immigrants, who supposedly were steering away from healthcare due to fear of identification and repatriation or had no direct access to health care.

Although all three arguments stemmed from legitimate concerns, they pursued different goals both in principle and in practice. In the first case, regularization would have merely “replaced” seasonal workers with irregular migrants. This would have been a “buffer solution” to preserve harvests in an emergency, without regularizing immigrants beyond temporary employment in agriculture. If the government were concerned only with the shortage of seasonal workforce, it could have opted instead for “green corridors” like the ones established in Germany, where seasonal agricultural workers were granted entry on the basis of agreements with their home countries.

The second and third argument, on the other hand, aimed at solving a more deep-seated problem than the ones that emerged with the pandemic, namely giving dignity to farmhands and providing full access to healthcare to irregular migrants. The latter problem has also intensified as a consequence of the so-called first “Security Decree” (L.132/2018), which was replaced by the Law Decree n. 130 of October 21st, 2020 (Blangiardo, Ortensi, 2020). It is no coincidence that the second Conte government had already been working on a regularization measure together with the three relevant Ministries – Internal Affairs (Minister Lamorgese), Labour (Minister Catalfo) and Agriculture (Minister Bellanova) – well before the COVID-19 epidemic ultimately fostered a debate on the issue. Many scholars as well as religious leaders, the National Anti-mafia Prosecutor, and economic, business, and civic actors had long been invoking regularization and consequently endorsed the measure.

During the drafting of the Decree, the Minister of the Interior Luciana Lamorgese played a significant role in voicing the above concerns, highlighting the need to regularize job contracts in order to strengthen health care and social security as well as fight labour exploitation by gangmasters and the mafia. These issues had already acquired prominence in the past few years; the health crisis has made them more pressing and their solution more urgent.

1.2 ISMU’s initial considerations on the decree

In the end, thanks to efforts by Minister Lamorgese the government opted for a selective regularization measure instead of a generalized one. In between the two stances highlighted above – a generalized regularization and no regularization at all – the government chose an intermediate solution. Only the necessary workforce was to be regularized, namely those employed in agriculture and in domestic care. The measure included in the “Recovery Decree” (Art. 103 of L.D. n. 34, May 19th 2020) introduced two regularization “channels”:

1) Through the first channel, employers could hire a foreign citizen who was on Italian soil as of March 8th, 2020, or regularize an existing yet undeclared job contract. For those who already had a valid permit to stay, this process implied only the regularization of their current work contract. In fact, this could have been done also before the measure was adopted through the National Institute for Social Security (INPS). For those who did not have a valid permit to stay – and this was the real innovation – being hired and having a regular job contract offered a way to receive it.

2) Through a second channel, foreign citizens whose permit to stay had expired no earlier than October 31th, 2019 were allowed to apply for a 6-months permit to stay in Italy for job-seeking purposes. This could be converted in a work permit, if the foreign citizen was to be hired during those six months and could certify employment in agriculture or domestic care.

This measure was arguably the result of a difficult compromise, due both to sharp contrasts within the ruling majority, and to the need to prevent growing concern among the Italian population: a broader regularization would have added to worries about the coronavirus epidemic and about the growing economic and employment crisis. As to the tensions within the Government, suffice it to mention that the Minister for Agriculture Teresa Bellanova threatened to resign if the measure was not going to be extended both in time and scope, while many exponents of the Five Star Movement supported regularization for fewer people and for a much more limited period.

While aware that the government was strongly limited in its action, we should nonetheless make some critical remarks on the measure adopted. Firstly, the measure once again missed the opportunity to implement a sound and consistent normative framework on migration, opting instead for yet another exceptional and temporary measure accompanied by new legislation. As ISMU has been arguing for years, since the Turco-Napolitano Law was passed in 1998 – which has in its turn become obsolete – immigration has always been the target of emergency measures in Italy. Instead of governing immigration in a long-term perspective, the laws passed (such as e.g. the Bossi-Fini Law) have proved inadequate and cumbersome. The present regularization is yet another “extraordinary” measure, and the opportunity to impose some order on the partial and inconsistent system of migration laws was not seized. On the one hand, the political conditions for a thoroughgoing and non-prejudicial debate on immigration seem to be lacking
in the present conjuncture, which is highly polarized and volatile. On the other hand, this can easily provide an alibi for postponing the debate indefinitely. Secondly, but no less importantly, the rationale of the Decree proved quite contradictory with reference to the three stances highlighted above. Migrants’ health, and public health more generally, is mentioned only briefly in the introductory section, but no explicit reference is made to regularization as a measure for containing the spread of the virus — even though the second channel of regularization mentioned above had been designed for this purpose. The measure also appeared disconnected from the first reason for which the norm was adopted, namely the creation of new contracts to meet the need for workforce in agriculture. The actual provision was aimed at regularizing undeclared labour. Thus, the creation of new jobs to compensate the lack of seasonal workers has given way to the regularization of existing undeclared contracts. This is confirmed by the fact that the application timeline — from June 1st to July 15th, 2020, later extended to August 15th — was too late to meet agricultural needs, thus making the creation of new contracts for seasonal agricultural labour almost impossible.

Moreover, the approved measure should have affected not only agriculture, but also the primary sector of the economy at large, as well as domestic labour and domestic care. One critical aspect emerged on this point: while new seasonal contracts were justified in agriculture, the stated goal of regularizing undeclared contracts (as per Art. 110-bis of the decree) makes the extension of new contracts to the primary and domestic sectors less justified insofar as it excludes other crucial sectors such as construction, tourism, and trade. At the same time, the regularization of undeclared labour ought to be understood in the light of the high unemployment rate caused by the health and economic crisis; as widely reported, the crisis has forced many Italians to find more or less temporary jobs in other sectors than those they had previously been employed in.

Data by the Ministry of the Interior show that 207,542 applications for regularization have been submitted, 176,848 of which in domestic labour and care and 30,694 in the primary sector. According to ISMU estimates, this figure amounts to approximately one third of the potential pool of workers to be regularized.

1.3 Regularization in Italy in an international comparison

Irregular migrants are definitely not an exclusively Italian problem. In the USA, for instance, the number of irregular — or unauthorized — immigrants has risen to approximately 10-11 million in the past decade. Between 3 and 4 million irregular immigrants were living in the EU in 2016-2017. In France, the number of irregular immigrants amounts to approximately 300,000 in the past few years. A 2009 study estimated between 417,000 and 863,000 irregular migrants in the UK. In Germany, the number of irregular migrants is non-negligible, at least in recent years, considering that, according to Eurostat data, the police have identified over 134,000 unauthorized people in 2018 alone.

Officially at least, irregular immigration is generally considered a problem. Therefore, the legal systems of various countries have devised a mix of measures to manage it, with the aim of reducing or at least maintaining the “normal” rate of irregular immigration under control. One of the measures adopted is repatriation, but this solution often turns out to be both unrealistic and, at times, inappropriate. It is unrealistic considering the many obstacles to the systematic identification of the people to be repatriated as well as to cooperation with the states that should “take them back”. It is inappropriate if we consider the fact that many irregular immigrants are relatively well-integrated, or at least could become integrated should they be granted a permit to stay.

In the light of these challenges to repatriation, many countries have adopted measures aimed at regularizing irregular immigrants who can be considered well-integrated, or whose integration could be facilitated by such measures. In particular, some countries have adopted so-called “permanent regularization mechanisms”. In France, approximately 30,000 people per year are regularized thanks to Article L.313-14 of the Code de l’Immigration, which grants a permit to stay for humanitarian reasons or if some standards of integration are met. A similar solution has been implemented in Spain, where specific legal dispositions allow regularization at any moment in time on the basis of certain integration indicators such as family, work, or social status: arribo familiar, laboral o social. The most common is the arribo social (Art. 124.2 of the Spanish legislation on immigration), which requires at least three years of stay in the country, a job contract lasting at least one year, and an “integration certificate” (informe de inserción social) issued by a local authority. In other countries, too — Portugal, the UK — irregular migrants can be granted a permit to stay at any time on the basis of their level of integration. Within this framework, regularization in an ordinary device for keeping the number of unauthorized immigrants under control. The aim is to ensure a stable balance

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2 Centre d’observation de la société, “Combien de sans-papiers en France?” http://www.observationsociete.fr/population/combien-de-sans-papiers-en-france.html (last access: July 14th 2020).


5 Centre d’observation de la société, “Combien de sans-papiers en France?” http://www.observationsociete.fr/population/combien-de-sans-papiers-en-france.html (last access: July 14th 2020).
between incoming and outgoing flows with respect to the total number of irregular migrants. This is achieved also by promoting existing integration processes.

The situation is different in Italy or in the United States, where one-off regularization measures have been implemented in the past. In the USA, however, no provisions of this kind have been adopted in recent years, leaving the management of immigration entirely with border control and repatriation authorities. These are considered the only effective means to try and control the number of unauthorized foreigners, while at the same time “taking in” a very high number of irregulars. The U.S. approach, therefore, rests both on great “trust” in control and repression and on tolerating an otherwise excessive number of irregular immigrants.

The COVID-19 emergency has significantly affected migration flows towards Italy. In particular, on April 7th, 2020 an inter-ministerial Decree was issued by Ministers Di Maio (Foreign Affairs), Lamorgese (Home Affairs), De Micheli (Infrastructure and Transport), and Speranza (Health), stating that “for the entire period of the national health emergency generated by the spread of the COVID-19 virus, Italian ports could not guarantee the necessary requirements to qualify as Places of Safety, as stipulated by the Hamburg Convention in regard to foreign vessels operating outside the Italian SAR area”. This decision caused NGO vessels, which nonetheless continued with their rescue operations, to remain at sea without docking.

Despite this, people continued to access Italy by sea: between January 1st, 2020 and June 30th, 2020 – i.e. during the most severe stage of the pandemic – 6,184 people reached Italian shores. The April 7th Decree established that for the entire period of the health emergency no Italian harbour could be considered "safe". Therefore, the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs – with the technical and operational assistance of the Italian Red Cross – managed to quarantine and isolate all people rescued at sea during the first wave of the pandemic, as well as to provide shelter and health assistance both to those who immigrated to Italy independently (i.e. overland) and to those rescued at sea. People who arrived by sea have been quarantined in dedicated hotspots. However, sea vessels have also been used to cope with the great number of people and ensure quarantine without overcrowding hotspots. At the beginning of the pandemic, 8 vessels in total were converted to this purpose; at the end of 2020, 5 were still active.

Between July and December 2020, following the first wave of the pandemic, 27,204 people arrived in Italy by sea, out of the total of 34,154 migrants who arrived by sea between January and December 2020. A high percentage of them originated from Tunisia (12,883, 37.7% of the total number of arrivals in 2020). This is not entirely surprising. A study conducted by agency As-daa-Bcw (2020) between January and August 2020 reveals that 47% of young people from North Africa tried to emigrate or seriously began to consider this option, due to the worsening of their employment opportunities as a result of the pandemic (87% of respondents were concerned about it) or to their deep mistrust in institutions and in the ruling elites in their home countries (77% of respondents believe their government to be corrupt). However, as immigrants from Tunisia are not very likely to receive any form of protection in Italy, the government resumed repatriation to Tunisia after the pandemic-induced stop, and even signed further agreements with Tunisia in August 2020 for increasing the number of weekly repatriations.

At the same time, the permanent ceasefire achieved on October 23rd, 2020 after negotiations led by the United Nations has not removed all problems with Libya. The controversial agreements between Libya and Italy (renewed in 2020) have reduced flows but raised crucial questions about the fate of those who are repatriated to Libya. Many have compared the situation in Libya to an open-air concentration camp; following one of the many patrols by the Libyan Coast Guard that ended with a disembarkation in Tripoli, the Chief of Mission for IOM in Libya Federico Soda stated that “Libya is not a safe port. Alternative solutions must be found". According to IOM data, in 2020 at least 11,765 people were returned to Libya following operations of the Libyan Coast Guard, whereas 983 people lost their lives or in shipwrecks along the Central Mediterranean route. In September 2020 alone, 6 shipwrecks led to the death of over 200 migrants. On November 12th, Open Arms disclosed footage of a rescue operation that saved the lives of 259 migrants, but in which 6 people lost their lives, including a 6-month-old baby.

Finally, the number of people entering Italy via land routes (particularly via the so-called Balkan route) to seek international protection has remained high. Between January and November 2020, 5,032 migrants arrived in Italy crossing land borders. Presumably, many of them applied for asylum. One should also bear in mind that, in 2020, 28,379 applications for international protection have been lodged in Italy.

The extended lockdown has had direct consequences on the integration of those who had just arrived in Italy. Integration is well known to be an extremely delicate and complex process, affecting all aspects of social life (language, work, home, social inclusion, etc.) Its success is conditional on an early beginning. The pandemic is thus bound to negatively affect vulnerable groups, including young people of foreign origin, a result both of the labour-market crisis (see Ch. 4) and of the extended school closure (see Ch. 5).


**The estimate refers to data from January 1st to November 23rd 2020 (IOM, 2020).

11 This is confirmed by various empirical data produced by NIEM, an EU project ISMU participates in, which evaluates the measures adopted by Member States for the long term integration of refugees (http://www.forintegration.eu/ - last access: July 27th 2020).
The extent to which the foreign population has been hit by the economic crisis will have to be assessed within the framework of the broader material impoverishment of Italian society due to the adverse consequences of the pandemic. Analysis conducted by Istat and by the Ministry of Labour (2020) shows that the employment rate has fallen both in a long-term perspective (-3.6%, -841,000) and momentarily (-2.0%, -470,000) during the second quarter of 2020 (i.e. in the months immediately following the first wave of the pandemic). Furthermore, a survey conducted by the Bank of Italy in June 2020 (Neri, Zanichelli, 2020) reveals that over half of the Italian population reported a decline in family income as a result of the measures adopted to contain the epidemic. Istat further estimated that, in 2019, the number of poor foreign households with minors was five times higher than the number of poor Italian households. Moreover, the number of foreign individuals living in complete poverty reached almost 1,400,000 in 2019 – i.e. 26.9% of the entire foreign population (Istat, 2020). If we consider that 5.9% of Italians also live in poverty (Ibid.), we can appreciate how the pre-coronavirus economic stagnation and the economic crisis subsequently brought about by the pandemic had a greater proportional impact on the foreign population.

3. Migrations and the future of Europe

The above scenario proves that no country can possibly face immigration flows on its own, especially since migration tends to take on an increasingly global dimension. This confirms that the European Union needs to put more effort into facing the challenges of migration. The pressure put on the EU by people migrating from poorer countries will arguably continue, if not increase, in the future. So will population decline: the fertility rate in the EU is currently 1.6 children per woman (Eurostat 2018 data), whereas a constant generational turnover can only be secured by a 2.1 rate. According to the same source, the total fertility rate in Italy is 1.3. In this context, the rate of natural increase (i.e. the difference between the number of births and the number of deaths) in the past five years (2015-2019) was -994,600 in the European Union and -902,172 in Italy.

As Istat stressed, the largest gap in the process of natural turnover in Italy since 1981 occurred in 2019. This gap would be even greater if immigrants did not contribute to partially bridge it. One must also bear in mind that, while in 1950 14.9% of the world’s population was European, this percentage fell to 6.9% in 2014 and is predicted to be lower than 5.5% in 2014. As a consequence, Europeans will account for an increasingly smaller part of the world population, which may translate into a lesser prominence of Europe in the international arena. Hence the need to further consolidate the European Union. At any rate, immigrants’ contribution to the population will not suffice to counterbalance Europe’s population deficit without threatening social cohesion (see previous ISMU reports). In order to favour the inclusion of new immigrants, integration processes based on mutual respect for cultural differences must be put in place in order to ensure peaceful coexistence based on human rights and other shared values, such as respect for the dignity of persons. These values are the basis of democratic life, as Article 2 of the European Union’s Treaty states.

Fundamental values need to be constantly consolidated if the growing and widespread anti-democratic pressure coming from within the EU is to be conquered. The rise of anti-democratic movements, in its turn, makes integration all the more imperative, provided that it is grounded on the aforementioned values and not limited to immigrants. Indeed, only by extending integration to the entire European population can the construction of the Union be consistently pursued. There is no doubt that, in a global geopolitical perspective, a European Union that is strong and united not only under the economic and financial profile, but also culturally and politically, is vital for promoting and safeguarding the respect of human rights and the inviolable value of liberty, both within and outside its borders. This is a necessary condition for respectful coexistence both at the individual and the collective level. Although its impact has been modest, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum for 2020 makes it more realistic to hope that member states will commit to address the challenges of migration. The EU’s effort to promote solidarity in facing the economic and social consequences of the pandemic may lead to revitalizing cooperation in a way that is both promising and unpredictable.

12 The estimate is based on data from the United Nations. For the three years mentioned, all EU Member States, including the United Kingdom, were considered.
References


1. A turnaround

The most recent estimates reveal a moderate fall in the number of foreign citizens in Italy – from 6,222,000 as of January 1st, 2019, to 6,190,000 as of January 1st, 2020. A well-established, steadily rising trend in Italy’s migrant population has thus come to a halt (Table 1). This 32,000-unit reduction is the result of a moderate rise in the number of residents (+51,000), compensated by a decline in the number of both irregular migrants (-45,000) and regular migrants not registered as residents (-38,000).

1 With some exceptions at the end of the 2010s, this trend can be attributed both to Italy’s reduced attractiveness following the economic crisis and to the revision of the number of foreign residents in line with the results of the 15th population census. For further details see Chapters 1.1 of the 18th and 19th ISMU Reports.
Moreover, the number of rejected asylum claims due to applicants becoming unavailable has risen in 2018-219 (Ministry of the Interior, 2020a). This suggests that many asylum seekers may no longer be on Italian soil.

Updates based on the 2018-2019 population census have been published by Istat after the completion of the present study. New data show that the number of foreign residents in Italy was 4,966 million as of 1st January 2019, and 5,4 million as of 1st January 2020. The difference with previously available data is by 260 thousand units in 2019 and by 267 thousand units in 2020. Accordingly, our estimates should be updated to 5,962 million foreign residents as of 1st January 2019, and 5,962 million as of 1st January 2020. Effectively, the 2019 variation in the number of foreign residents in Italy would be relatively unaffected (-39 thousand residents instead of -32 thousand residents) and our conclusions would remain unchanged. For this reason, the final version has not been amended except for the introduction of cautionary notes where appropriate. In fact, new updates are forthcoming regarding the time series of foreign residents in the January 2012-January 2020 period. This would allow for a more accurate redistribution of the aforementioned variation over the entire 8-year period in which it occurred.

### Table 1. Foreigners in Italy as of January 1st 2018-2020 by type (in thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>1.1.2018</th>
<th>1.1.2019</th>
<th>1.1.2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>5,144</td>
<td>5,256</td>
<td>5,307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular non residents</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregulars</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total presences</strong></td>
<td>6,108</td>
<td>6,222</td>
<td>6,190</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analyses and estimates on Istat data

In relative terms, the reduction since January 2019 has been modest (-0.5%). However, this slight reduction signals a new steady state in migration to Italy. This trend is affected by the reduction in the number of arrivals in 2018-19 as well as by the widespread economic and labour-market crisis in Italy: even before the pandemic, Italy struggled to return to productivity levels comparable to those of other major European countries.

The turnaround in irregular immigration (Figure 1) also deserves attention. This decrease began before the 2020 regularisation; as discussed below, it occurred in spite of a new law (included in the so called “security decree”) which selectively increased the number of asylum rejections. In fact, this result may have been primarily driven by the decline in the number of irregular entries through other channels, broadly compensating for the reduction in the number of permits granted on humanitarian grounds.

### Figure 1. Foreigners in Italy on January 1st 2014-2020 by type (in thousands)

![Figure 1](image-url)

Fonte: Fondazione ISMU, Annual reports

As of January 1st, 2020, European foreign residents in Italy (Table 2) amounted to 1,586,000 – including 31,000 British nationals – while the overall number of Third-Country Nationals (TCN) was 3,720,000. The former have not significantly grown in number since the previous year (+3,000). Most of them are Romanians (1.2 million). Just over 1 million TCNs – whose growing number in 2019 (+48,000) mostly drove the overall increase in residents – come from non-EU European countries. Among these, Albania, Ukraine, and Moldova make for 806,000 residents, with Albanians accounting for just over half this number.

Some moderate dynamism seems to be found in non-European vis-a-vis European TCNs (-13,000). The African component (1,159,000 residents) went up by 18,000 units, but only as a result of the growing number of residents from North Africa (+22,000), particularly from Morocco and Egypt. In contrast, the Sub-Saharan component – whose growth has been driven by consistent migration to Italy – remains stable (approximately 470,000 residents).

The overall increase in Asian nationals is also relatively modest (+31,000) and primarily limited to immigrants from the Indian subcontinent (+21,000) and, less so, from China (+5,000).

Finally, the number of residents from the Americas – approximately 380,000 and almost entirely from Latin America – is also on the rise (+11,000), although this growth is driven not much by the two main nationalities (Peru and Ecuador) as by the rise, albeit modest, in the number of Brazilians, Dominicans, Cubans, Colombians, and Salvadorians.

As of January 1st, 2020, TCN residents amounted to 4,269,000 people.
This figure includes both irregular migrants – 517,000 – and approximately 180,000 regular migrants who are not, or not yet, registered as residents. TCNs thus make for more than two thirds (69%) of foreigners in Italy and consist almost entirely of citizens from so-called “countries with a strong migratory pressure” (CSMP), namely Eastern European or “developing” countries.

A comparison with estimates from the previous year reveals that the population of TCNs in Italy has fallen by 174,000 units (-3.9%), affecting both of irregular TCNs (-8%) and regular non-resident TCNs (-12.5%).

Table 2. Foreign residents in Italy by macroregional nationality as of January 1st 2019 and 2020 (in thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macroregions</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>Variation</th>
<th>Most represented nations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU-28</td>
<td>1,583</td>
<td>1,586</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>Romania, Poland, Bulgaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third countries</td>
<td>3,673</td>
<td>3,721</td>
<td>+48</td>
<td>Albania, Ukraine, Moldova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which: Central Eastern Europe</td>
<td>1,046</td>
<td>1,033</td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>Switzerland, San Marino, Norway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other European countries</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Morocco, Egypt, Tunisia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Africa</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>692</td>
<td>+22</td>
<td>Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Africa</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>Cameroon, DR Congo, Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and South Africa</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Georgia, Iran, Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Asia</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>India, Bangladesh, Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and South Asia</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>+21</td>
<td>PRC, Philippines, Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>+7</td>
<td>USA, Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>Peru, Ecuador, Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and South America</td>
<td>362</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>+11</td>
<td>Australia, New Zealand, Samoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>India, Bangladesh, Pakistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,256</td>
<td>5,307</td>
<td>+51</td>
<td>Romania, Poland, Bulgaria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analyses on Istat data

Variation by nationality has also been negative in 2019, albeit with some internal differences. The number of Nigerian nationals, in particular, has considerably reduced (-66%) due to increasingly denied asylum. In contrast, the smallest decline is among Albanian nationals (-8.7%).

In 2019, work permits were prevalent not only among U.S. nationals (32.1%) but also among Indians (18.8%). In contrast, work permits are only marginally claimed by migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Nigeria. Family reunification has the highest relative frequency among Moroccans (83.3%), Egyptians (81.7%), and Bangladeshis (71.8%), whereas study permits are most frequent among Chinese nationals (50.7% of new permits). Asylum remains prevalent among Pakistanis and Nigerians.

Over 2019, Italy has issued 177,000 new permits to stay (26.8% less than 2018): this reduction is three times higher (-8%) than it was in the previous year (Table 3) and affected all types of permits – although asylum permits especially decreased from approximately 51,000 in 2018 to 27,000 in 2019 (-47.4%). Overall, new permits for family reunification remain prevalent (56.9%), whereas asylum is now as relevant as study permits (15.6% and 11.5%, respectively). The share of work permits is also small (6.4%).

Almost two thirds (63.1%) of all holders of a permit to stay (3,616,000 as of January 2020) are long-term migrants. The share is higher (more than 75%) for migrants from Moldova, the Republic of Macedonia, Ecuador, Algeria, Ukraine, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Work permits account for approximately 11% of all permits this group, with a 20+% peak for work permits granted to U.S. (25.4%) and Chinese nationals (23.1%). 17% of all permits are issued for family reunification, especially to Latin Americans (Cubans, Dominicans, Brazilians). 6% of the total number of holders of a valid permit to stay are asylum seekers, yet the percentage is much higher for Malians (81.8%), Somalians (79.5%), Gambians (78.6%), Afghans (75.6%), and Iraqis (71.8%).
4. The effects of the pandemic on immigration: initial considerations

The COVID-19 epidemic has notably led to the closure of national borders to both inbound and outbound migrants in many countries, with inevitable consequences on immigration to Italy. While approximately 100,000 new permits to stay had been granted in the first half of 2019, in the first half of 2020 their number came down to less than 43,000, with a 57.7% negative variation (Istat, 2020).

The most consistent reductions occurred in April and May (Figure 2) – by 93.4% and 86.7%, respectively. This downwards trend, however, had already been evident at the beginning of the year, with a negative variation by approximately 20% – in line with the 2019 trend. Family reunification and asylum were the most affected type of permits in the first six months of 2020 (-63.6% and -55.1%, respectively).

People coming from India, Morocco, Ukraine, Albania, and Bangladesh have been affected the most. Within Italy, the most affected regions have been Umbria (-71.6%), Calabria (-68.2%), and Emilia-Romagna (-68%).

5. Trends on sea arrivals and asylum claims

The travel restrictions introduced in different countries to contrast the spread of the pandemic have not only reduced regular migration for economic, family, or study purposes. They have also impacted migration connected to asylum or subsidiary protection. The impact has been noticeable in air traffic, family, or study purposes. They have also impacted migration connected to asylum or subsidiary protection. The impact has been noticeable in air traffic variations: the frequency of commercial flights went down by 70% in the most severe stage of the pandemic, and it never went higher than 40% of the pre-crisis traffic even in the months preceding the “second wave” in Autumn 2020 (Villa, 2020). The reduction in air travel is connected with the fall in asylum or subsidiary protection. The impact has been noticeable in air traffic, family, or study purposes. They have also impacted migration connected to asylum or subsidiary protection. The impact has been noticeable in air traffic variations: the frequency of commercial flights went down by 70% in the most severe stage of the pandemic, and it never went higher than 40% of the pre-crisis traffic even in the months preceding the “second wave” in Autumn 2020 (Villa, 2020). The reduction in air travel is connected with the fall in

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Table 4. Asylum claims in the first six and nine months of 2020 and 2019 by continent of origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>1,960</td>
<td>-114%</td>
<td>6,495</td>
<td>2,725</td>
<td>-138%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>6,185</td>
<td>4,330</td>
<td>-43%</td>
<td>9,410</td>
<td>6,190</td>
<td>-52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>7,880</td>
<td>4,610</td>
<td>-71%</td>
<td>11,850</td>
<td>6,410</td>
<td>-85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21,095</td>
<td>11,695</td>
<td>-80%</td>
<td>31,570</td>
<td>16,435</td>
<td>-92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analyses on Eurostat data

The difference in the number of asylum claims between 2020 and 2019 by continent of origin appears even greater if we consider the first 9 months of 2020. The fall in the number of arrivals from Latin America reaches 138%, compared to an overall total reduction of 92%.

Contrary to overall mobility trends, entries by sea routes have gone up since 2019. The number of disembarkations in the first six months of 2020 has risen by 59% with respect to the same period in the previous year. The increase was even sharper in the following period: the highest peak was reached with 7,000 arrivals in July 2020, the largest number since July 2017. This figure is much greater than the monthly average in the two previous years, but equal only to 25% of the maximum value reached in October 2016, when over 27,000 people reached Italian shores (Figure 3).

It is important to stress that, after reaching a minimum in 2019, the share of unaccompanied minors disembarked at Italian ports went up again in 2020. Their number in the second half of 2020 was similar to that in the 2015-2017 period.

Table 5. Sea arrivals, asylum claims, and share of unaccompanied minors. 2015-2020*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sea landings</th>
<th>Asylum claims</th>
<th>Asylum claims per 100 disembarkations</th>
<th>Unaccompanied minors landed</th>
<th>% Unaccompanied minors on total number of persons landed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>153,842</td>
<td>83,535</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>12,360</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>182,657</td>
<td>122,960</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>25,846</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>119,369</td>
<td>128,855</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>15,779</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>23,348</td>
<td>59,955</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>3,536</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>11,487</td>
<td>43,675</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>1,680</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 (6 months)</td>
<td>6,950</td>
<td>11,694</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>1,004</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 (11 months)</td>
<td>32,542</td>
<td>20,093</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>4,255</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Data as of November 30th, 2020.
Source: ISMU analyses on Eurostat data and Ministry of the Interior – Statistical Dashboard
Data on entries via land borders have only recently been made public through official statistics. They are not sufficient for reconstructing an annual trend, yet they do show that, as of November 26th, 2020, irregular land entries amounted to 5,032, 79% of which through Slovenia (Ministry of the Interior, 2020a). These figures suggest that irregular land immigration, too, has risen in 2020; this is consistent with data on other countries. By contrast, transfers of refugees and asylum seekers based on the Dublin Regulation (5,864 in 2019; Eurostat, 2020b) and entries from third countries based on resettlement agreements (1,355 in 2019) have been slowed down by the pandemic.

Even though a relevant share of asylum seekers come from sea routes, other sources also matter. Since 2017 and until the first half of 2020, asylum claims have consistently exceeded the total number of arrivals on Italian shores in the proportion of 380 asylum claims per 100 sea arrivals in 2019 (Table 5). However, if we extend the analysis to July-November 2020, we can see that sea arrivals exceeded asylum claims, as they did in 2015-2016. This is likely due, at least in part, to the temporary obstacles to submitting asylum applications, such as mandatory quarantine upon arrival. On the other hand, a large number of migrants who arrived by sea in the last months of 2020 come from Tunisia (38% on November 30th) and are unlikely to stay in Italy in the medium to long term.4

In the first 10 months of 2020, the overall share of rejected asylum claims (77%) has decreased since 2019 (81%). However, their number is still greater than it was before humanitarian protection permits were abolished in 2018 (Figure 4). Special protection permits are still uncommon; they account for 1% of all applications processed in 2019-2020.

The “Security Decree” undoubtedly contributed to the rising number of rejected applications for permits since 2019. However, not all foreign nationals have been affected equally. Figure 5 shows the percentage of rejections by nationality – excluding applications rejected on grounds of applicants becoming unavailable4 – on the basis of data from 2017-2020. Afghan and Somali migrants seldom apply for humanitarian protection and their asylum claims are infrequently met with rejection; this has not changed over the past three years. At the other end of the spectrum, the number rejected asylum claims by Nigerian migrants has also remained very high in the light of the newly introduced restrictions. In 2017, 20.7% of asylum seekers from Nigeria had been granted humanitarian protection; this did not change in 2019, yet the high number of rejections has been compensated by the refugee status being granted to 16.1% of applicants, whereas in 2017 it had only been granted to 4.9% of applicants. The same goes for asylum seekers from Cameroon, who had received humanitarian protection in over 30% of cases in 2017.

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3 Of the total record of immigrants (5,032), 79% (3,987) had entered Italy via Slovenia, 11% (571) via France, 6% (324) via Austria, and 3% (150) via Switzerland.
4 Despite some differences, all data reported by the media unequivocally reveal a significant rise in arrivals in 2020. However, such data will not be cited or commented upon in the present chapter due to lack of available references.
4 For instance, only 9.8% of Tunisian refugees who had been granted a permit to stay in 2011 due to the humanitarian crisis that followed the Arab Spring were still on Italian soil as of January 1st, 2018 (Istat, 2019).

5 All data cited in this section do not include rejections on ground of asylum seekers becoming unavailable. Data vary by nationality; in some cases (e.g. Indian migrants, 2017 data) the share is as high as 20%.
Although protection has been denied more often in 2019 (+7 percentage points, from 45.7% in 2017 to 53.0% in 2019) the number of refugees has also risen (from 17.6% to 29.1%). Other nationals who primarily benefited from humanitarian protection have generally been affected negatively by the change in legislation. Applications by Ukrainian migrants, for example, mostly resulted in humanitarian protection in 2017 (60.2%). In 2019, however, rejections went up from 23.9% to 79.2%. The same goes for Egyptians and Salvadorians, who in 2017 had received humanitarian protection in 53% of cases. National variations and annual variations in migration – both of which are highly volatile – must thus be taken into consideration while evaluating the impact of the abolition of humanitarian protection and of subsequent Law Decree n. 130 of 2020.

Figure 5. Rejected asylum claims. Main nationalities. 2017-2019. (%)
Among EU nationals, Romanian citizens are in the highest number among naturalised Italians (10,200). Long-term residence is the main reason for which Italian citizenship is granted (41.6%). Declaration upon majority age, together with other types of naturalisation such as citizenship by descent, account for 44.9% of all naturalisations. Citizenship by *jus sanguinis* is more widespread among people of Argentinian and Brazilian origin, which account for 96% of all naturalisations by birth (Ibid.).

Naturalised citizens are prevalently aged 0-19 (36%) due to citizenship granted in high number by descent and (less so) by declaration, followed by young adults in the 30-39 age range (19%; Figure 6).

Figure 6. Italian citizenship acquisitions, 2012-2019, by age range

8. Conclusions

Although sea arrivals in Italy have gone up again in the second half of 2020 as they did e.g. in Spain (IOM, 2020a), the rate of immigration is still lower than it was in 2018. In fact, migration to Italy appears to be relatively stagnating, at least as far as non-humanitarian immigration is concerned. This downward trend, which was partially anticipated in the latest ISMU Report, is likely to increase as a result of the economic crisis, or at any rate as a consequence of the pandemic. Migration to Italy is expected to slow down in favour of other countries, including repatriation to home countries. The number of irregular migrants in Italy is also expected to decrease as a consequence both of the 2020 regularisation measure and of a crippled Italian labour marked struggling to return back to normal and appealing fewer and fewer foreign workers.

References


2020 has been a year characterized by many relevant facts also in legal terms. Developments in this respect are partly due to the COVID-19 epidemic, and partly to the choices made by the governing coalition including the Democratic Party, the Five Star Movement, and other smaller parties. Two important rulings by the Constitutional Court should also be mentioned.

The epidemic has first and foremost favoured the adoption of a set of transitory legal provisions. Policymakers explicitly mentioned the epidemic as the reason behind the adoption a regularization measure, although such a measure is also connected to overall political choices. These have led to the adoption of a “Migration Flows Decree”, which has effectively operated as a measure for the regularization of migrants. More importantly, political choices – particularly urged by the Democratic Party – have led to a revision of the so-called “Security Decrees”.

The temporary dispositions targeting the epidemic included, among other things, the extension of the terms of existing procedures as well as of some acts that are critical to the operation of the public administration. Moreover, restrictions have been introduced for civilian ships taking rescued migrants to Italian ports, citing the health emergency as a justification for them on the basis of an inter-ministerial decree issued on April 7th. Special measures for facilities hosting migrants have also been adopted with the aim of contrasting the spread of COVID-19 in reception and repatriation centres. The length of stay in reception
grant workers in Italy, which amounted to approximately 517,000 according to ISMU Foundation estimates (see Ch. 1 of this Report).

This outcome was largely predictable, and it proved to be a relatively modest (if not entirely irrelevant) one given the total number of irregular workers in Italy. Let us consider that the agricultural sector has always been only marginally affected by regularization measures because of the particular forms of exploitation that characterize it. This was true also for the largest regularization measure adopted in Italy, namely the one introduced by the Bossi-Fini Law, where only 4.5% of regularized migrants were agricultural workers. Therefore, almost all applications for the recent regularization provision (around 177,000) came from the domestic and care sectors, in which almost a third of all irregular migrants are employed and have been so for decades. (Indeed, 40% of migrants regularized on the grounds of the Bossi-Fini Law were also employed in these sectors.) For further information on regularization see Chapters 1 and 8 of the present Report as well as the dedicated section on the ISMU Foundation webpage.

As if to partially compensate for the exclusion of some important categories of irregular migrant workers from regularization, the subsequent Migration Flows Decree of July 7th not only opened Italian borders to 20,000 seasonal labourers; it also welcomed 6,000 new migrant workers in transportation, construction, and hospitality. This provision has been considered an informal expansion of the regularization introduced with the Recovery Decree insofar as such “quotas” are known to be widely used by employers to regularize migrant workers who already live and work in Italy without a permit.

However, a still open issue concerns hundreds of thousands of immigrants who have not been able to regularize their status.

3. The legal framework

As mentioned, in 2020 the Constitutional Court issued two important rulings. The first is Ruling n. 44 of January 28th, which addressed the long-standing issue of discrimination against immigrants in access to social housing and, more generally, to social services and welfare. The second is Ruling n. 186 of July 9th, which ruled it unconstitutional to bar asylum seekers from registering with the Registry Office – as per one interpretation of the first Security Decree.

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As mentioned above, the Recovery Decree introduced a process for the regularization of migrants. This became effective as of June 1st, when the call for applications opened.

In the preceding debate, a measure aimed at tackling the specific lack of workforce in agricultural sectors during summer months was proposed at the governmental level in order to counteract the limitations imposed by the health emergency on incoming seasonal workers. Subsequently, the health emergency and, more generally, the problem of labour exploitation led to the proposal for a more general regularization of immigrants currently employed irregularly in the agricultural sector.

In the face of fierce opposition by the League and Brothers of Italy, who firmly rejected regularization in any form, and with segments of civil society demanding a more comprehensive measure for the regularization of all irregular migrant workers, the Government included an article in the Recovery Decree which, taking the COVID-19 emergency into account, allowed the regularization of all migrant workers employed in the food industry, domestic labour, and domestic care.

This regularization was thus sector-specific, albeit more comprehensive than initially envisaged. Compared with past measures, it was considerably different from the one introduced by the so-called Bossi-Fini Law of 2002, which included all irregular migrant workers, and more similar to the one introduced by the so-called Maroni Law of 2009-2010, which only affected migrants illegally employed in domestic labour and domestic care.

As mentioned above, this provision affected approximately 200,000 migrant workers – nearly 208,000 – i.e. just over a third of all irregular immi-

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the like. As a consequence, a tight network of lawful restrictions will now prevent any attempt hitherto made to discriminate against foreigners who apply for welfare benefits and social services.

The second **Constitutional Court ruling, concerning the registration of asylum seekers as residents**, is based on a specific disposition included in Decree n. 113 on the registration of asylum seekers, according to which the permit to stay is not a “valid title for registration at the Registry Office”.

Many had interpreted the disposition as a full ban on registration, and some regional authorities effectively denied residency to asylum seekers on this basis. Disagreement has then arisen between judges who denied that this ban had any constitutional basis (since registration could still be granted on other criteria), and judges who accepted the legitimacy of the ban. In this context (see last year’s Report for further details) the Court acknowledged that Decree n. 113 would legitimize a ban but declared it unconstitutional nevertheless. This ruling was justified as follows:

- The ban runs counter the aims of the Security Decree, given that registration of residency at the Registry Office is an essential instrument for policing residents in a given area.
- The ban results in unequal treatment, given that asylum seekers would be denied registration with the Registry Office whereas other migrants with shorter permits to stay would be considered eligible.

This ruling led to the introduction of a specific legislation (Law Decree n. 130) regarding the registration of asylum seekers.

### 4. The revision of the Security Decrees

The Law Decree n. 130 of October 21st introduced some amendments to the Security Decrees n. 113 of 2018 and n. 53 of 2019.

Once again, and regrettably, an exceptional legal instrument such as a Law Decree was used to govern a decade-long emergency like immigration, which would (with some exceptions) call for ordinary legislation.

More substantially, however, it ought to be noted that the Decree n. 130 has introduced no reform of the Italian legislation on immigration. Nor can we speak of a full return to the legislation before the two Security Decrees – albeit some presented the Decree in this way. Still, the scope and impact of the Decree are remarkable.

The governmental power to bar migrant ships from accessing Italian ports “for reasons of public order and security” has been essentially confirmed, in line with Decree n. 52 of 2019. Controversy arose in this regard (see the 2019 Report for further details), questioning not so much the government’s power per se – which would be in line with the principles of the Italian legal system – as its exercise, which has at times appeared to run counter international law and norms: “the purpose of this service is to meet housing needs: long-term residency ... is unrelated to it ... as this requirement does not signal any relevant condition connected to the needs that this service aims at meeting”. This was an expected conclusion – who could ever think that, all other things being equal, residing in a given territory for a shorter period of time generates a smaller need for housing? – and one that is not unprecedented in the records of the Court’s rulings.

More interestingly and more relevantly, the Court also ruled what follows: “residency for more than five years is not, in itself, an indicator of a greater probability of staying in a given territorial context”. Therefore, the relevance accorded to it by the regional law is not “unquestionably adequate to preventing the ‘risk of instability’ for council tenants”. Since previous residency does not guarantee a more efficient provision, the Court ruled it as unwarranted. According to the Court, the “elements on which one can reasonably expect a long-term stay in the country” ought to be much more variegated. At any rate, the Court stated its position in the following conclusion: “prospective stay” may well “be included among the elements that ought to be taken into consideration when selecting applicants”, especially when it comes to providing long-term benefits, such as social housing, that are in relation to the efficacy of public intervention, yet “it cannot alone be a condition for the generalized exclusion” of those the length of whose prospective stay does not meet the existing standards.

The Court ruled the regional law unconstitutional on the basis of such considerations about the unwarrantedness of the five-year residency criterion as well as its unrelatedness to the needs that social housing meets and to the efficacy of that measure.

Most importantly, the Court’s ruling also obstructs the implementation of further legal acts that may arise out of the political willingness to discriminate against immigrants in matters of welfare and social services. Especially as far as long-term welfare provisions are concerned, discrimination of this kind is often justified on the grounds that the length of a migrant’s stay in a region is an indicator of their “rootedness”. In this respect, the Court first of all ruled that the length of stay is not, in itself, an indicator of any “rootedness”, as this consists of a broader set of factors. In addition, the Court ruled that the importance of “rootedness” can never justify the exclusion of those who are “unrooted”, but only, at most, their comparative disadvantage in selections. For this reason, it will no longer be possible in the future to legitimately discriminate against migrants or sections of the migrant population in granting access to this or that service – even when it is a long-term service - by simply assuming that a certain number of years of previous stay in the area is an indicator of “rootedness”. In fact, this had long been taken for granted by lawmakers and scholars alike, but now many norms that currently include such a requirement for accessing various welfare benefits are at high risk of being invalidated.

Previously, the Court had time and again ruled against the possibility of discriminating against migrants who did not have a permanent permit to stay. Moreover, in the past few years various courts have repeatedly ruled against regional discriminations against migrants by means of bureaucracy – e.g. by requesting certificates attesting property ownership in the country of origin or regional discriminations against migrants by means of bureaucracy – e.g. by requesting certificates attesting property ownership in the country of origin.
the protection of human rights. The confirmation of this power, therefore, was entirely predictable, as was the recommendation for the government to use it only under exceptional circumstances, and even then, to strictly limit its use in time and space.

On the other hand, the legislation regarding sanctions on commanders and shipowners who violate the ban on rescue ships has been radically amended. The exceptional (and extremely heavy) sanctions introduced with Decree n. 53 have been cancelled; sanctions now refer to ordinary naval code. This has been considered a compelling solution, at least in principle – it is consistent with the overall legal system and it complies with the principle of proportionality – and one that is in line with the comments made by the Head of State on the occasion of the conversion of Decree n. 53 into Law n. 77 of 2019.

Indeed, these amendments to the two Security Decrees aimed by and large at incorporating the recommendations made by the Italian President. In the preceding political debate, the Democratic Party seemed inclined towards more comprehensive amendments than the Head of State suggested. However, the Five Star Movement was concerned with not steering too far away from the line of the previous Government (which it had been part of together with the League, the main advocate of the Security Decrees), and therefore opposed major modifications.

Let us now move to another controversial point. Decree n. 130 has not restored the permit to stay for humanitarian reasons, which was cancelled by the first Security Decree. This had been a protective measure for those asylum seekers who were not considered eligible for the status of refugee or to subsidiary protection. Its importance can be appreciated if we consider that over 20% of asylum seekers had been granted a permit for humanitarian reasons as of 2018. On the other hand, Decree n. 130 introduced a new discipline on granting permits to stay under special protection, which would protect a significant number of the many asylum seekers who are not eligible for other forms of protection.

Special protection also applies to migrants who could be otherwise eligible for refugee status or subsidiary protection – which is an inherent flaw of the provision. Yet it also applies to migrants who could be repatriated to countries with “systematic and serious violations of human rights” or “violations of the right to respect for private and family life” should they leave Italy. The latter is a fundamental right according to Article 8 ECHR, which the European Court of Human Rights has applied on many occasions in order to protect migrants in a way that also promotes social and family integration. (Social and family integration was only marginally considered in assessing the eligibility to the pre-existing humanitarian permit). The ECHR also tended to comparatively assess the social integration of migrants in host countries vis-à-vis their integration in their home country.

The actual import of special protection – i.e. its adequacy in truly ensuring the safeguard of standards of protection required by international, European, and Constitutional norms, and in addressing the concerns voiced by the Head of State when Decree n. 113 was issued – will depend essentially on how special protection will be applied. In the past, a change of government – i.e. the formation of the “yellow-green” government coalition between the Five Star Movement and the League – led to a set of directives for Territorial Commissions which transitioned from a large-scale granting of humanitarian permits to a few eligible cases in the summer months preceding the issuing of Decree n. 113 in 2018 (as noted by the 2019 Report). This is a clear example of how loose and inevitably vague norms give the government a great power in determining the scope of their implementation.

5. A revision of the discipline on migrant reception

In matters of reception of asylum seekers and international protection, Decree n. 130 restated the principle of the first Security Decree, namely the exclusion of asylum seekers from integration measures, which only affects migrants that have been deemed eligible for some form of stable protection by their Territorial Commission. Other measures which do not formally count as “integration” but which are nonetheless connected to this aspect – such as basic Italian language courses or “legal aid and services for territorial inclusion” – are part of the reception process involving all migrants, including asylum seekers.

At the organizational level, Decree n. 130 changed the role of reception facilities known as SPRAR and, after Decree n. 113, as SIPROMI. Before Decree n. 113, reception centres were required to host migrants as soon as possible, within the limits of the facility’s capacity, but also asylum seekers – including not only refugees and other migrants under stable international protection, but also asylum seekers. With Decree n. 113, however, facilities were to host only refugees and other recipients of special protection (plus unaccompanied minors), while asylum seekers had to stay at first-reception centres until the relevant Commissions processed their request. With Decree n. 130, SPRAR-system centres are to return to their original function, i.e. they are once again open to asylum seekers (within the limit of their capacity) under a new denomination, namely SAI (Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione, Reception and Integration System).

This appears to be a sensible solution, considering that the network of former SPRAR centres is in many respects the most advanced component of the Italian reception system. It thus ought to be used most effectively, especially since it consists of small-scale ordinary facilities that work in partnership with local authorities, while first-reception centres are often large-scale facilities imposed by the state to face an emergency.

As mentioned, Decree n. 130 restated the principle according to which integration measures are to be implemented only after regional authorities have confirmed the eligibility for stable protection. Consequently, SAI facilities run on a double standard for reception, which translates into two different kinds of services:

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a) Basic services, known as first-level services, accessible to all guests, including asylum seekers. These do not include specific integration services even though Italian language courses and "legal aid and territorial inclusion services" are offered.

b) Integration-specific services, known as second-level services, focusing on "labour-market inclusion and vocational training" and only accessible to migrants under stable protection.

Article 5 of Decree n. 130 also introduces “further integration measures” for SAI guests who are deemed eligible for stable protection by the Territorial Commission. These include courses in Italian language, civic education, and information on services and on career opportunities. The overall integration process should thus develop in three stages:

- stage one kicks off once a migrant enters the reception system; it includes paths to integration that do not formally qualify as "integration measures" but that are nonetheless connected with this aspect, involving e.g. teaching Italian language;
- stage two begins after a migrant is granted the right to a permanent stay in Italy, and it extends stage-one measures while also offering vocational training;
- stage three takes place once a migrant with a permanent permit to stay leaves the reception facility. It extends existing integration paths through language courses and other measures aimed at favouring the migrant’s access to the labour market.

Overall, this is a sensible blueprint. It would make little sense to invest in integration before ascertaining that migrants are entitled to a permanent stay in the country, especially as demands for protection are typically rejected in great number. Moreover, some measures such as language courses need a relatively long period of time to yield the expected results, and are most effectively implemented insofar as their recipients already hold a permit to stay.

6. Conclusions

The legal developments surveyed here have undoubtedly been impactful and beneficial. Nonetheless, the key issues concerning the governance of immigration at the national level (over and above the recurring and so-far unsuccessful calls for a greater role of the EU in the matter) have hardly been addressed by them. Such issues featured prominently in the 2019 ISMU Report, and therefore will only be briefly mentioned here. These are:

- effectively granting the legal immigration of workers – and consequently distinguish between economic migrants and asylum seekers – via a comprehensive revision of the Italian legislation on immigration;
- granting the legal immigration of asylum seekers, which would also contribute to fight human trafficking and high-risk attempts at illegal immigration;
- Effectively offering paths to integration for migrants under stable protection, turning them from a problem to a resource in the mid-to-long term.
- managing the massive presence of irregular immigrants with stable and effective rules. This could be done by introducing reasonable criteria for the legal access to a permit to stay (thus no longer requiring occasional mass regularizations) and effective repatriation.

Decree n. 130 agreeably addressed the problem of integration under special protection. However, it should also be noted that Article 14 of the Decree states that this “cannot translate into more economic burden on the public budget” and that these measures are to be implemented “through the human, material, and economic resources available under the current legislation”. To date, therefore, a qualitative improvement seems unlikely in this respect, especially as no use of private resources – such as e.g. those coming from the productive sector, as per the German model – is included in the present legislation.
Amidst Italy’s first lockdown, when the dramatic occupational consequences of the pandemic started to emerge, the announcement of a regularization measure aimed at responding to the “unmet needs of the agricultural sector” seems to have highlighted once again the key aspects of the relationship between immigration, labour market, and Italian society.

The first aspect is the need of a ‘politically sustainable’ narrative stressing functionalism over human and civil rights and social protection. Everyone knows that the time needed to reap the fruits of a regularization measure are irreconcilable with the necessity of rapidly finding e.g. farmhands to save crops and harvests. Despite this, pro-immigrant narratives struggled to distance themselves from the principle of complementarity. In some respects, calling for a regularization measure “because Romanian labourers are not allowed to immigrate” amounted to admitting that the work and salary conditions immigrants are typically offered are so disadvantageous that they cannot be accepted even by those who are unemployed, hit by the crisis, supported by benefits in the form of the ‘Citizens’ Income,’ and ready to take any form of paid occupation. This is tantamount to reinforcing the belief that some jobs are inevitably “for immigrants” even if (many) Italians do them, i.e. they are beneath what our society considers a decent job.

Second, it is as if immigration contributed to legitimate forms of labour which have survived the industrial era and have risen again in recent years through the spread of the virus of bad and underpaid labour. It took a pandemic to shed light on the myriad workers employed in unskilled jobs in the service sector. Riders – the only ones, except for ambulances, to race around si-
lent and deserted cities – are only the tip of an iceberg made of armies of workers who were suddenly defined as “essential”.

Finally, without denying or downplaying its merits in regularizing thousands of workers stuck in irregular employment, this measure has once again emphasized the distance between the law and reality. Devised primarily for the agricultural sector and then extended to domestic care workers, the regularization measure has benefited especially the latter and with only a minimal impact on irregular employment. More importantly, it has once again left the issue of redesigning the normative framework that regulates economic migrations unaddressed. This goal has acquired importance as the health crisis has made us more aware of the need to combine competitiveness and equal opportunities, to foster sustainable models of development, and to create new forms of governance of global relations.

After outlining the scenario of immigrants’ inclusion in the Italian labour market (sec. 1), this chapter will focus on the impact of the pandemic (sec. 2) and then make some final remarks on the management of migrations (sec. 3).

1. Migrants in the Italian labour market

In 2019 (Table 1), the number of employed migrants has exceeded 2.5 million out of a population of working age of over 4 million. Compared to the previous year, the percentage variation in the number of employed subjects has been much more significant for foreigners (almost four times more) than for the Italian population. Not so for the number of unemployed foreigners, which has only decreased by 5,000, while the decrease in the number of unemployed Italians (equal to over 176,000) has been much more significant. Finally, whereas inactive Italians are down by three points, further reinforcing the trend of the past few years. As a result of these variations, foreigners – who total 10.4% of the population of working age – make now for 11.2% of the labour force, 10.7% of the total number of unemployed subjects.

Table 1. Population by occupational status and nationality (2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population of working age</th>
<th>Italians (35,032,927)</th>
<th>EU foreign nationals (1,299,239)</th>
<th>Extra-EU foreign nationals (2,782,966)</th>
<th>Total foreign nationals (4,082,205)</th>
<th>Total (39,115,132)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workforce</td>
<td>23,034,248</td>
<td>953,832</td>
<td>1,953,314</td>
<td>2,907,146</td>
<td>25,941,395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed population</td>
<td>20,854,680</td>
<td>820,764</td>
<td>1,684,422</td>
<td>2,505,186</td>
<td>23,359,866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In search of employment</td>
<td>2,179,568</td>
<td>133,068</td>
<td>268,892</td>
<td>401,960</td>
<td>2,581,528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inactive population</td>
<td>11,998,679</td>
<td>345,407</td>
<td>829,652</td>
<td>1,175,059</td>
<td>13,173,738</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Istat – Ongoing monitoring on the labour force in Italy, 2019

The analysis of activity, employment, and unemployment rates confirms the picture outlined above (Table 2). In the context of a “delayed” economic recovery, at the end of 2019 the situation was more static compared with the mean of OECD countries: the rate of occupation among foreigners has declined slightly (due to the negative trend of female rates) and it is now eight percentage points lower than the OECD average; the rate of unemployment has also diminished ever so slightly, but it is still much higher than the OECD average.

These trends must be interpreted not only in the light of the overall economic-occupational picture, but also with the dynamic of migration flows in mind. These have indeed decreased with respect to the pre-crisis period, but they have also been characterized by a progressive rise in “non-economic” migrants. In the past year (2019), only 6.4% of immigration was related to labour. The largest share (56.9%) migrated to Italy for family reasons, followed by those seeking subsidiary protection (15.6%), reasons for study (11.5%) and other reasons (9.6%).

The differential between foreign workers and Italians is a positive one in terms of employment rate (61% and 58.8%, respectively). Nonetheless, this differential is progressively reducing (in 2008 the difference was as high as 9 percentage points) and it can be explained in part by the low occupational rate among Italians. Perhaps also due to their higher activity levels (70.9%, compared with 65.1% of Italians), foreigners perform worse than Italians in terms of unemployment (13.8% vs. 9.5% and 16.3% vs. 10.4% if we consider the female workforce alone, i.e. a difference by 4 and 6 percentage points, respectively).

Along with women, young people are a traditionally disadvantaged group in the Italian labour market. Young foreigners, however, have much higher levels of inclusion compared to Italians (the rate of activity of people under 29 is 39.9% among Italians, 51.4% among EU foreigners, and 49.8% for non-EU nationals). They fare better in occupational terms (the employment rate is 31%, 42.7% and 37.8%, respectively) but are equally at risk of unemployment (the unemployment rate is 22.4% for Italians, 16.9% for EU foreign nationals, and as high as 24% for young non-EU nationals). Employed young foreigners are generally less educated and more likely to be employed in low-skilled occupations. More than 9 in 10 young non-EU workers have low-skilled and low-paid jobs. The structural disadvantage of both first-generation and second-generation young immigrants (common to many European countries, see Zanfri-ni, 2019) is confirmed also by the high share of foreigners among young NEETs (32.8%, 10 percentage points above the already worryingly high percentage of young Italian NEETs, 22.5%; Eurostat, 2019).

This adds to a gender imbalance as young foreign women are more disadvantaged than men. This fact fits a variety of gender-based models of division of labour, which in some immigrant communities tend to be based on the male-breadwinner model, but it is also related to the earlier age at which immigrant women tend to take on “reproductive” roles compared to Italian women. Among young female NEETs only 8.3% of Italians have significant unpaid responsibilities connected with care or household management, while non-EU women in the same condition are 32.9%. Moreover, over half of the
women in the latter group claim to be unable to work outside the household.

Compared to the past few years, the characteristics of employed migrants (Direzione Generale dell’immigrazione e delle politiche di integrazione, 2020) have not changed significantly. The most racialized sector is that of “other collective and personal services,” where the presence of foreigners tops 36%, followed by the agricultural sector (18.3%), hospitality and catering (17.7%), and construction (17.6%). In terms of contract type, foreigners are underrepresented in self-employment (13% compared with 23.9% Italians), in fixed-term occupation (19.5% vs 12.3%), and especially in blue-collar work (77.1% vs 31.7%). Recent hires confirm the expected distribution over the various types of occupation: farmhands, home-based carers, waiters, and domestic workers are the most frequent. Data by Infocamere highlight that businesses started by foreigners are largely sole traders (76.5% compared with 52% run by Italians) and mostly concentrated in the commercial, building, hospitality, and catering sectors.

Finally, immigrants are overrepresented in those sectors where employment has increased in the past few years but where productivity is low: this contributes to accounting for their low salary (non-EU immigrants’ annual salary is on average 35% lower than that of the entire population of workers). Figures gets progressively worse if we focus only on domestic and home-based care work, which is the main area of employment for migrant workers (especially female migrant workers). According to data provided by an employers’ association (Domina, 2020) with reference only to regularly paid salaries, over one fourth of domestic workers (26.6%) earns less than 3,000 euro per year; and 20.9% earn between 3,000 and 6,000 euros. This is a manifestly problematic situation, especially in a long-term perspective, as workers in these sectors will be paid small pensions once they retire. This is an even bigger problem for the many workers without a regular job contract.

Overall, irregular labour continues to be a common and widespread phenomenon, especially in those sectors where the share of migrant work is large. The latest Istat Report (2020) estimates that 2.3 million individuals are employed irregularly (excluding foreigners who live and work in Italy without a valid permit to stay). This affects approximately 2.1 million households in which, in at least half of cases, all working members are employed irregularly and are at a high risk in the current COVID-19 pandemic. Among these particularly vulnerable households, foreign ones are significantly overrepresented: 26 in 100 households with irregular workers are migrant households, and 33 in 100 households where all workers are irregular are migrant households.


2. The impact of the pandemic

This is the background against which the consequences of the pandemic must be understood. The first effect of the pandemic has been to uncover the gap between the relevance of migrant labour in crucial sectors for the everyday survival of Italian society – especially in an emergency situation – and the norms and practices that regulate the entry and treatment of imported human resources.

At the international level, the COVID-19 emergency has highlighted the high percentage of migrants among key workers employed in the production of essential services such as the food production chain, the health and domestic care sectors, logistics, etc. The question then arose as to how to secure the production of indispensable goods and services, all the while ensuring their “resilience” to unpredictable events (Anderson et al., 2020) through the management of immigrant labour forces. Disproving the hierarchy which has informed migration policies in recent years – characterized by an increasingly selective trend in favour of so-called talented migration – attention turned to different unskilled workers with a low social gradient, whose needs do not always emerge in inquiries on job vacancies, especially considering the high levels of informality/irregularity of these areas of the market. In particular, it appears that food production systems in developed countries are highly dependent upon foreign labourers recruited through the channels of seasonal migration. As far as the healthcare sector is concerned, where various schemes for the attraction of specific professional profiles are already in place, it has become clear that the growing intra- and international competition may result in vacancies both in the country of origin and in the country of destination. As we shall see, all this has breathed new life into the debate on labour migration policy. In the meantime, various countries have adopted a set of “buffer” measures to allow the access and permanence of foreign workers (such as extending expiring permits, removing restrictions on mobility and, in Italy, regularizing specific categories of workers). This shift in focus has also drawn greater attention to the working and pay conditions of those who have suddenly become “essential workers”, albeit often perceived and treated as (hyper-)disposable labour: in the whole of the EU, it is estimated that immigrant workers are 13% of essential workers (Pasani, Mazza, 2020).

The pandemic has not merely revealed the vulnerability of migrants in the labour market; it has also reinforced it. This can be ascribed only in part to insufficient channels of legal entry (an argument that has received a lot of attention and emphasis in Italy); more substantially, it is the result of the faults of hitherto labour-market governance as well as of social protection systems. UNDP-IOM (2020) estimated that approximately 30% of the workforce employed in the sectors most affected by the pandemic is of foreign origin. The overrepresentation of migrants among fixed-term workers puts them at a higher risk of not having their job contract renewed (OECD, 2020). Moreover, many such fixed-term jobs are incompatible with telework and tend to expose workers to a
greater risk of infection (such as e.g. those in cleaning, logistics, transportation, trade, and care). One should also mention the risks many immigrants employed in informal work sector are subjected to, having to choose between not working and violating restrictions, and often being fired without notice by their employers. In various countries, foreign workers and unemployed migrants have even been excluded from unemployment benefits, but they have nonetheless been the target of the local population's hostility (IOM, 2020).

Immigrants in Italy experience this vulnerability in many respects. Although they are entitled to and benefit from much the same measures aimed at guaranteeing employment and salary support to Italian workers, their previous condition and their frequent inclusion in the informal labour market have further weakened their position much more than that of many Italians. On the other hand, the crisis has made us aware of the relevance of manual labour or even “slave” labour both in quantitative terms and, especially, in terms of supporting Italian society’s day-to-day life: it is estimated that 43% of EU and 40% of non-EU migrants are employed in essential jobs (Fasani, Mazza, 2020).

Some sectors, in particular, deserve special attention. The strong racialization of domestic work and home-based care is the flipside of the occupational segregation of female migrants. The sector employs over 4 foreign women out of 10, with widely underestimated consequences on the stability of their mental and physical well-being (a risk that has certainly been exacerbated in recent months). The problem of irregular employment emerged dramatically during the first lockdown.

In contrast with the official employment of approximately 800,000 workers, it has been estimated that the real number of workers in domestic labour and home-based care work at the end of 2019 exceeded two million, approximately one million of whom are non-EU citizens. Among the latter, “only” 150,000-200,000 do not even have a residence permit. According to employers’ associations, moreover, the first lockdown (Spring 2020) – with its obligation to certify personal movements – led to the regularization of several hundred thousand workers (leading to an increase of about 10% of employees in good standing). On the other hand, the lockdown has also led to the loss of a significant number of jobs, exposing all the limitations of scarcely regulated work (especially when it is limited to a few hours per week). Although formally permanent, domestic employment can be terminated at any time and at short notice. Even outside the lockdown, this happens regularly whenever the cared-for person dies or is institutionalized (which is very common given the age and health conditions of most people in need of home care). The regularization measure issued in summer 2020 led to 176,849 applications: a considerable number, but one with a negligible impact on the problem of informal labour, which continues to affect 6 out of 10 workers.

Moreover, the pandemic revealed that the entire health and social sector is increasingly dependent on the immigrant workforce. Its importance is expected to be even greater in the future, given that the increasing short-
cants are below tax exemption, which confirms the comparative disadvantage of this sector. Finally, many workers have even paid for the cost of their own regularization or for a fake job contract (up to 5,000 euro). Despite the different provisions implemented to face these issues (regularization, the issuing of a temporary permit for unemployed overstayers, an anti-gangmaster law), irregular work and exploitation remain widespread.

An even more substantial question concerns future economic and employment scenarios. As Istat has pointed out (2020), containment measures adopted to face the pandemic have disrupted the Italian economy in a period of stagnation. Despite the massive use of the cassa integrazione system of redundancy funds, the pandemic brought about a further reduction in employment and a fall in activity rates. Actions to fight the health and economic crisis will produce a strong increase in public debt and will only reinforce the critical aspects of the business system. On the other hand, however, some positive reactions and structural transformations are also emerging in a non-marginal component of the production system. It is a difficult and uncertain context, the evolution of which will also depend on the use of the exceptional resources allocated by the European Union for recovery.

Of course, all this could bring about a change in qualitative-professional needs connected to migration, a mounting opposition to active migration policies, and even the public opinion’s hostility towards immigration. But no such outcomes are inevitable. According to many observers, this extraordinarily difficult moment may in fact pave the way to a new economic and social paradigm and even revolutionize the governance of migration and integration processes.

3. The post-COVID-19 scenario: a new era in the governance of immigration?

As many have observed, the pandemic has been a stress test; it has accelerated digitalization and the diffusion of telework, and it has overall redesigned the organization of labour. On the other hand, it has acted as an amplifier of the critical aspects of contemporary accumulation regimes on many levels, from the design of global value chains to issues connected with the work-life balance. It is on these two aspects that we shall briefly focus on in this final section.

The analysis of immigrant labour leads us to question the current configuration of production and distribution chains, especially in the agrifood supply sector. It is not “merely” a question of fighting labour exploitation and introducing minimum wage; the question more deeply bears upon how the entire system can be redesigned according to principles of equity and sustainability.

In this regard, the pandemic may even offer a unique opportunity to reorganize the agrifood system, “to make it both greener and more rights-compliant, with more sustainable supply chains, ensuring labour rights, fair wages for workers and adequate prices for both farmers and consumers” (Palumbo, Corrado, 2020). Within this framework, migration schemes for seasonal work (ILO, 2020) and, more generally, for the recruitment and employment of migrants in agriculture, food processing, and logistics must be redesigned (Kalantaryan et al., 2020).

The second point mentioned above refers to domestic care work, a key aspect of the work-life balance. As we have seen, although the pandemic may lead to a quasi-quantitative transformation of professional needs, the need for carers is bound to increase in the future. It is vital to devise policies that effectively regulate domestic care – where the concentration of immigrants is highest – by bringing together principles of equity, quality standards, and sustainability. This can be done e.g. through state funding (i.e., by making the cost of labour fully tax-deductible or subsidiarized) or through preferential migration for domestic workers (for further information cf. Zanfrini, 2020).

Agriculture and domestic care may also become a testing ground for new approaches to the management of labour migrations, based not on skills – as it is currently the case – but instead on sectors of employment. As the key role of immigrant labour in certain economic sectors became evident, attention to the link between migration policies and industrial/labour policies has increased (OECD, 2020). Perhaps this perspective can lead to opening the doors to low-to-medium skilled migrants, which are only part of temporary and circular migration schemes. Be this as it may, a tighter interplay between migration and labour policy has already received a significant endorsement by European institutions within a dedicated international webinar (EMN-JRC-HOME, 2020).

This and other hypotheses for the redefinition of the governance of migrations will be the focus of further work by ISMU Foundation, following in the footsteps of an early paper (Zanfrini, 2020) prepared within the “Italia 2030 – Crescita Competitività Sviluppo” (Growth Competitivity Development) Project promoted by the Ministry of Economic Development. With this paper, the author urges to re-open the so-called “front door” – or, the official entry door for economic migrations – through a variety of migration schemes and a dramatic streamlining of the necessary paperwork for regular immigration. The report calls for a pragmatic and non-instrumental approach to the issue that entails the posterior evaluation of the measures adopted and a rapid revision of those deemed ineffective. The author also stresses the need to re-introduce a multiannual programme based on the Country’s needs as well as on its capacity to welcome new migrants. Opinions differ regarding specific proposals, but they all agree on priorities such as: institutionalizing the immigration of low-skilled labour (as an antidote also to irregular migration and fake asylum requests), extending residence permits for seasonal labour and possibly turning them into permanent permits to stay, introducing temporary permits for job-seeking purposes, devising specific channels for domestic workers, creating circular migration schemes capable of supporting internalization efforts by Italian business-
es, moving beyond the “unwelcoming” approach that currently discourages the immigration of high-skilled workers, managers, professionals, and investors. All these proposals go in the direction indicated by the New Pact on Migration and Asylum adopted by the European Commission, which intends to write a new chapter in EU economic migration policies.

At the same time, the legacy of the pandemic should not be neglected. The pandemic has highlighted the need – in immigration just like in any other field – to always bear in mind the mid-to-long term effects of specific policies and to build an international community that is resilient to unpredictable events and capable of ensuring the sustainability of economic and social processes. On the one hand, this is about imagining models of global governance of transnational production and services, in which the regulation of human mobility and migrant labour plays a key role (Anderson et al., 2020). On the other hand, it is about prioritizing the “management” of immigration in the definition of the strategic guidelines for Italy’s growth and development (see once again Zanfrini, 2020). In both cases, we need to adopt a perspective and future-oriented vision.

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1. School closure: the effects of an unexpected event on the children of immigrants

It is beyond doubt that 2020 introduced an unexpected scenario in the everyday life of millions of students, parents, and teachers, as all schools across Italy closed from late February-early March to the end of the school year to respond to the COVID-19 epidemic. The suspension of school attendance has been a dramatic change, cancelling all traditional learning and teaching in the classroom and altering the relationship between teachers and families.

Following a directive from the Ministry of Education, a few weeks after closing, schools started offering what has come to be known as Didattica a Distanza or DAD (Distance Learning) – i.e., a set of educational activities that could be carried out using ICT and e-learning environments – which has taken different forms in response to the various stages of the pandemic. During the spring lockdown, some of the most widespread practices included videoconferencing, assigning exercises and study materials through digital platforms, and contact and socialization activities with students online (INDIRE, 2020).

There are currently no detailed and exhaustive data on the effects of “forced” DAD on the educational paths of students in the short-to-medium term. Some, however, have tentatively estimated the economic and social costs of the COVID-19 pandemic, including poorer educational achievements and the subsequent loss of human capital (Gavosto, Romano, 2020). These have had a varying impact depending both on the DAD activities that schools have been
able to put in place and on the personal and family characteristics of students.

Among those who were especially affected by the interruption of education- al activities at school in the 2019/2020 school year, disadvantaged students could rely comparatively less on suitable ICT devices and internet connection, had less parental support, fewer adequate spaces to concentrate and study, etc. (Save the Children, 2020) According to a survey of over 3,700 teachers across all educational stages conducted in June 2020 (INDIRE, 2020), children from migrant families are one of the main groups excluded from DAD (Figure 1): 13.3% of kindergarten teachers believe that children of immigrant origin are among those who did not participate in DAD activities, as do 14.6% of primary-school teachers, 17.1% of lower-secondary and 8.1% of upper-secondary school teachers. Among those who have been most affected at this stage, teachers also count socio-economically, linguistically, or culturally disadvantaged students, students with special educational needs (SEN), and students at risk of school drop-out – among all of which, students with a migration background are once again highly represented.

The beginning of the 2020/2021 school year was marked by generalized con- cern, interruptions to school attendance, and DAD experimentation at various educational stages and in different areas across the country. Based on these premises, this chapter aims to offer an in-depth analysis of access to education for students with a migration background in this uncertain scenario.

2. In Italian schools one student in ten has a migration background

The latest available data on Students with Non-Italian Citizenship (NIC) refer to the 2018/2019 school year and recorded over 850,000 units (Ministry of Education, 2020). Non-Italian citizens now account for 10% of the total number of students in Italian schools, from kindergarten to upper secondary education (Table 1). The significant threshold of 10 students with a migration background per 100 students has thus been reached. After the 2015 stagnation, the number of migrant students is once again on the rise, whereas the number of Italian students continues to fall.

Table 1. NIC students in the Italian school system. 2008/09 and 2018/19 school years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Per 100 students</th>
<th>Increase in A.V.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>673,592</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>711,046</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>+37,454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>755,939</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>+44,893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>786,630</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>+30,691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013/14</td>
<td>803,053</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>+16,423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>814,208</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>+11,555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>814,851</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>+643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>826,091</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>+11,240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>841,719</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>+15,628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>857,729</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>+16,010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analysis on Ministry of Education data

As previous ISMU Reports already stressed (Colombo, 2019), Italian multi-cultural schools entered a phase of stability beginning with the 2012/2013 school year, when the rising trend in immigrant students began to plateau. This was due to the reduction of migration flows towards Italy, to a rise in Italian citizenship acquisition among the younger generations, to the relatively low levels of education in non-compulsory education, and to limited or no access to education by unaccompanied minors, asylum seekers, and refugees (Colombo, Scardigno, 2019).
In the last decade, the trend has been stable also in terms of the distribution of students across different educational stages. 36.5% of students with a non-Italian citizenship are enrolled at primary schools, followed by upper and lower secondary schools and, finally, kindergarten (Table 2). In primary and preschool education, the threshold of 10 students of migrant origin out of 100 has been crossed, whereas the percentage incidence is lower in secondary education (7.4% of NICs on the total number of students at this educational stage).

Table 2. NIC students by educational stage. 2008/09 and 2018/19 school years. A.V. and %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>Primary school</th>
<th>Lower Secondary</th>
<th>Upper Secondary</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>Lower Secondary</th>
<th>Upper Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>122,085</td>
<td>234,206</td>
<td>140,731</td>
<td>130,012</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>165,209</td>
<td>313,204</td>
<td>180,296</td>
<td>199,020</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>36.5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analysis on Ministry of Education data

Romania, Albania, Morocco, and China are the largest minority groups in education. In the 2018-19 school year, the number of Romanians – still the largest minority group – has slightly decreased compared with the previous school year (157,470, or 18.3% of NICs), followed by Albanians (118,085 or 13.6%), Moroccans (105,057 or 12.2%) and Chinese (55,070, 6.4%), all of whom are historically significant immigrant minority groups in Italy. In the ranking of the top 10 nationality groups (which encompass almost 68% of foreign students) we find Asian countries (the Philippines, India, and Pakistan), East European countries like Moldavia and Ukraine, and Egypt.

The greatest change in the last decade concerns the differentiation of NIC students in terms of place of birth: the number of Italian-born students has topped 550,000 in the 2018-2019 school year; in the past 6 years, those born in Italy have been the majority of foreign students (64.5%; Table 3). In the youngest school population, second generations make for 83% of children with a migration background in kindergarten and 3/4 of students of immigrant origin in primary school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School year</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>Primary school</th>
<th>Lower Secondary</th>
<th>Upper Secondary</th>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>Lower Secondary</th>
<th>Upper Secondary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>79,113</td>
<td>137,596</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>83.3</td>
<td>79,113</td>
<td>137,596</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>89,421</td>
<td>235,877</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>89,421</td>
<td>235,877</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>75.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007/18</td>
<td>22,474</td>
<td>107,312</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>59.5</td>
<td>22,474</td>
<td>107,312</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>59.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>8,111</td>
<td>72,391</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>8,111</td>
<td>72,391</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>199,119</td>
<td>553,176</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>199,119</td>
<td>553,176</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analysis on Ministry of Education data

The trend of recently arrived students, on the other hand, has been fluctuating. Although there has been an overall reduction by over 23,000 units over the past decade (currently 2.7% of all NICs, Table 4), their number has risen again between 2013 and 2015 – over 34,000 students in 2015/16 – and fallen again to approximately 22,000 units in the following three years.

Table 3. NIC students born in Italy by educational stage. 2007/08 and 2018/19 school years. A.V. and % incidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A.V.</th>
<th>Share of Italian-born per 100 NICs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007/08</td>
<td>2018/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>79,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>89,421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary</td>
<td>22,474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
<td>8,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>199,119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analysis on Ministry of Education data

The percentage incidence of recently arrived students has fallen significantly in primary school, but it has risen in secondary schools and in the South, where many minors continue to arrive, either unaccompanied or together with their families. The ISMU Foundation has recently devoted a specific in-depth study to unaccompanied foreign minors (UAMs) and their entry in education/training (Santagati, Colussi, 2020), imposing some order on the partial and fragmented data available. A qualitative study by ISMU (Santagati, Barzaghi, Colussi, 2020) has highlighted the difficulties in accessing and continuing education for UAMs in Italy, given their concentration in the 16-17 age range and the fact that, once they reach voting age, they lose all protection for minors and must rapidly become self-sufficient in order to stay in Italy. These challenges, however, have led some of them to contin-
ue to invest in education (Santagati, Augelli, 2020). One of the key elements that have facilitated this process is meeting with significant adults (social workers, educators, volunteer guardians, teachers, trainers, etc.) who operate in the reception system, are able to protect their vulnerability, foster their resourcefulness, and negotiate with educational and training institutions. According to the study, these UAMs had the opportunity of continuing their education not only as a result of their courage and dedication, but also thanks to the openness of the schools they were enrolled at as well as to the support of volunteers and third-sector organizations. Their histories confirm that the educational and training integration of UAMs is the result of a process of continuing negotiation, which involves minors, educators, and institutions (Santagati, 2020).

3. Multicultural schools in local contexts

Students with a migration background are known to have a similar distribution to immigrant adults and households across the country: they are more concentrated in the Northern regions and, with a significant percentage incidence, in some regions of Central Italy.

Lombardy has always been the region with the largest number of foreign students (almost 218,000 NICs in 2018/19) followed by Emilia-Romagna (over 100,000), Veneto (approximately 94,000), Lazio and Piedmont (79-78,000), and Tuscany (71,000). In the current school year, Campania replaced Sicily as the Southern region with the largest absolute number of students with a migration background as well as in terms of percentage increase in the last three-year period (+15.2%) – although this figure (27,000 students) is still a far cry from Northern and Central regions. If we consider the ratio between foreign students and the total school population, however, Emilia-Romagna tops Lombardy with 16.4 foreigners per 100 students, followed by Lombardy (15.5) and by Tuscany, Umbria, Veneto, and Piedmont (14-13).

By place of birth (Figure 2), the majority of foreigners in 13 regions in the 2018/19 school year were born in Italy, whereas in the remaining Southern regions (including the insular areas) the majority were born abroad. In the following chart we can see two opposing cases: Calabria, with approximately 63.8% of NICs born abroad and with a personal history of migration, and Veneto, with over 71% of NICs born in Italy.

The Twenty-sixth Italian Report on Migrations 2020

The highest percentage of second-generation students in the 3-5 age range can be found in Veneto, Umbria, Tuscany and Aosta Valley (over 86%), whereas second-generation students in the 6-10 age range are mostly to be found in Umbria, Piedmont, and Veneto (over 80%).

The 2018-2019 ranking of NIC students by province is the same as it was in previous years. The highest number is in the Milan area (over 92,000 foreign students), followed by Rome (63,000), Turin (over 39,000) and Brescia (33,000). Most of the top 10 provinces by number of NIC students are located in the North (8 out of 10, of which 5 are regional capitals, 2 are in Central Italy; Ministry of Education, 2020: 17).
Table 5. Ranking of the first 10 provinces and cities by number of NIC students in Italy. 2018/19 school year. A.V.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provinces</th>
<th>Cities</th>
<th>A.V.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milan</td>
<td>92,104</td>
<td>Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rome</td>
<td>63,488</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turin</td>
<td>39,405</td>
<td>Turin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brescia</td>
<td>33,053</td>
<td>Genoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergamo</td>
<td>25,757</td>
<td>Bologna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence</td>
<td>22,311</td>
<td>Florence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bologna</td>
<td>22,013</td>
<td>Prato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verona</td>
<td>20,718</td>
<td>Brescia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padua</td>
<td>17,880</td>
<td>Padua</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analysis on Ministry of Education data

A comparison between the rankings of provinces and cities with the highest number of NIC students reveals 8 high-ranking cities in high-ranking provinces, whereas areas such as Bergamo and Modena rank highly only in the provincial ranking, and Genoa and Prato only in the city ranking.

The 10 cities with the highest number of NIC students are still prevalently in the North (7, of which 4 are regional capitals). Rome and Milan are the top-ranking cities (with over 40,000 NICs), followed by Turin (over 24,000). Genoa, Bologna, and Florence follow at a distance (approximately 9-10,000 NICs), before Prato and Brescia (~8,000), Verona (over 7,000), and Padua (over 6,000).

The ranking by percentage incidence of foreign students differs from the past and includes other provinces (Piacenza, Mantua, Asti, Parma, Cremona, Lod, Alessandria). Once again Prato (26.8%) and Piacenza (22.7%) rank highest, followed by Mantua, Asti, Parma, and Cremona (over 18%). Brescia drops from the 4th to the 7th place with respect to the 2017-18 school year. Lod, Modena, and Alessandria are the lowest-ranking provinces (17% and beyond).

The number of schools unaffected by immigration continued to decrease in the 2018-2019 school year (10,211, or 18.3% of all Italian schools), whereas the number of schools with up to 30% of NIC students has risen (over 3/4 of all schools in Italy) (Table 6).

Table 6. Italian schools by % incidence of NIC students on the total number of students. 2008/09 and 2018/19 school years. (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2008/09</th>
<th>2018/19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No NICs</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 30% NICs</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%+ NICs</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analysis on Ministry of Education data

Table 7. Italian and NIC students with an educational delay (per 100 students) by educational stage. 2007/2008 and 2018/19 school years. (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007/08</th>
<th>2018/19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italians (a)</td>
<td>NICS (b)</td>
<td>b-a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analysis on Ministry of Education data

There is an increase also in the number of schools with over 30% of foreign students, which has almost trebled in the past decade and now includes 3,574 schools (6.5% of all Italian schools).

4. Differences and inequalities in the educational careers of NIC students

In this final section, we shall focus on the educational careers of students with a migration background, considering both challenges and achievements.

Educational delay is one of the most widespread indicators of the difficulties faced by NICs in Italian schools (ISTAT, 2020). First, we must distinguish between students with an immigrant background whose late education is due to school failure and students who, having been born and educated abroad, have enrolled at Italian schools in classes not corresponding to their age group (usually 1-2 years lower).

Access to education raises questions that have no easy answer. On the one hand, admission to classes of peers may foster socialization and dedication. On the other hand, admission to a lower class can help overcome the language gap by prolonging education. This can increase the risk of later dropout, yet it can yield greater educational achievements by setting lower learning objectives (Bertozzi, Santagati, Saruis, 2020).

Currently, educational delay affects 9% of Italian students and 30% of non-Italian students (Table 7). Although the share of students with a migration background has shrunk by over 10 percentage points in the past decade, it remains especially large in upper secondary schools, where 57% of NICs is one or two years behind. The delay rate is comparatively high also in primary education.

Table 7. Italian and NIC students with an educational delay (per 100 students) by educational stage. 2007/2008 and 2018/19 school years. (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007/08</th>
<th>2018/19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Italians (a)</td>
<td>NICS (b)</td>
<td>b-a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower secondary</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>51.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analysis on Ministry of Education data

There is an increase also in the number of schools with over 30% of foreign students, which has almost trebled in the past decade and now includes 3,574 schools (6.5% of all Italian schools).
and Training (NEETs) among young people born abroad. In 2019, Italy has been the European country with the highest number of both.

The percentage of ELETs – i.e. the percentage of young people aged 18-24 with no upper secondary education or vocational qualification and who are not in education or training – has been shrinking in the past decade, both among Italians and among NICs. However, in 2019 ELETs born abroad account for 32.3% of foreigners aged 18-24 (compared with 22.2% in the EU-28 average), i.e. three times the percentage of Italian ELETs. The decade-long trend is more stable as far as NEETs are concerned, with NEETs born abroad amounting to 31.9% of the total number of people aged 15-29 born abroad and residing in Italy.

Table 8. ELETs (aged 18-24) and NEETs (aged 15-29) among Italian people and NICs (var. place of birth). 2010 and 2019. (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Italians (a)</th>
<th>NICs (b)</th>
<th>b-a</th>
<th>Italians (a)</th>
<th>NICs (b)</th>
<th>b-a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analysis on EUROSTAT data

Overall, in the period considered there has been no significant reduction in the gap between Italian-born people and people born abroad in terms of ELETs and NEETs. However, the gap may widen in the present historical conjuncture due to a halt to educational, training, social, and work activities of the younger and more vulnerable population groups.

More positive aspects can be found in secondary school choices among NIC students. In the last decade (Table 9), NICs have been a stable share of students at istituti tecnici ("technical colleges") (38% in the 2018/19 school year), whereas their share has shrunk in vocational colleges (-8.5 percentage points over the past 10 school years) while rising by almost the same amount in licei (lyceums). Lyceum students are now 30% of NICs in secondary education (almost 60,000) and 35.3% of Italian-born NICs.

Table 9. NIC students in upper secondary schools. 2008/09 and 2018/19 school years. (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Lyceums (licei)</th>
<th>Technical colleges (istituti tecnici)</th>
<th>Vocational colleges (istituti professionali)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008/09</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analysis on Ministry of Education data

Let us not forget, however, that there is still a significant difference in the school choices of Italian and non-Italian students at the end of primary school. In the transition to secondary education, a student’s immigrant origin proves to be a factor of inequality even in the face of decent school performance. A study on a large sample of students (Argentin et al., 2020) revealed that the best students’ rate of enrolment in lyceums is over 70% for Italians, while it is only 40% for first-generation foreigners. More contradictory results emerge from data on learning achievements (INVALSI, 2019), especially if we consider the INVALSI Institute assessment of Italian language and Mathematics learning in second-year upper secondary schools (Table 10).

Table 10. Average scores in Italian and Mathematics in second-year upper secondary schools. INVALSI tests by nationality. 2013/14 to 2018/19 school years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Italian 1st gen. NICs</th>
<th>Italian 2nd gen. NICs</th>
<th>Italian 1st gen. NICs</th>
<th>Italian 2nd gen. NICs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013/14</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/15</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analysis on INVALSI data

From school year 2013/14 to school year 2018/19, Italians scored better than second-generation NICs in Italian language. In turn, second-generation NICs performed better than first-generation NICs. While this gap is a relevant one, it is much narrower for Mathematics. On the other hand, over time the scores of first-generation and second-generation foreigners in Italian tends to improve more than in Mathematics.

In the Mathematics and English test results of fifth-year secondary students, however, there are more cases of resilience (i.e., high academic achievements despite the disadvantaged background: see Santagati, 2019) among students with an immigrant origin, even in those areas where these standardized test scores are overall lower (i.e., in the South and insular areas). Analyses on INVALSI data for 2018/19 (Barabanti, Santagati, 2020) highlight the heterogeneity of educational paths and careers, including achievements and failures for both natives and foreigners. These vary not only in relation to family and migration background, but also as a result of specific educational and local contexts. This is the so-called “school effect” – where families, schools, and teachers engage in micro-mechanisms of interaction that translate into inequalities in school results (Argentin, Pavolini, 2020).
The Twenty-sixth Italian Report on Migrations 2020

5. Open issues

The analysis presented so far ends with school year 2018/19 (the latest school year on which data is available) and confirms many well-known trends. COVID-19-induced changes are not included, yet they will in all likelihood introduce both obstacles to and opportunities for students with a migration background.

It is very likely that the NIC school population will progressively shrink, while the Italian school population has already been shrinking for some time due to the population decline. The medium-term and long-term effects of the pandemic are likely to affect the choice between continuing or leaving education and therefore further reduce the NIC school population, as local surveys already show. A recent memo by the National Observatory for the Integration of Foreign Students and Interculturalism, titled É la lingua che ci fa uguali. *Nota per ripartire senza dimenticare gli alunni stranieri* (It is language that makes us equal. *Starting again without forgetting about foreign students*, 2020), published before schools re-opened in September, highlights the challenges that the pandemic has posed to a school system that is already struggling with ensuring equal educational opportunities for all (as indicated by the negative figures on ELETs and on NEETs discussed above). Key strategies for not losing contact with foreign students in the near future and avoiding the dropout of those who are more isolated and in greater difficulty involve: new investments in targeted learning tools for Italian L2 – both in schools and in distance learning – in order to avoid regression, promoting relational dynamics with Italophones and non-Italophones in order to improve and promote language learning, increasing the number of L2 teachers and experts in highly multicultural schools, strengthening individual tutoring and support for all students facing difficulties and especially for UAMs, identifying quality criteria and guidelines for DAD that take NICs into account.

References


1. Introduction

In consideration of the effects of the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 epidemic in Italy, the present chapter shall focus first on the policy implications that the crisis has had at the national, European, and international levels, and more specifically on the guidelines adopted by international actors to contrast the pandemic. We shall then focus on the spread of the virus itself – even though the situation is constantly changing – by analysing available data on infection rates among different national groups of the migrant population in Italy.

With the breakout of the coronavirus, a considerable part of society instinctively wondered whether immigrants with COVID-19 could themselves be considered a virus that is spreading beyond control. As we can see from the existing literature as well as from previous ISMU Foundation reports, immigrants do not have particular health problems per se, yet they can be counted among the most vulnerable groups due to their poor life conditions.

Another issue concerns the Italian National Health Service’s (SSN) capacity to handle an unprecedented demand for health care, i.e. its ability to respond effectively to the COVID-19 epidemic. The health emergency has certainly put the national healthcare system under pressure since it is financed mainly through general taxation. (The UK, Spain, France and Sweden, to name but a few European countries, have similar healthcare systems). This allows for services to be provided “free of charge” based on the principles of universality, equal citizenship, and solidarity.
Nobody was prepared to face a pandemic, and panic has immediately spread among the population. Yet even discounting this, the state of the SSN system has not proven very stable in terms of its efficacy to provide adequate health care. In such a context, it is legitimate to ask how the system worked to secure the health of immigrants – especially irregular ones – and whether immigrants have indeed posed a threat to the wellbeing of society as a whole as well as to their own health.

The present chapter thus focuses on two main issues: immigrants’ liability to infection based on ethnicity, age, and legal status, and the spread of infection from minority communities to the rest of the population.

2. The COVID-19 emergency: policy implications at the Europe and Italian level

With the first reported cases in Italy at the end of February 2020, the COVID-19 epidemic officially broke out in Europe and began to spread quickly, soon leading the WHO to declare a global pandemic.1 Whereas Italy had rapidly put in place containment measures to handle the first large wave of infections outside Asia, international stakeholders began to analyse what had happened in China in order to learn lessons and adopt effective shared practices. In this sense, Italy’s response to the pandemic both fell under the influence of European and global governance and in its turn influenced global practices and approaches.

2.1 Guidelines from international and European actors

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has emphasised how, even before the spread of COVID-19, border screenings and treatment were considered essential for mobility and international protection (IOM, 2020). According to the IOM, these interventions had in the past proved to have a positive impact on the migrants’ capacity to fully integrate in host societies, as they ensure that the migration process endangers neither the lives of migrants nor of the host population. Migrants, therefore, must be put at the centre of a process of health-care examination of the population through screenings conducted in a rapid and efficient fashion, equal and accessible to all.

In a communication issued in April 2020, the Council of Europe recalled the right to health protection, calling on European States to give this right the maximum priority in defining and issuing initiatives, policies and laws aimed at fighting the pandemic. The right to protection of health, according to the Council, also indicates that health care must be available to all without discrimination. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this means putting in place effective services that everyone can access financially and that “groups at particularly high risk, such as (…) persons with an irregular migration status must be adequately protected by the healthcare measures put in place” (Council of Europe, 2020a: 4).

The High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020) suggested that States take the necessary measures to regularize irregular migrants, where necessary, in order to facilitate access to healthcare services during the pandemic, as irregular migrants, asylum seekers, and victims of human trafficking are at a particularly high risk of infection due to their life conditions and the lack of protection of their work environments.

In its interim report on the health of migrants and refugees during the pandemic, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) mentioned the vulnerability of these two groups, especially in terms of access to information on prevention and infection management. Among its recommendations, the WHO suggested carrying out information campaigns in various languages, in a way that is accurate and sensitive to the cultural specificities of different groups, translating all the relevant material (where possible) and including members of migrant and refugee communities in the process. The empowerment of local organizations as well as the use of media and the inclusion of ethnic and religious members are particularly important as these actors are considered, in some communities, more trustworthy than other sources. Moreover, it is important to ensure that the fear of being IDed does not discourage migrants and refugees from seeking healthcare assistance, as this would create a high-risk situation for both individuals and the entire community.

Given the temporary suspension of repatriations and the often precarious conditions of reception facilities, the Council of Europe exhorted European countries to review the situation of rejected asylum seekers hosted in detention centres, and to facilitate their release within reasonable limits and with particular attention to those who are more vulnerable (Council of Europe, 2020b). According to the Council of Europe, these measures are necessary for the protection of the health and dignity of migrants as well as for the public health of host countries.

The document that has probably influenced the debate and the response to COVID-19 the most from the point of view of migration and asylum in Europe is the communication that the European Commission issued in mid-April 2020 (European Commission, 2020). This communication contains guidelines that detail what actions must be undertaken to secure the continuity of procedures as much as possible and, at the same time, to ensure the full protection of people’s health as well as of their fundamental rights.

In terms of procedural aspects on the reception of asylum seekers, the communication refers to the corresponding directive, which specifies that Member States can subject people to medical testing and tracing so long as this takes place according to the principles of necessity, proportionality, and non-discrimination. Asylum seekers must receive basic healthcare assistance – meaning ER treatment – at fighting the pandemic. The right to protection of health, according to the

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services and essential treatment for physical illnesses and severe mental diseases. Quarantine or ‘lockdown’ measures, albeit not regulated by the directive, are permitted according to international law as long as they comply with the principles of necessity, proportionality, and non-discrimination. Health screening of those asylum seekers that are most exposed to the risk of infection (the elderly or the chronically ill) must be given maximum priority. Those requesting international protection who need special medical assistance must be preferentially assigned or transferred to specific healthcare facilities.

The document puts particular emphasis on information campaigns. The Commission suggests informing asylum seekers, in a language they understand sufficiently well, on the national measures adopted to contain and prevent the spread of the virus. By providing accurate information, asylum seekers should be made aware of the importance of handwashing, interpersonal distancing, respiratory and personal hygiene, quarantine or ‘lockdown’ measures, use of disinfectants, the ban on gatherings, the correct use of public spaces, rules for correct behaviour, and mobility restrictions.

2.2 Legislative developments in Italy

In order to secure the health of migrants during the pandemic, some policymakers have adopted a variety of special measures for reception, detention, and provision of legal status.

The “Cura Italia” Decree of March 17th 2020 introduced, among other things, new provisions on the reception and health protection of immigrants in the light of the COVID-19 emergency. These measures have been designed to promote social distancing and avoid the overcrowding of facilities and the deterioration of the life conditions of migrants. First of all, the deadline of region-specific plans for the reception of migrants (the so-called “SIPROIMI” system of “secondary” reception) has been extended from June 30th 2020 to December 31st 2020. The decree also opens SIPROIMI facilities to applicants for international and recipients of humanitarian protection under quarantine or home isolation with active surveillance.

A Ministry of the Interior memo from March 26th 2020 detailed the measures for preventing the spread of COVID-19 in centres for repatriation. Facilities were asked to ensure that guests undergo screening tests for COVID-19, that all areas be sanitized, and that healthcare supplies and accurate information on prevention be provided.

With respect to rescue operations, the Decree n. 150 of April 17th 2020 issued by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, in cooperation with the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of the Interior, and the Ministry of Health, suspended the classification of Italian harbours as “places of safety” for rescue operations conducted by Italian ships outside the Italian SAR area. This measure was motivated by the COVID-19 emergency, given that the availability of medical staff and safe facilities in Italy could not be guaranteed. In the case of rescue operations taking place within the Italian SAR area, on the other hand, the Government specified that “the obligation remains for Italy, even in the current situation of emergency, to try and find every possible solution to ensure the safety of survivors and the individuation of safe places for disembarkation and reception”. Specific health measures regarding rescue operations at sea have been introduced with the Civil Protection Decree of April 12th 2020, which specifies the organizational measures and procedures aimed at offering health assistance to people rescued at sea or following autonomous disembarkations, ensuring that they have a place to live during the quarantine mandated by national dispositions.

The regularization of irregular migrants is the focus of other chapters in the present Report (see Chapters 6 and 14), and it deserves a separate analysis. “Since the birth of the Conte II Government, the issue of the regularization of irregular migrants and the need to move beyond the system of flows have been part of the Italian political agenda. Various actors acknowledge that the policies implemented to date have substantially produced more than half a million irregular presences, having denied these people any possibility of regularization” (ISMU Foundation, 2020a). With the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in Italy, this issue has increasingly grown in relevance in the policy agenda, until it became prominent in the public debate, too. On the one hand, the case for regularization emphasises the protection of the health of individual migrants and, consequently, of their community as well as that of the host community. On the other hand, people from the primary sector of the economy have especially called for some forms of regularization, even partial or temporary ones, in order to employ labourers in harvesting the crops of the agricultural and food sector, especially as the harvest season draws closer (ISMU Foundation, 2020a).

However, various civil society actors and stakeholders (as shown in Chapter 8 on regularization from this Report) have labelled the Decree a missed opportunity in terms of protection of migrants’ health, which – despite being initially prominent in the debate – has not been given priority. Quite on the contrary, priority has been given to the (labour) market: “The leader of trade union USB, one of the most vocal actors urging the Government for a generalized regul-
larization of migrants out of public health concerns, declared that “it is not [farm]hands that need to be regularized, but human beings. The Decreto Rilancio (“Recovery Decree”) includes a provision for the regularization of [farm] hands, not of people’s health”.

3. The COVID-19 emergency: the data

3.1 Data on infection rates among migrants

During the most acute phase of the pandemic and on the following downslope, the issue of infection rates among migrant populations intermittently surfaced in public debate. Despite several bombastic titles that brought attention to outbreaks in single reception facilities, there have been few complete analyses on the epidemiological data on the migrant population. One of the few available datasets is the one presented by the Istituto Superiore di Sanità (Italian High Institute for Health; ISS) during the press conference “COVID-19: An analysis of the epidemiological trend and technical-scientific update” co-organized with the Ministry of the Interior on May 8th 2020. This was the first time that data on the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic within the foreign population and on the basis of different national groups was published in Italy.10 Following an update by the ISS, this data has been processed and published by the ISMU Foundation in a press release (ISMU Foundation, 2020c) offering a detailed account of infection rates among the foreign population, in relation to the main minority groups in Italy and classified according to the Human Development Index (HDI) of the countries of origin. The overall picture reveals that, as of April 22nd, 2020, 5.1% of all COVID-19 cases (6,395) recorded by the ISS were foreign citizens. Romanians were the most impacted nationality (high HDI), followed by Peruvians, Albanians, Ecuadorians, Moroccans, Ukrainians, Egyptians, Moldavians, and Filipinos (medium HDI), then Indians, Bangladeshi, Nigerians, and Pakistanis (low HDI) (Istituto Superiore di Sanità, 2020a). Based on this data, the ISMU Foundation calculated the rate of infection comparing reported cases with ISTAT data on minority groups in Italy as of January 1st, 2019. What emerges is that groups with the highest infection rates are Peruvians (8.1‰) and Ecuadorians (4.2‰), whereas other national groups range from 1.8‰ (Egyptians) to 0.7‰ (Moroccans).

At first, these figures can be seen as partially connected to a high concentration of these groups in the Lombardy region (46.3% of Peruvians and 44.1% of Ecuadorians), the epicentre of the Italian COVID-19 epidemic. This, however, is not sufficient to explain why the rate of infection among these communities is so high, since Egyptians, for example, seem to have a much lower rate (1.8‰) despite their significant presence in Lombardy (67.8%). Moreover, unlike the two Latin American groups, infections among Asian populations are particularly low. It is legitimate to ask if these differences can be attributed to different cultural attitudes of social distancing (or proximity) in the pre-COVID-19 period and/or if different Asian groups have spontaneously put in place more effective containment measures vis-à-vis other groups, possibly on the grounds of past experiences of epidemic outbreaks that affected Asia in the recent past that trigger prompter and more effective responses.

In this regard, it should be emphasized that recent studies (cited in chapters on health in previous ISMU Reports) show that, generally speaking, refugees and migrants are at a very low risk of spreading disease to host populations. On the contrary, they appear to be at a higher risk due to their own social determinants of health (WHO, 2018). In other words, “refugees and migrants are potentially at increased risk of contracting diseases, including COVID-19, because they typically live in overcrowded conditions without access to basic sanitation” (Kluge et al., 2020: 1238). Moreover, refugees often have to overcome bureaucratic, financial, legal and linguistic barriers to access the healthcare system (WHO, 2018).

This kind of data acquires particular importance in light of the limited rise of COVID-19 infections during Summer months and of the way this trend was treated in the public debate. Some politicians have connected such increase to the return of irregular migrant arrivals on Italian coasts.11 According to the ISS (2020b), however, the main reason for a surge in infections is related to the return of holidaymakers from vacations abroad.

3.2 Initiatives by Italian stakeholders

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic in Italy, the life and health conditions of migrants have been identified as risk factors, attracting the attention of public and civil-society actors who undertook specific actions in this regard.

Regarding irregular settlements, the Government adopted a set of measures aimed at strengthening actions already in place to protect the health of migrant citizens, in order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in contexts that are considered to be at high risk (Chamber of Deputies, 2020). Specific actions have been put in place within the Italian SU.PRE.EME Programme (Sud protagonista nel superamento delle emergenze or the South as a Protagonist in Overcoming Emergencies), financed by the European AMIF – Emergency Funds (AP2019).

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10 Regolarizzazione, lo si crede oscuri degli esclusi: “Siamo invisibili per il governo, lo staremo anche nei campi”, “La Repubblica”, 15/05/2020 [online], available at: https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2020/05/15/news/regolarizzazione_braccianti_migranti_soumahoro-256673396/.
11 A video recording of the press conference can be watched at the following address: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=138&v=IKqNJ3pMgko&feature=emb_logo.
The programme focuses on cases of severe exploitation and marginalization of irregular migrants in the five less developed Italian regions (Apulia, Campania, Sicily, Basilicata, Calabria). One of the objectives of the programme specifically targets health-related issues and aims at strengthening healthcare services for migrant workers as well as extending the information campaign on how to access local healthcare services. Some regions, like Apulia, have made specific national AMIF funds available for similar interventions in specific irregular settlements.

The conditions of Repatriation Centres (CPR) have raised some concerns. In a communication of April 2nd, 2020, the Association of Juridical Studies on Immigration (ASGI) asked local health centres (ASL) to ensure that the migrants’ right to health in CPRs was being guaranteed (ASGI, 2020). Specifically, ASGI mentioned the ban on any form of crowding cited in the Governmental decrees on COVID-19 risk containment – especially in conditions of close proximity – as well as the High Commissioner of Human Rights of the Council of Europe’s appeal to release any detained foreign citizens and asylum seekers (Council of Europe, 2020b).

4. Conclusions

Over 2020, the health conditions of the migrant population have inevitably been influenced by the COVID-19 health emergency. The development of the epidemic at the global level, including Europe, has made Italy both an object influenced by global practice and a subject influencing global measures aimed at containing the spread of the virus.

Among the practices adopted at the European and national level, the most relevant have been healthcare and social distancing measures in reception facilities of all kinds, information campaigns on socio-hygienic prevention practices for migrant populations, and strict measures on SAR operations. In Italy, specifically, the COVID-19 emergency has pushed the issue of migrant regularization to the top of the political agenda, although some have pointed out how this resulted in a system which, somewhat paradoxically, does not put the health of migrants – and hence of the whole community – at its centre.

The lack of priority given to migrants in the system of prevention and management of the epidemic is confirmed by the empirical data gathered, presented and analysed in this chapter. Once established that, overall, the risk of the infection spreading from migrants to the host populations is very low, it became clear that the risk to individual and collective health is represented not so much by being a migrant per se – whether regular or irregular – as by the poor conditions generated by the inequality that migrant populations suffer, such as e.g. when accessing decent housing or regional health services. The data on infection rates among the different migrant communities raise questions on the overall prevention strategies adopted by each migrant community. Adequate answers will require months – if not years – to be provided.

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The year 2020 can no doubt be defined as “the year of COVID-19.” From the beginning of 2020, the pandemic has hit Europe, and Italy in particular, leading to a postponement of any other preoccupation to better times. The global nature of the pandemic, however, has also raised a series of issues connected to human mobility, which are also global in character.

The pandemic has first and foremost revealed the extent to which the mobility of workers is essential to the functioning of the national economies of so-called “Northern” countries. The agricultural sector, for example, is particularly dependent upon foreign labour force, both in Europe and in North America, and a threat to production in this sector poses risks to the food supply in Europe (European Commission, 2020). The labour shortages in the agricultural sector have impacted Italy as well, leading to the implementation of special measures via the Law Decree n. 18/2020.

Another global problem raised by the pandemic is the question of international protection and the compliance with the legal obligations concerning the Status of Refugees as imposed by the Geneva Convention. As isolation measures were put in place and national borders were closed to contain the spread of the virus, provisions adopted towards citizens of other countries have varied significantly across different EU countries. These are generally based on two axes. The first axis is the closure of borders to prospective immigrants, whatever their reasons for entry. In mid-March 2020, most EU Member States closed their borders alongside the majority of their asylum offices, thus halting the
registration of many demands for protection. The closure of borders has created serious problems to asylum seekers and could represent a violation of the principle of non-refoulement, which is a main thrust of the Geneva Convention.

The second axis concerns the treatment of those who have already entered the territory of a Member State. The measures adopted in this regard are manifold (see UNHCR, 2020 for more details), but they can be grouped essentially into two categories. The first category includes measures such as those adopted by Portugal, where a permit to stay was granted to all migrants who had submitted their request before the COVID-19 emergency. This has facilitated their access to public services, including health services. The second category includes the majority of other EU and EEA Member States. Most of these countries opted for measures aimed at adapting the existing system to the needs of the health emergency. They generally did this through the construction of new reception facilities or through the conversion of existing ones, improving their hygienic conditions, conducting meetings online, etc. (Ibid.). In some cases, however, these measures turned out to be particularly problematic in a context in which interpersonal distancing is crucial and reception centres are overcrowded.

Be they economic or humanitarian, the issues connected to migration that have emerged during the COVID-19 crisis, or have been exacerbated by it, require political responses. In an integrated space such as that of the EU, these responses could have a greater impact should they be adopted at the supranational level. In February 2020, before the COVID-19 crisis broke out, the European Commission announced the introduction of a New Pact for Migration and Asylum – an agreement for the establishment of a migration management system which would be more efficient, humane, and resilient. During the last few years, observers were able to see how reluctant Member States can be to transferring broader responsibilities regarding migration to the EU. The 2019 ISMU Report especially highlighted the reluctancies of the so-called "Visegrád Group" regarding asylum, but it also cast light on the diverging positions of Italy vis-à-vis Germany and Austria regarding secondary movements (Van Wolleghem, 2019). Given the rising politicization of the issue of migration and its capacity to influence elections and government formations – which has especially emerged in the numerous elections held in 2017 and 2018 – it is important to look into the public opinion’s feeling on the matter (Section 1). This allows for an evaluation of the room for manoeuvre that European institutions have for launching common initiatives on migration policies, especially in the context of the negotiations for the next European budget, which will determine the priorities of the Union (Section 2).

1. Immigration in European public opinion

Eurobarometer data up to the end of 2019 reveal that, three years after the so-called ‘Asylum Crisis’, migration remains one of the most important issues for the public opinion across the EU. In the period before the Asylum Crisis, the percentage of citizens who declared that immigration was one of the two most important issues faced by their country rarely exceeded 10%. This percentage rose to 36% at the peak of the Asylum Crisis in autumn 2015, and gradually fell to 17% in autumn 2019. The average tendency in Europe, however, conceals significant variations between European countries. Figure 1 refers to: i) Italy, Malta and Greece, three of the countries most affected by the Asylum Crisis; ii) the average percentage in Visegrád Group countries (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia), who fiercely opposed greater integration at the European level; and iii) the EU average.

In Malta, the issue took on a significantly higher relevance for the whole period compared to other EU countries, albeit with some oscillations. In Italy, where the average oscillated between 2% and 15% in the period between 2008 and 2014, percentages were much higher during the Asylum Crisis, with an average of over 31% from spring 2015 to autumn 2019. In Greece, the trend was similar to that of Italy but with generally lower levels, except for the last Eurobarometer data from the spring-autumn 2019 period, where the importance of immigration rose from 18% to 47%. This rise can plausibly be related to the new increase in migrant arrivals on Greek coasts, to the tensions at the Turkish-Greek border, and to Turkish President Erdogan’s threats to “open the doors” to outbound Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey. In the Visegrád Group countries, who were not much affected by migration before the Asylum Crisis, the importance of the issue in the public opinion peaked in autumn 2015. Although the percentages decreased in the following period, they still remained significantly higher than they were before the Crisis (with an average of 16% after the Crisis compared with average levels of 3% before it).

2 For more information see also https://www.ismu.org/europa-africa-e-migrazioni/.

3 At the time of writing, Eurobarometer data is collected only up to the fall of 2019 and do not allow us to evaluate the priorities of European citizens during the COVID-19 pandemic.
The issues a country must face are typically in great number, and the policy-makers’ attention is insufficient to consider them all. Only a small number of questions are taken into consideration by political actors and tackled through public intervention. These tend to coincide with the issues deemed of greater concern to citizens; it is thus important to consider the relevance of the issue of migration in relation to other issues which are targeted by public policy. Figure 2 illustrates the varying importance that EU citizens attributed to the six most important issues that European countries must face until fall 2019. Over almost all the period considered, the highest importance was clearly given to unemployment, topped only by health and welfare and by environment issues in the autumn of 2019. Immigration reached the same level of importance as unemployment in autumn 2015, with 36% of respondents self-reportedly considering immigration as one of the two most important issues.

Over and above the national relevance of the issue, Eurobarometer data also highlights the support of European citizens for a common policy on migration and asylum. 71% and 72% of respondents said they were in favour of a common migration policy in autumn 2014 and autumn 2019, respectively. Over those 5 years, the percentage has remained quite stable, oscillating between 67 and 73% (with an average of 7% of non-respondents).

Yet support for a common migration policy alone says little as to what kind of policy of EU citizens support. In the same vein, Member States may well agree on the idea of developing a European policy on immigration, but they need not necessarily agree on what such a policy should look like. The failure of the Dublin IV Regulation proposal is a case in point. The proposal of the Von Der Leyen Commission to adopt a European Pact for Migration and Asylum – which would redistribute responsibilities among Member States (see Chapters 11 and 13 in this volume) – could easily lead, once again, to a strong opposition within the Council. In the words that the German Minister of the Interior used when Germany assumed the Presidency of the Council: “[The reform of the common system of asylum in the EU] will certainly be a very difficult problem to solve in the following months. I would be happy if during our presidency we should find at least a political agreement on the most important questions” (Seehofer, 2020).
In 2021, the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) should be implemented. The Commission’s forecast and the intention of the then Budget Commissioner Günther Oettinger went in the direction of a swift adoption of the new MFF. As of July 2020, however, the Commission’s proposal (laid out in May 2018) was still on the negotiation table. Even after the 27 leaders of the Union have reached a troubled agreement on July 21st, the budget still needs to be approved by the Council and ratified by the European Parliament. The latter has already said that it will not merely ratify the decision and that it “is ready to deny its consent for the MFF until a satisfactory agreement has been reached” (European Parliament, 2020: 3).

With the COVID-19 emergency resulting in a change in the EU’s political priorities and in the proposal of a Recovery Fund, the negotiations within the European Council held from 17th to 21st July 2020 proved particularly intense. It is not surprising, therefore, that it took the Council an entire four days and four nights to meet on a common ground. Deciding on the MFF is indeed a complex process, in which the 27 Member States have to agree on the EU’s expenditure over the next seven years.

2. The next Multiannual Financial Framework

2.1 The main points of the MFF

The MFF is the Union’s expenditure plan: it imposes expenditure limits and aims at ensuring an organized and contained use of funding within the margins of available resources (Article 312 TFEU). It is proposed by the European Commission and subsequently discussed within the General Affairs Council. The latter predisposes a “negotiation box” to facilitate the work of the European Council, providing a political perspective on the main aspects of the long-term budget plan. On this basis, the Council of the European Union defines its own position on the matter, and its members must approve the final text unanimously. The process ends when the European Parliament approves the budget as defined by the Council.

Over the years, the EU’s budget has stabilized at approximately 1% of the Gross National Product (GNP) cumulated at the European level. In the 1993-1999 period, for instance, the budget was set at 1.25% of the GNP while in the 2014-2020 period it was set at 1%. According to the initial proposal of the Commission, issued in 2018, the budget for the 2021-2027 MFF was set at 1.11% of the European GNP, i.e. approximately 1,279.4 billion euros (current prices).

The EU budget for the MFF is divided into various areas of expenditure that reflect the EU’s own areas of action and political priorities. Historically, these priorities have included a common agricultural policy and a policy for the cohesion of the areas of the Union. Together, these amounted to approximately 80% of the EU’s expenditure from 1993 to 2006, before relatively decreasing in incidence from 2007 onwards.4

4 For more details, see COM(2018)321 final, p. 23.

The Union’s migration policy, on the other hand, has always been allocated a considerably smaller chunk of the common budget. In the 2014-2020 MFF, the funds devoted to this policy area amounted to 0.93% of the total budget. The European Commission’s initial proposal for the next MFF included a significant increase of dedicated resources, effectively trebling the budget and bringing it to 2.73% of total funding available. As we shall see, the figures were later revised and reduced, both in the second proposal of the Commission presented in May 2020 and in the conclusions of the European Council, even though they have been significantly increased with respect to the previous MFF. Considering that the total budget of the EU has remained relatively stable, such a rise necessarily implies a significant reduction in the funding of other policy actions.

2.2 An emphasis on border management: “10,000 additional border guards”

In May 2018, Budget Commissioner Günther Oettinger announced in his presentation of the Commission’s initial proposal that 10,000 additional border guards were to be hired for Frontex by 2027 (Oettinger, 2018). The announcement itself may appear anecdotal, but it is meaningful insofar as it reflects the objectives of the MFF in terms of migration policy. Indeed, the initial proposal of the Commission reflected the emphasis that the Union has been placing for years on the need for measures aimed at reducing irregular migration to Europe. While aiming at achieving the goals of the Bratislava and Rome agendas, the priorities of the Union have also been significantly influenced by the Asylum Crisis as well as by the need to respond to the concerns of European citizens, especially in the light of the Brexit referendum (Drachenberg et al., 2017).

The Bratislava Declaration5 is the result of an informal meeting of the Heads of the 27 Member States held on September 16th, 2016. It defines the key priorities of the Union for the months following the meeting, which mainly consist in reducing the arrival of irregular migrants via a strengthening of external borders and an externalization of border management (the complete implementation of which includes an agreement with Turkey and with other countries). Despite its relevance, the topic of solidarity among Member States – often discussed within the framework of the reform of the Dublin Regulation – is mentioned only twice in the Declaration, thus disappearing de facto from the political agenda. Asylum policy is not mentioned at all.

Following the Bratislava Declaration, the leaders of the 27 countries met again in Rome in the first months of 2017 to draft agreed-upon guidelines for the next ten years. These guidelines were presented in the Rome Declara-

5 The Bratislava Declaration can be downloaded at the following link: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21250/160916-bratislava-declaration-and-roadmapen16.pdf.
tion on March 25th, 2017. The document set out four main objectives: a safe and secure Europe, a sustainable and prosperous Europe, a social Europe, and a stronger Europe on the global scene. With respect to migration, the objective of a “safe and secure Europe” is of particular interest. It is presented as follows:

“a Union where all citizens feel safe and can move freely, where our external borders are secured, with an efficient, responsible and sustainable migration policy, respecting international norms; a Europe determined to fight terrorism and organised crime.”

In this context, the initial proposal of the Commission for the next MFF reflects the previous steps geared towards greater control at the Union’s borders. This proposal included a significant increase in resources allocated for border management (+197% for the integrated management of borders funds; +289% for the European agencies involved in border control).

In the same way, other legislative proposals from the Commission for funding schemes not explicitly destined to border control seem geared at reducing immigration. The Asylum and Migration Fund (AMF), for example, is aimed at supporting Member States in receiving asylum seekers and in the integration of third-country nationals. According to the specific legislative proposal, the AMF has the following three objectives:

“(a) strengthening and developing the Common European Asylum System by ensuring that EU legislation in this field is efficiently and uniformly applied; (b) supporting legal migration to EU States in line with the labour market needs and promoting the effective integration of non-EU nationals; (c) enhancing fair and effective return strategies, which contribute to combating irregular migration, with an emphasis on sustainability and effectiveness of the return process”

A novelty of the new funding structure lies with the synergy between funds. In particular, the AMF is to be supplemented with funds for cohesion policy (which aims at supporting the socio-economic integration of foreigners) and with funds for external policy (aimed at tackling aspects such as the root causes of migration, including cooperation with third countries on issues such as migration and security). This converges with the external dimension of the common European system of asylum (see point (a) above) and indicates that at least one “significant component” of the fund will contribute to the external management of migration. This, in turn, raises questions on the implementation and the goals of the fund, as the external dimension of asylum policies tends to merge into border management policies.

2.3 The effect of the pandemic on the MFF and its adoption by the European Council

In response to the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and after difficult informal negotiations due to the emission of European bonds, the EU issued a proposal for the economic recovery of the Union. It includes 750 billion euros aimed at boosting the economy with an eye to the priorities established by the MFF. It is important to note that the resources allocated for the MFF and for the recovery fund come from different sources: whereas the former will be financed through national contributions to the EU’s budget, the latter will not weigh directly on the Union’s resources. Instead, it will be financed by the market through bonds issued by the Commission. In this way, the funds loaned will add to the Union’s budget on top of the MFF. Yet despite this difference in funding, the allocation of MFF resources had to be amended to face the short-term and long-term implications of the COVID-19 emergency in the second proposal of the Commission and in the European Council’s final considerations on the MFF.

The proposal of the European Commission for the next MFF, presented in May 2020, was based on a response to the crisis along two axes. The first axis is the Recovery Fund, which became known as Next Generation EU (NG-EU) and consists in a temporary increase of the Union’s economic intervention. The second axis is the reorganization of the MFF itself in order to consolidate economic recovery with targeted investments in the long run. The Commission’s budget proposals, however, were overturned by the need to find a unanimous agreement among the 27 leaders, each of which had different preferences. The final agreement reached by the European Council in July 2020 includes a set of changes to the original proposal. Firstly, the overall budget of the Union was reduced from 1.11% to 1% of the European GNP. The agreement also includes a reduction of the MFF resources allocated to most expenditure items (Figure 3). These are to be compensated by the sums included in the Recovery Fund, except for migration policies. In its conclusions, the European Council has established that this sector would be allocated 22.7 billion euro, as opposed to the 31.1 billion proposed by the Commission in May 2020. It ought to be emphasised that this amount is still greater than it was in the previous MFF (approximately) 10 billion euro, and its proportion is 2.1% of the total MFF (excluding the Recovery Fund). Reductions affect both migration policies (asylum, integration, and repatriation) and border management. Specifically, the AMF is reduced to 8.7 billion euro – 16.4% less than the Commission had proposed – whereas border management policies are halved (from 21.3 billion to 10.7 billion euro). One must consider, however, that border management resources, albeit not greater than those proposed by the Commission, will still be twice as large as in the previous MFF.
The Twenty-sixth Italian Report on Migrations 2020

This distribution of resources between different policy strands seems to indicate a relatively balanced development of political priorities. The emphasis placed on border management in the Commission’s initial proposal seems to have vanished in the final text adopted by the European Council, thus questioning the EU’s ability to keep Oettinger’s promise of recruiting 10,000 extra border guards by 2027. The main missing piece in the European Council’s conclusions is EASO, the European Agency for Support Office. The Commission had expressed its intention to strengthen it in anticipation of the Asylum Pact announced in February 2020. In the conclusions of the European Council, however, EASO is not even mentioned. Nonetheless, a simple calculation reveals that, once the resources for the AMF and the resources for border control are accounted for, 3.3 billion euro of funding remain unallocated. As of September 2020, it is not clear how this sum will be spent, but even if half of it were to finance EASO’s activities, the resources at its disposal would double with respect to the previous MFF.

Figure 3. Change in budget headings from the first Commission’s Proposal (May 2018) to the MFF adopted by the European Council. %

Despite the crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU has been able to carry out its political agenda on the management of human mobility. Supported by a public opinion generally favourable to coordinated action at the EU level, the European Commission has both presented its new Pact on Migration and Asylum and allocated significantly more resources to migration policies for the seven years to come.

In a context marked by the saliency of migration issues, European citizens’ support for a common policy on migration seems to have stabilized over time. The Asylum Crisis may have played an important role in this regard: the sudden rise of flows in the 2014-2016 period and their redistribution from the Mediterranean route to the Balkan route may have determined a rise in awareness about the need to manage migration in a coordinated fashion. That said, the generalized support for a coordinated European policy on migration and the perception of the relevance of this issue in the European public opinion do not simply translate into unconditional support for any common action. Instead, they result in a more critical approach to the actions taken by national leaders on the European scene. To use Hooghe and Marks’s jargon of “constraining sensus”, “Party leaders in positions of authority must look over their shoulders when negotiating European issues”, and “what they see does not reassure them” (Hooghe, Marks, 2008: 5). In other words, it is no longer the time of permissive sensus” , “what they see does not reassure them” , “Party leaders in positions of authority must look over their shoulders when negotiating European issues”, and “what they see does not reassure them” (Hooghe, Marks, 2008: 5). In other words, it is no longer the time of permissive consensus, when national leaders, protected from their electorate, could simply make agreements at the European level.

The public opinion’s ability to influence national leaders may easily obstruct the EU’s plans. This holds not only for the Pact on Migration and Asylum – whose objectives are easily identifiable – but also for the implementation of the MFF. The latter was still being negotiated as of November 2020, and it included a significant increase of the resources allocated to migration policy (the amount of funding doubled compared to the previous MFF). Along with said increase, the specific funding proposals relating to migration policy include greater flexibility as to how the available resources can be used, both at the national and at the European level. Once again, the preferences of the public could constrain national leaders and influence the direction that the policies funded by the MFF will take. The open question therefore concerns the preferences of European citizens and the possibility to make them converge on a set of measures that is coherent, fair, and respectful of international obligations.
References


8. The politics of immigration in 2020: regularization and regional elections

Nicola Pasini and Marta Regalia

The present chapter of the Report focuses on two important – albeit not strictly connected – events that have marked the politics of immigration over 2020: the issuing of the so-called “Recovery Decree” and the election by direct vote of the Regional Councils and Presidents in eight Italian Regions.

1. The debate on regularization: how the “Recovery Decree” came about

The steps that led to the approval of the “Regularization Decree” have been anything but straightforward.\(^1\) Talks about going beyond the existing “Flows Decrees” and adopting some form of regularization of irregular migrants began since the early days of the second Conte government. All the parties supporting the government have in different degrees recognized that the policies currently in place have failed in addressing the issue. However, the issue of regularization was not considered a priority and has only really been addressed for the first time during the debate on the (later rejected) amendment to the Financial Stability Law 2020 presented by Senator Emma Bonino.

The issue attracted the government’s attention at the end of February 2020

\(^1\) See the detailed study section on the ISMU website: https://www.ismu.org/la-nuova-regolarizzazione-degli-immigrati/.
as the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, and it became increasingly urgent as a consequence of the prolonged lockdown on the economy – especially on the agricultural sector. Members of the agricultural sector began to explicitly call for procedures to regularize their workers, be they even partial or temporary, in order to enable farmhands to assist production in agriculture and food production in preparation for the challenges that would come as the harvest season drew closer.

In April, former PM Renzi’s party, Italia Viva, made the issue of regularization a priority of its own. The Minister for Agriculture, Food, and Forestry Policies, Teresa Bellanova, also a member of the party, exerted all forms of pressure, even threatening to resign from her post and to withdraw the party from the governing coalition, in order to obtain the inclusion of regularization measures of some sort in the “April Decree”. After various postponements, the decree was redrafted once again, only to be issued in its final version in May 2020.

The debate on the Decree was primarily a confrontation between the Five Star Movement and Italia Viva. The “regent” of the Five Star Movement, Vito Crimi, reiterated his party’s opposition to a generalized regularization and demanded that stricter criteria be introduced. Italia Viva, on the other hand, wished for a more inclusive measure. However, some members of the Five Star Movement took softer stances: Minister for Social Policies Nunzia Catalfo’s stance, for instance, was closer to that of Minister Bellanova and of the Minister of the Interior, Luciana Lamorgese, than to the official line of her own party.

Expectedly, the voice of those who opposed to a regularization measure made itself heard in the Parliament: Matteo Salvini’s League and Giorgia Meloni’s Brothers of Italy both lamented the risk of negative consequences from regularization, both for the economy and for the social cohesion of the country as a whole. Even within the opposition, however, some proved more open to the idea, especially within Silvio Berlusconi’s party Forza Italia. Mara Carfagna, in particular, stated that the measure was in line and in continuity with the two large interventions undertaken by the centre-right government in the past, which aimed at identifying irregular migrants and led to the regularization of almost one million workers.

Meanwhile, other sectors of society also gave voice to their own point of view. The National Antimafia Prosecutor Federico Cafiero De Raho stressed the positive aspects of a regularization measure, which would disrupt the activity of criminal organizations by diminishing their power over local territories. Despite their internal differences, workers’ unions and the private sector were also mostly favourable, although each organization (Confindustria, Coldiretti, Confindustria, and the various workers’ unions) would lay their own preferred hypotheses on the table.

The resulting public debate was, as it often happens, confused, confusing, and divisive. By its very nature, the issue of immigration polarized both the media and the ensuing debate.

2. The “Recovery Decree”:
   expectations and requests for regularization

After extenuating negotiations that attempted to juggle the pressing requests of Italia Viva and the limitations imposed by the Five Star Movement, an agreement was reached that materialized in the so-called “Recovery Decree.” The proposed solution was very close to the one that the Five Star Movement had hoped for, and very far from the expectations of those who would have wanted a more generalized regularization. Indeed, the regularization was limited to a residence permit for workers in the food, agricultural, and domestic sectors, while employers could still be held penally accountable for their past conduct in the employment of irregular workers. A further clause also enabled migrant workers whose residence permit had expired to regularize their position on their own (on the issue of regularization, see also Ch. 6 of this Report).

According to governmental estimates, approximately 200,000 workers would have been able to benefit from this measure, including not only irregular migrants but also Italian workers without a valid job contract. After a rocky start, application for regularization to the Ministry of the Interior began to intensify, reaching a total of 207,542 on August 15th, in line with the government’s forecast.

Details on the categories of workers who applied for regularization, however, show a great unbalance among different categories of workers as well as in their distribution over the country. Applicants are prevalently domestic workers and carers (85%) who are based primarily in the North (mostly in Lombardy) or in the larger cities (Milan, Naples, Rome). A closer look at the ranking of the countries of origin of regularized immigrants reveals that they come in the highest number from Ukraine, followed by Bangladesh and Pakistan. The number of applications for a temporary residence permit submitted by foreign citizens is also relatively small, coming in at only 12,986.

In the light of these outcomes, the ISMU Foundation has set out to interview a sample of key actors to better understand the developments and the effects of this measure. In the following section, we shall illustrate what emerged from this qualitative study.

3. Interviews with key actors

Immediately after the “Recovery Decree” had passed, the ISMU Foundation conducted a set of interviews with key informants (institutional actors and representatives from the civil society, special interest groups, and members of the third sector of the economy) with the aim of exploring the contents and implications of the measure. The interviews also aimed at establishing whether a generalized view on the measure could be identified or whether various stances
on the matter could be seen as reflecting pre-existing sectoral interests. As a limiting case, it was entirely possible that no agreement was to be found even within the various categories of social actors.

The questions (14 in total, all open-ended) revolved around four topics:

1) Importance and priority of regularization.
2) Opinions on the different aspects of regularization as per the Recovery Decree.
3) Usefulness of regularization for migrants and for the country as a whole.
4) Consequences of regularization.

The analysis of the interviews reveals what follows.

### 3.1 Importance and priority of regularization

Farmers’ unions do not consider regularization a priority. They deemed it more urgent to establish “green corridors” with Romania, to issue a Decree on immigration flows for 2020, or even to introduce a simplified procedure using a voucher-based work scheme and, last but not least, to extend expired seasonal work permits – although the latter measure would in fact be implemented. According to this group, regularization should have affected a higher number of production sectors.

Workers’ unions deemed it more important to introduce a comprehensive measure instead of an emergency measure (as is the one introduced with the Recovery Decree), since the latter could not possibly be a permanent solution to the problem. Workers lament that many sectors were excluded from the provision (e.g. trade and hospitality), thus favouring work under bogus employment contracts in those sectors.

The associations and exponents of civil society believe that regularization was necessary, but argue that the one introduced with the Recovery Decree will be insufficient and discriminatory, whereas a generalized regularization that favoured integration, access to the labour market, and the acquisition of equal rights independently of the area of work would have been necessary.

### 3.2 The various aspects of regularization

Farmers’ unions emphasize the weaknesses of the measure connected to some technical aspects, as well as the unpreparedness of the public administration – which, once the measure was put in place, had not fully disclosed all the necessary application steps to be taken to benefit from it.

All workers’ unions agree on the cumbersome nature of the regularization process and note that the voucher-based work system can be no solution to the problem since it does not yield residence permits.

Associations and exponents of civil society consider this regularization measure far too exclusive. Moreover, they emphasize the lack of clarity concerning the regularization process itself. Vouchers were not considered an apt solution to the problem of illegal labour, let alone to the irregular status of migrants.

### 3.3 Usefulness of regularization

Farmers’ unions believe that regularization will be useful both for migrants to obtain greater social security (including health care) and for the country as a whole – even though no such measure alone can contribute significantly to boosting the national economy.

Workers’ unions, on the other hand, suggest that the regularization measure was geared at meeting the economic needs of the country more than those of migrants. They believe that the measure will not benefit the country’s economy due to its limited nature. (It only affects two sectors.)

Civil society actors believe that regularization is necessary for migrants to become financially autonomous and thereby participate more fully in the social life of the country. They believe that this can have beneficial consequences for society as a whole.

### 3.4 Consequences of regularization

Farmers’ unions believe that strict control measures will be necessary to avoid undue benefits from the Recovery Decree, but they also believe that union members will not make great use of it. They doubt that this regularization measure will solve the problem of gangmasters in Southern Italy. On the contrary, the measure could paradoxically benefit organized crime, which already trades in the regularization black market. There is no expectation in terms of a rise or fall in salaries, yet regularization is expected to result in more security and protection for workers.

According to workers’ unions, the closure of borders will prevent regularization from having a strong pull effect. Nevertheless, applications for regularization domestic labour may still escalate since they can serve as a cover for other types of occupation. Moreover, regular contracts may be stipulated for fewer hours than the actual work shifts: this would leave part of the salary undeclared and benefit not only employers who would pay less taxes, but also migrant workers who do not intend to receive pension payments in Italy.

Civil society associations and actors believe that, in the present conjuncture, regularization is unlikely to favour immigration. Instead, it will lead to better salaries and greater social protection in the long term. However, the measure may also foster a black market for job contracts which, in some cases, can exploit the migrants’ vulnerability. Besides, the migrants’ status would fall back to irregular in the event of unemployment.

All social actors agree that the matter of asylum seekers remains unaddressed: many of them already have a regular employment, and it is not clear how they can obtain a stable residence permit by regularizing their position.
### Table 1. Key actors and their stance on the regularization measure included in the Recovery Decree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regularization</th>
<th>Actors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employer associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a priority</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should have been extended to other sectors</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will be useful for</td>
<td>Migrants and the economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will either raise or lower salaries</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will grant workers higher social protection</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will favour irregular immigration</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could be taken undue advantage of</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems</td>
<td>Too many requirements, Lack of clarity, Asylum seekers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ISMU analysis

### 4. 2020 Regional elections: what parties campaign for

2020 has also been the year of regional elections. Between January and September, citizens in eight Italian Regions voted via direct elections for their Head of Regional Government – plus the election in the autonomous region of Aosta Valley. Although regional governments have less power than the central government in matters concerning migration, the policy proposals of different candidates on the issue of immigration are worth analysing. The management of migration flows is not among the Regions’ powers, yet policies on the social dimension of immigration and on security are – including specific measures for integration. These intersect with migration policy insofar as regions are called upon to establish the criteria for access to certain services.

It ought to be noted in this respect that different approaches to the issue in different Italian regions can be attributed, at least in part, to the political orientation of the governing coalition.

In this paragraph, we shall focus on the analysis of the electoral manifestos of the main presidential candidates in regional elections, in order to assess to what extent, if at all, the immigration issue is taken into consideration, how it is framed, and what solutions are being proposed.

Table 2 summarises the electoral manifestos of each candidate in each region, highlighting references to migrants or foreign citizens and, where applicable, the chapter/paragraph of reference. All the main candidates except for Vincenzo De Luca in Campania and Daniela Sbrollini in Veneto published a manifesto. Not all manifestos, however, made explicit reference to the immigration issue.

**In Calabria**, only the centre-left candidate Callipo made a reference to migrants in his manifesto, and only in a section on law and order, although the proposed measures also refer to social inclusion.

**In Emilia-Romagna**, the issue was mentioned both by Simone Benini of the Five Star Movement and by Stefano Bonaccini of the centre-left coalition, whereas the League candidate Lucia Borgonzoni made no mention of it. Benini only touched upon the issue in passing in a section on civil rights, whereas incumbent president Bonaccini made only a brief reference to migrants while enumerating the challenges ahead.

**In Campania**, no candidates mentioned immigration in their electoral manifesto.

**In Liguria**, by contrast, all candidates addressed the issue, if only by mentioning it in their manifesto, and from different points of view. In a section on security, incumbent president Toti suggested:

“Facilitating voluntary repatriations of immigrant citizens; increasing the responsibility of minority communities in preventing and reporting conditions of extreme poverty, marginality, and criminality; fostering a coherent organization of language courses and of civic education for foreigners aimed at making them aware of their rights and duties”.

Sansa, the candidate of a coalition stretching from the centre-left to the Five Star Movement, included the issue in a chapter on education and culture. He proposed:

“Measures to favour the socio-economic integration of migrants, marginalized communities, and vulnerable groups”.

Finally, Italia Viva candidate Massardo suggested:

“Managing migration flows with an unbiased approach and in cooperation with the central government”, in a chapter dedicated to social cohesion.
In the Marche region, the winning centre-right candidate Francesco Acquaroli spoke of a “plan to monitor and contrast criminality and irregular or illegal immigration” in a chapter on security from his manifesto.

Mercorelli of the Five Star Movement did not make any reference to immigration, whereas Maurizio Mangialardi (centre-left) devoted a whole chapter of his manifesto to the issue, claiming that it was necessary to “keep implementing the regional plans supported by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) in order to strengthen and secure measures of social inclusion”.

In Puglia, neither Fitto (centre-right) nor Scalfarotto (Italia Viva) made any mention of immigration. On the contrary, incumbent president Emiliano highlighted immigration as one of the main challenges for the next administration, suggesting: “Generative paths and actions aimed at recognizing the value of immigrant people in local communities”.

The Five Star Movement candidate Antonella Laricchia gave the issue more space in the chapter on internationalisation and international cooperation of her manifesto.

In Tuscany, only the centre-right candidate Ceccardi made reference to immigration in her manifesto, in relation to the issue of security.

In Veneto, all candidates elaborated fully and extensively on the issue of immigration. Incumbent President Zaia expanded on it in a long paragraph in the chapter on security of his manifesto, titled “Solidarity in Veneto, but not without rules: sharing stronger control of migration with the government”.

Presenting data on migrant offenders, Zaia “inevitably” brought together the issues of security and immigration, while acknowledging that the presence of migrants “has contributed, especially during the past crisis, to compensating for some structural shortcomings of the local community, such as the fall of in birth-rates or the ageing of the population”.

Zaia also invoked the need to create Italian language courses to foster the integration of migrant communities and educate them to “preventing and reporting conditions of extreme poverty, marginality, and criminality”. In matters of labour and production, Zaia’s proposals encourage “positive experiences where foreign workers and entrepreneurs work together with local production systems in order to contrast illegal activities, labour exploitation, and no man’s lands”.

The Five Star Movement candidate Cappelletti, on the other hand, elaborated on migration in reference to social services. He suggested: “Supporting territorial offices for cultural mediation in order to foster integration in compliance with regional laws and in a way that also takes local culture into consideration”.

He also proposed: “The creation of a round table consisting of institutions, charities, and reception facilities for refugees and asylum seekers aimed at launching social work projects for migrants, with the goal of contributing a climate of tolerance, collaboration, and cultural interaction, as well as fostering professional training for migrants and refugees”.

Lorenzoni (centre-left) also devoted a paragraph in his manifesto to the issue of immigration while tackling the issue of inequality. He made twice reference to migrants when dealing with illegal labour and especially suggested vocational training as a means of protecting migrants from exploitation and discrimination.
Table 2. Election manifestos and results of the main regional candidates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Coalition</th>
<th>Electoral manifesto</th>
<th>References to issue of migration</th>
<th>Chapter</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calabria</td>
<td>Jole Santelli</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Francesco Aiello</td>
<td>Five Star Movement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Filippo Callipo</td>
<td>Centre-left + Italia Viva</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sì</td>
<td>Law and order</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emilia-Romagna</td>
<td>Lucia Borgonzoni</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simone Benini</td>
<td>Five Star Movement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Civil rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stefano Bonaccini</td>
<td>Centre-left + Italia Viva</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Rights and duties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campania</td>
<td>Stefano Caldoro</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valeria Ciarambino</td>
<td>Five Star Movement</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vincenzo De Luca</td>
<td>Centre-left + Italia Viva</td>
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<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
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<td>Liguria</td>
<td>Giovanni Toti</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Security</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ferruccio Sansa</td>
<td>Five Star Movement</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Education and culture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Aristide Massardo</td>
<td>Italia Viva</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Social cohesion</td>
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<td>Marche</td>
<td>Francesco Accquaroli</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gian Mario Mercorelli</td>
<td>Five Star Movement</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>/</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Maurizio Mangialardi</td>
<td>Centre-left + Italia Viva</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Migration policy</td>
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<td>Puglia</td>
<td>Raffaele Fitto</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Antonella Laricchia</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Ivan Scalfarotto</td>
<td>Italia Viva</td>
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<td>/</td>
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<td>Tuscany</td>
<td>Susanna Ceccardi</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
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</table>

Source: ISMU analysis on data from the websites of candidates and of the Ministry of the Interior
Immigration features in the policy proposals of parties and coalitions (and of their candidates in regional election) from the entire political spectrum, but the issue is framed in different ways by the various candidates and, more often than not, only superficially (of the 26 candidates analysed, of whom 24 had made a manifesto available, only 14 dealt with the issue directly). Overall, however, the analysis of the manifestos of the main candidates shows that centre-right candidates tend to frame the issue in terms of “law and order” and/or “security”, whereas the centre-left and Five Star Movement candidates prefer to consider it as part of their actions regarding “rights” and/or “social policy”.

5. Conclusions

The decision-making process regarding regularization in Italy has been of great public relevance since the beginning. It included – to various degrees – citizens, the public opinion, special interest groups and lobbies, political institutions and governments at all levels, the media, and, obviously, political parties. The political debate has often been polarized and not always “genuine”; and at times it has been directed merely at winning the voters’ consensus, as the implementation of regularization measures in 2020 has shown. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the governmental agenda; expectedly, this external variable has changed, at least in part, the priorities of both the media and the public opinion – which, under ordinary circumstances, would have probably given more relevance to the issue of regularization.

Nonetheless, the regularization of migrants and the need to overcome the existing management of migration flows has been on the agenda of the second Conte government since its formation. Various actors have recognized that the approach adopted thus far had de facto resulted in over 600,000 irregular residents, offering them no opportunity to regularize their status. During the first months of 2020, the debate remained undercurrent as coalition members were divided on the issue and unable to work out a common and shared solution. Interviews with key actors and the political debate between parties and in the parliamentary arena reveal that many actors had to revise their prior expectations. This is true both for those who wished for a more far-reaching measure for regularization (especially in the primary sector of the economy), and for those who opposed the regularization process (including the main opposition parties) and would have liked to seize this window of opportunity to win the consensus of the public opinion, but eventually had to reconsider their stakes.

As suggested in the second half of this chapter, the regional elections of 2020 did not attract the attention of citizens and the media as much as one would have expected (unlike they did on other occasions, see also Chapter 15 of this Report). Nonetheless, the analysis of the electoral manifestos gives some indication about the relative importance accorded to the issue of immigration by the various political parties and coalitions. Their framing of the issue is consistent with the decades-long socio-political cleavage that has divided coalitions, movements, and political parties between the law-order-security pole and the inclusion-solidarity-integration pole. Once again, the various stances on the matter are firmly anchored to deep-seated convictions, as if they were not liable to change.

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In the past few years, the issue of migration has featured prominently in the Italian and European public debate, both in civil society and in institutions. Accordingly, the issue has featured prominently in the media, too.

The Italian media system is deeply entwined with politics, so much so that the information system tends to follow and give resonance to a political agenda in which immigration is cause for contention.

In the second quarter of 2020, the health emergency caused by the COVID-19 epidemic has changed the agenda of mainstream media, and immigration – much like other phenomena – has lost much of its relevance. However, attention to migration increased again in May, both in the political debate and in the press.

The analysis of communication on migration in the Italian media presented in this chapter must be understood against this background. Our analysis will focus on television – based on data on prime-time news and on the main infotainment programmes – as well as on the press – based on data on the main national and local papers. Understanding if and how the COVID-19 epidemic has changed the discourse on migration is particularly relevant since...
the invisibility of migrants and refugees can have social consequences in terms of racism and xenophobia.

The analysis of prime-time TV news – which are watched by a large portion of the population, approximately 7 out of 10 Italians, with a rise in audience during the lockdown1 – invites some reflection.

Figure 1. News items on immigration in Italian prime-time news programmes: TG1, TG2, TG3, TG4, TG5, Studio Aperto, TgLa7; 2015-2020 comparison (from January 1st to September 30th); perceived threat by immigrants and refugees among the Italian population; foreigners in Italy, 2015-2020

Figure 2. Trend of news items on immigration in Italian prime-time news: TG1, TG2, TG3, TG4, TG5, Studio Aperto, TgLa7; 2015-2020 comparison (from January 1st to September 30th)

Source: Data and analysis by Osservatorio di Pavia

A glance at the time devoted to immigration in prime-time news reveals a decline in prominence during 2020. The progressive rise in the number of news items peaked in 2019 but apparently came to a halt in 2020, when the COVID-19 health emergency took all media coverage. Despite a new rise the second half of 2020 – corresponding to a few notable events – the overall percentage was at 6%, almost half that of the same period in the past two years.

Although analysis over the past few years reveals a continuous and pervasive attention to the issue, during 2020 immigration was characteristically covered only in correspondence with specific events. These were the conflicts at the Greek-Turkish border at the end of January, the regularization measure for foreign workers (and the corresponding political debate) in May, the protests against racism after the killing of George Floyd in the United States, migration flows to Lampedusa and other reception centres from June to the end of August, and the health “threat” posed by migrants and refugees in the summer months – in correspondence with new flows and with the murder of Willy Duate in September. The importance of some of these events affects the salience of some issues over others.

Compared with data from previous years, new aspects emerge along with elements of continuity. The first element of continuity concerns the coverage of migration flows, which have been the most covered aspect of immigration (38% of news items). Another third of immigration news consisted of sea arrivals, relations with Libya, NGO rescue vessels, shipwrecks, the political debate, and the legal and institutional proceedings concerning former Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini.

Another element of continuity is the lack of coverage of matters concerning the reception of migrants in prime-time television (only 4% of news items). Not only did the rate of related news fall dramatically; the topic has almost always been framed in negative or problematic terms, focusing on the dangers and risks of welcoming migrants at a time of great economic crisis and health hazard.

Two new aspects essentially emerged: attention to racism and protest movements against racial discrimination and, of course, the relationship between COVID-19 and immigration. All prime-time news programmes gave coverage to the anti-discrimination protests that took place in the United States in memory of George Floyd, and the movements that these gave rise to in different parts of the world. The language used in the news "is full of key words..."
that summarise the demands made by protesters: antifascism, antiracism, civil rights and jus soli”.

News items on COVID-19 and immigration fall under either of two rubrics: discrimination against the Chinese community during the early spread of the epidemic, and racism and intolerance against new migrants arriving in Italian reception centres at a time when measures to fight the pandemic were being implemented. Headlines connecting the spread of the virus to immigration read e.g.: “New arrivals in Lampedusa: A Health Hazard,” “Migrants with COVID-19 Arrive in Calabria: Fear and Protests among the Population,” “Alert for New Imported Cases,” using an alarmist and sensationalistic tone.

Less attention has been devoted to immigration as connected with crimes and insecurity in the first nine months of 2020, with the exception of two events – the murder of a black man in Colleferro and the killing of a priest by a man of foreign origins in Como.

1.1 Voices and faces of ethnic diversity in the media

Being able to express themselves through their own voices in live or recorded interviews is crucial for the visibility of individuals and social groups. It is often emphasised that media attention to migration is not complemented by an adequate role of migrant voices, nor of those of refugees and other people of foreign origin. Covering an event without giving voice to the people involved, which are generally replaced by opinion leaders and commentators, emphasizes debate over the facts and the subjective experience of migration.

In the first 9 months of 2020, only 7% of TV reports in the 7 main news programmes in prime time gave voice to immigrants, migrants, and refugees. To put this figure into context, let us consider that 33% of reports regarding immigration gave voice to politicians and members of institutions.

Immigrants, migrants, and refugees are almost non-existent outside news on immigration (0.4% on the overall coverage). They featured only in reports on Albanian and Cuban doctors sent to Italy to help with the pandemic, in reports where voice is also given to foreign workers (such as e.g. riders), or in the area of so-called “soft news” as showbiz or sport personalities. Members of foreign communities, people of African descent, and second-generation migrants still remain at the margins of mainstream information: 9 months of analysis covering 1176 editions of the main information and entertainment shows recorded only 20 representatives of foreign communities or immigrants was interviewed only occasionally and only in connection with specific events.

For instance, Aboubakar Soumahoro, a union leader from Ivory Coast, has been interviewed in connection with the regularization of foreign workers; representatives of the Bulgarian community have been interviewed after anti-migrant protests in Mondragone following a local COVID-19 outbreak; popular singer Mahmood has been interviewed during the pandemic; business owners of foreign origin have been interviewed to talk about the economic consequences of the health emergency. But hosting guests or commentators who represent an ethnically diverse society remains an isolated fact: only in 1.7% of cases do programmes invite a guest of foreign origin.

Even though many Italian citizens of foreign origin operate in a variety of business areas, news prevalently concern reception of migrants, sometimes poverty and degradation, or racism. The more pro-active dimension of prime-time news programmes does not yet seem to characterize infotainment programmes.

1.2 A glance at migration in the press

The press follows a trend similar to that of evening news. The front pages of the main Italian newspapers have given much space to migration both before and after the most severe stages of the COVID-19 emergency.

Treating immigration as something other than an emergency or a crisis is still a distant goal after all these years. If we look at the main information and infotainment shows, the presence of migrants and refugees has even shrunk: in some main shows (e.g., Porta a Porta, Di Martedì, Matrix, Non è l’arena, 8 e mezzo), representatives of foreign communities or immigrants is hosted only occasionally and only in connection with specific events.

The following programmes are part of the sample used in the present analysis: Aigòra, Cartabianca, Che tempo che fa, Di Martedì, I fatti vostri, La vita in diretta, Matrix, Non è l’arena, Piazza Pulita, Pomeriggio Cinque, Porta a Porta, Povera Patrìa, Presa diretta, Quarta Repubblica, Unomattina.

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4 The following programmes are part of the sample used in the present analysis: Aigòra, Cartabianca, Che tempo che fa, Di Martedì, I fatti vostri, La vita in diretta, Matrix, Non è l’arena, Piazza Pulita, Pomeriggio Cinque, Porta a Porta, Povera Patrìa, Presa diretta, Quarta Repubblica, Unomattina.

1.3 The voices of foreign communities

Headlines of daily and weekly newspapers confirm the role of big players in communication, especially as headlines are often quoted in other networks. A scoping study conducted on daily and weekly newspapers in the first nine months of 2020 reveals that specific nationalities only occasionally feature in headlines. A significant change, in line with advocacy of emancipation from racialized language, is the limitation of reference to ethnicity and/or nationality to those instances where it is strictly necessary to understand the facts.

Explicit reference to nationality re the five largest communities in Italy (i.e., Romanians, Albanians, Moroccans, Chinese, and Indian) is limited to 43 news items, i.e. 0.5% of all headlines.

When nationality is in fact mentioned, it is often associated with negative and deviant behaviour: “Fake Textile Workshop Offered Work to 237 People: 55 Chinese Nationals Reported to the Police”; “Italian People are More Afraid of African than Chinese People”; “COVID-19 Outbreak in the Indian Community: All Members Hospitalized for Testing”; “Three Indians Rape Daughter of Man who Hosted them”; “Apulia is a Hub for Albanian Clans”; “Moroccan Man who Trashed Post Office Repatriated”.

Putting immigrants, refugees, and citizens of foreign origin at the centre of news reports in a balanced way is a challenge for media professionals who need to operate on a common ground of shared values.

2. A history with deep roots

The arrival and presence of immigrants on Italian soil continues to be an important issue for the public opinion, even as it has now become less relevant than in the past and it has been more or less directly tied to the pandemic as the key issue of 2020.

According to a study by Eurispes (2020), people with an openly negative attitude towards immigrants are still a minority. It is trends that make the difference. Four in ten Italians (40.3%) characterize their relation to immigrants as “normal”, 19.4% speak of mutual indifference and 14.4% of mutual support. However, one tenth finds immigrants hostile (10.1%), 8.1% cannot stand them, and 7.7% fears them. Other variables record people’s attitude towards foreigners. According to 45.7% of Italians, an attitude of distrust towards immigrants is “justifiable, but only in some cases”. For almost one fourth of respondents (23.8%), distrust towards immigrants is “dangerous”; for 17.1% (+6.7% compared to 2010) it is “acceptable”, and for 13.4% it is “regrettable” (-4.3% compared to 2010).

Comparison with past years on issues such as “work” and “identity” reveals even more significant differences. The belief that foreigners might “take” jobs from Italian people has grown by over 10% in the past ten years, raising from 24.8% to 35.2%. The percentage of those who see immigrants as a threat to
national and cultural identity has risen from 29.9% to 33%, while the percentage of those who fear the spread of diseases has risen from 35.6% to 38.3%. By comparison, the share of those who believe that foreigners enrich their culture has gone down by 17 points since 2010, from 59.1% to 42%. Likewise, the belief that immigrants contribute to the country’s economic development has gone down from 60.4% to 46.9%.

According to Eurispes, another figure that makes Italian society appear less open than it was a few years ago is connected to citizenship. Compared with 2010, the share of Italian people favourable to jus soli has shrunk by over ten points (from 60.3% to 50%), whereas the share of staunch supporters of jus sanguinis has grown steadily (from 10.7% to 33.5%). The number of those who advocate citizenship for those born in Italy, on condition that they received an Italian school education, has also decreased (from 21.3% to 16.5%). The perceived causes of xenophobic episodes are evenly distributed: according to almost two Italians in ten (1.7%), the recent surge in xenophobic episodes is due to the immigrants’ own behaviour, while one fifth of the population (19.2%) ascribes it instead to inadequate government policies. 18.3% of respondents blames politicians’ aggressive communication, while 15.1% blames the way the media conveys the news.

According to the 2019 ISMU Report, the number of migrants that have arrived in Italy by sea in 2019 was 11,471 – the lowest number since 2010. However, according to a survey by Demos & Pi (2020a), approximately one third of the population sees immigrants as a threat - a smaller share than it was two years ago between Winter 2017 and Spring 2018, when concern about immigration reached the peak of the entire decade at 41% (Figure 6). This is no coincidence, since this period preceded the 2018 national election and immigration has been the most important issue in pre-election debates. In the past two years, however, the problem seems to have taken less dramatic tones also in the citizens’ perception. In 2020, concern about immigrants living in Italy reached its lowest level, even in comparison with the recent past. The reasons for this are easy to understand: in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic overshadowed all other concerns.

Nonetheless, the Demos & Pi (2020b) survey conducted for the Osservatorio Europeo sulla Sicurezza (European Security Watch) in the first part of 2020 reveals (Figure 7) that immigration had already become less of a concern in six European countries at the time when the first set of interviews were conducted in January 2020 – just before the health emergency hit Italy. At that moment, immigration was considered the main problem – and hence the main cause for concern – only by 9% of respondents, whereas the citizens’ fear mostly revolved around issues related to the economy and employment. Furthermore, a comparison between the level of concern about immigration in Italy and that in the other five European countries included in the sample reveals that Italians were among the least concerned. Among the countries considered, Italy was the country where immigration generated the least distress. At any rate, the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic has certainly contributed to draw concern away from immigration.
This is confirmed by Ipsos (2020) data from May 2020, which emphasised the extent to which the main concerns of Italian people had changed over the course of just a few months. The main concern was employment and the economy (78% of respondents), followed by welfare and institutional functioning (41% and 35%, respectively). Only further down the ranking does one find fear of COVID-19 (34%), followed by immigration (14%, one third of what it was only a few months earlier).

Although it occurred in the United States, the death of George Floyd, an African American man killed by a police officer on May 25th (see chapter 10 of this Report), shocked the Italian and European public opinion and brought racism back under the spotlight. In the months that followed, protests erupted in Italy and in Europe, using the message and slogans of the Black Lives Matter movement against racial discrimination. Even though concern about immigration apparently faded with the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, a Demos survey suggests that racism is still a problem according to Italian people. In fact, the survey suggests that it has actually become an even more salient issue in the past few years. At the same time, the survey also reveals that a large share of Italian citizens supports anti-racist protests. The Demos (2020a) survey indicates that just over 60% of respondents agree that “Italy has a problem with racism” – 13% more than they were two years before.

Of course, claiming that a problem exists does not mean that the problem actually exists. What it means, however, is that awareness about the issue is high. The media played a crucial role in this. Many networks aired footage of George Floyd’s killing over and over. This gave physical reality to a problem that normally translates into everyday discrimination, but it is often invisible to most. The repeated airing of George Floyd’s violent death made the problem of racial discrimination evident to the Italian audience, triggering a strong emotional reaction. As a result, almost two thirds of Italian citizens surveyed claimed that they would be ready to mobilise against racism. Expectedly, however, the respondents’ politics also played a role in determining their response. Researchers observe that only League voters consider racism irrelevant. On the other hand, over half of Brothers of Italy voters agreed with anti-racism protests. At the other end of the political spectrum, awareness about racism is shared by Democratic Party voters and by Five Star Movement voters alike.

A survey conducted by Demòpolis in October 2020 also highlights that migration lost much of its relevance over just 15 months, from July 2019 to October 2020.
Table 2. Variation in the Italian people’s ranking of priorities (July 2019-October 2020)

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<thead>
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<th>July 2019</th>
<th>October 2020</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1°</td>
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<td>Employment (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2°</td>
<td>Immigrant (66%)</td>
<td>Health (75%)</td>
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<td>3°</td>
<td>Health (63%)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4°</td>
<td>Health (63%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5°</td>
<td>Immigration (51%)</td>
<td>Immigrant (51%)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Demòpolis, 2020

As Table 2 shows, in July 2019, when the then Minister of the Interior Matteo Salvini blocked the Gregoretti Italian coastguard vessel with migrants on board (which later led to his trial), over two thirds of respondents (66%) considered controls on migration flows one of the top priorities (4th in the ranking). In October 2020, only just over half of respondents (51%) considered it a priority (8th in the ranking).

3. Immigration and politics in the media during the COVID-19 epidemic: a complicated relationship

Immigration has always been consistently prominent in the public debate – although both positive and negative peaks can be observed corresponding to periodic flows, notable events, or elections in which a given political party, coalition, candidate, or politician campaign on immigration. In 2020, both the media and the overall political agenda focused almost exclusively on the COVID-19 epidemic and on its consequences, as argued in Chapter 8 of the present Report. During the first wave of the epidemic, the media covered immigration with almost exclusive reference to the “Recovery Decree” (Law Decree n. 34 of May 19th 2020), which opened a window of opportunity for domestic, care, and agricultural workers of all nationalities to regularize their position (see also Chapter 3 in this Report).

As mentioned in the preceding sections, in 2020 immigration was never much at the centre of the debate as it had been in 2019. However, regional elections and the Recovery Decree favoured a comeback of the issue after months of near-predominance by the COVID-19 epidemic, suggesting that immigration continues to divide and polarize the public opinion. In line with what past ISMU Reports showed, the debate is often heated. Rival views are often presented in an all-or-nothing form that corresponds almost entirely to the the left-right poles of the political spectrum; they get more radical and extreme as one moves farther away from the political centre. Such polarization tends to obliterates the nuances and the actual contents of news items. In turn, this allows the media to fall into an echo chamber that reinforces a debate locked in a permanent campaign, making it impossible for the public opinion to be adequately informed and ultimately become more aware and independent. If coverage of “immigration” is filtered through a political lens, the narrative will inevitably contain a simple and simplifying language. Complex phenomena require instead extensive and thorough analysis by journalists and experts.

The politicization of immigration is confirmed by data from the Osservatorio di Pavia (Figure 8). The survey reveals that, between January and September 2020, politics was part of 25-30% news items on immigration in the seven main prime-time evening programmes, with peaks in July (30.1%) and in September (30.6%). Considering that the pandemic has been the near-exclusive focus of public debate and the media in 2020, these figures can hardly be underestimated. Even at a time characterized by a significant health, economic, and social crisis, politics takes more than one fourth of media coverage of immigration.

Figure 8. Politics in news items on immigration in Italian prime time news: TG1, TG2, TG3, TG4, TG5, Studio Aperto, TG87; percentages of the overall number of news items, January-September 2020

Source: Osservatorio di Pavia, 2020
In what ways does politics deal with issues connected with immigration? And from what perspective? Figure 9 shows in percentage how politicians hosted in the seven main prime time news programmes talk about the issue of immigration. In over one third of cases (36%) immigration is treated simply as a matter of political debate, in 19% of cases it is part of discussion of migration flows, in another 19% it is connected to COVID-19, in 14% of cases it is connected to discrimination, in a further 6% of cases to crime and security, in 4% of cases to reception of migrants and in 1% to the economy, the labour market, or terrorism.

![Figure 9](image)

**Figure 9. Politics in news items on immigration in the Italian prime-time news programmes: TG1, TG2, TG3, TG4, TGS, Studio Aperto, TgLa7; percentages of the overall number of news items, January-September 2020**

Going into greater detail, one can look at how politicians regularly participating in TV debates on immigration framed immigration. By number of TV appearances (and therefore by prominence in the debate) leader of the League Matteo Salvini overwhelmingly talked about immigration in public debates with other party leaders (78%), only marginally connecting it with COVID-19 and migration flows (8% and 7%, respectively) and even less so with crime and security (4.5%). This may appear unexpected, especially considering that Salvini was put on trial in early October 2020 (see above) and that part of the current government (Conte II) was called to testify in court. Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte also dealt with the issue primarily in debate (38%), but also in relation to crime and security (29%) and to the epidemic (18%). On the other hand, the current Minister of the Interior, Luciana Lamorgese, primarily focused on the COVID-19 pandemic while talking about immigration (37.5%); migration flows came second (21%) while reception, crime, and security came third along with participation in political debates (12.5%). Unlike all other politicians, Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi Di Maio focused equally on employment and the economy and on migration flows (37.5%), followed by participation in the political debate (31%), discrimination (15.6%), and COVID-19 (9.4%). The President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, and Senator for life Liliana Segre, who both have an exclusively institutional role, mainly focused discrimination (78% and 93%, respectively). Finally, Mayor of Lampedusa Salvatore Martello mainly talked about migration flows (53%), the COVID-19 epidemic (23.3%), and the problems connected to the reception of migrants (20%).

Table 3. Issues connected to immigration raised by prominent political and institutional figures on TV

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reception</th>
<th>Covid-19</th>
<th>Crime and security</th>
<th>Political debate</th>
<th>Discrimination</th>
<th>Employment and the economy</th>
<th>Migration</th>
<th>Terrorism</th>
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<td>4.5</td>
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<td>1.9</td>
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<td>37.5</td>
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Source: Osservatorio di Pavia, 2020

In conclusion, we may say that immigration continues to be a controversial and polarizing issue, even though it appears to have lost much of its salience in 2020 due to the health, economic, and social crisis. As discussed in section 2, however, immigration was never really at the top of citizens’ priorities...
as much as it was at the top of politicians’ priorities, especially when they were seeking consensus. When ranking priorities, citizens prove perfectly capable of distinguishing between issues that directly affect them (health, employment, the economy) and issues whose importance is inflated by politics. On the other hand, in the past few decades the debate on immigration and its relevance for politics (both in terms of policy-making and in terms of campaigning) has put the strength of contemporary liberal-democratic society to a test, calling its fundamental values into question and showing how difficult it still is to find a common cultural ground on this matter. While the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have now put the current global arrangement of our society into question and weakened social cohesion, immigration has not lost its relevance. Quite on the contrary, immigration is bound to be a top concern for Italian people and to feature prominently in the political agenda for years to come.

This brings us to the vexed question of who shapes citizens’ public preferences, which has been the subject of recent research (Eugeni, Pasini, 2019: 161). Is it parties, the family, peer groups, the media (radio and television, the press, social networks)? We are currently witnessing a quantum leap compared to traditional relationships between political supply and demand. In other words, the relationship between the needs, interests, expectations, and identities of civil society and political parties and interest groups tapping into and selecting this demand has floundered. The past 30 years have thrown socio-political, socio-economic, and cultural representation into a crisis that prevents institutions everywhere and at all levels from translating the (now “broken”) relationship between public opinion and political parties into effective decision-making.

The way in which immigration is framed in public and political discourse and the influence of media communication on regional, national, and European migration policy points us to a new subject for research to investigate with new lenses. Similarly, the role of the public opinion and of various opinion-making agencies should also be reconsidered. The debate on the “crisis” of politics and the “rise” of communication (whatever this may mean) is a puzzling cultural issue, and one that can be investigated through the lens of immigration.

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1. Introduction

In a climate of general social acceptance and of "normalisation of hate" (Andrisani et al., 2020), the Italian situation has been struck by dark and alarming signals in recent years – the rise of antisemitism, verbal and physical aggressions against foreign citizens, racist and xenophobic crimes, overt racism in the stadium against black athletes, the spread of hate speech online (ECRI, 2020; Eurispes, 2020; FRA, 2020b; Oscad, 2020; Vox, 2019, Amnesty International, 2019; Andrisani et al., 2020). The sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented health emergency, and it has imposed new priorities both on the political administration and on society more generally. This could lead us to conjecture that the spread of the virus "displaced" fears which, especially in 2019, were overwhelmingly directed at "others" (immigrants, Jews, Roma people, Muslims). But one could also ask oneself if, on the other hand, the virus – as a multiplier of the people’s fears – radicalized and exacerbated existing tensions and contradictions, further fuelling episodes of racism and discrimination.

In order to tackle this issue on the basis of the most recent empirical studies, the present chapter first considers the pre-COVID Italian context, analysing the presence and spread of racism in its main forms (anti-migrant/refugees/asylum-seekers attitudes; antisemitism; antiziganism) (Par. 2). In the subsequent paragraph (Par. 3), the focus will then shift to the changes that occur as a result of the spread of the virus in terms of hostile and repul-
sive attitudes towards ethnic minorities. The chapter concludes by reflecting on future scenarios in consideration of the crisis that hit Italian society (Par. 4).

2. Before the pandemic: racism and xenophobia on the rise in Italy

Contemporary racism is versatile and multifaceted (Siebert, 2003), and takes on different forms than biological racism. It is a “racism without race”, it is increasingly implicit and symbolic, and it in some cases it is “elusive” and difficult to identify (Taguieff, 1999; Aime, 2020). The most recent data indicate a significant increase in both online and offline hate, intolerance, and racist phenomena in Europe as much as in Italy (ECRI, 2020; EURISPES 2020; FRA, 2020b; OSCAD, 2020; Vox, 2019, Amnesty International, 2019). Racial slurs directed at members of minorities that in the past would have been considered unacceptable can now be easily found in social media (ECRI, 2020). More specifically, as Italian human rights watch Vox notes on the basis of a Twitter analysis, in 2019 the categories most affected by online hate speech are migrants, Muslims, and Jews (Vox, 2019). Online hate speech is not limited to the web but also affects everyday interactions among people. In fact, online hate speech, representations, and actions are closely intertwined (ECRI, 2020; Andrisani et al., 2020).

2019 data published by the Observatory on Safety Against Discriminatory Acts (OSCAD, 2020) show a significant higher percentage of reported crimes in Italy that are xenophobic or racist in nature (74.9%) compared those based on sexual orientation, gender identity and/or disability. Given the complexity and multidimensionality of racism – which has led some scholars to speak of “racisms” (in the plural) or “neo-racism” (Siebert, 2003; Aime, 2020) – what follows will only present a non-exhaustive summary of the main forms of racism currently in place in Italy.

2.1 Anti-migrant, anti-refugee, and anti-asylum-seeker attitudes

Over half of Italian citizens (51%) has a negative opinion about migratory flows coming from extra-EU countries (Eurobarometer, 2019a). More often than not, traditional media have contributed stereotyped representations and hostile images to the representation of immigration in a conflictual frame or in emergency-related terms (Carta di Roma, 2019). A strong populist rhetoric has exploited the idea of “invading foreigners”, of their dangerousness, and of the relative social insecurity they generate, especially during election campaigns (Amnesty International, 2019; Andrisani et al., 2020). As we shall see, “foreigners” have even been portrayed as “plague spreaders” during the pandemic.

In the two-year period 2018-2019 preceding the pandemic, both individual and group aggressions against foreign citizens significantly increased (Andrisani et al., 2020). As mentioned above, these aggressions also happen online. In 2019, the number of hate tweets against migrants – the main target of attacks – have been on the increase, with a rise in 15.1% compared to the previous year. Of the total number of negative tweets, those against migrants are approximately 32%.

Fear and negative attitudes also come from a partial or mistaken understanding of the migratory phenomenon. Almost 50% of Italians believe that Italy hosts more illegal than legal migrants (Eurobarometer, 2018), a perception that is far from the actual ratio of regular and irregular migrants. The same study also highlights that Italian people tend to vastly overestimate the overall number of migrants in Italy (Ibid.).

Skin colour can also lead to stigma and unequal treatment. In Italy, hostility against people of African origin appears to be particularly strong, due to an overlap of ancient colonial stereotypes, on the one hand, and anti-immigrant attitudes on the other (ECRI, 2020). In 2019, Italian people who thought that discrimination based on skin colour was widespread were in a very high percentage (almost 70%), much higher than the European average (59%). More than 1 Italian in 10 reported that they would feel completely uncomfortable working with a person of colour (compared with a European average of 7%) (Eurobarometer, 2019b). In line with these data, almost 1 Italian in 5 declares that they would not want their children to have an intimate relationship with a person of colour (Ibid.).

1 Data refer only to reported racist discrimination and violence. It should be noted that the under-reporting of hate crimes is a very widespread phenomenon.

2 We have chosen to tackle only some of the forms of racism in Italy. Moreover, the listed social factors, ethnicity, religion, phenotype can combine as they do e.g. in the cases of Black Muslims or Muslim women. These are referred to as “multiple discriminations.”

2.2 Antisemitism

Not too long after the tragic events that marked the XX Century, acts of vandalism, antisemitic graffiti, physical aggressions, online threats, and insults against Jews prove that antisemitism – a form of racism with peculiarities of its own (Siebert, 2003) – is still widespread in European countries, including Italy (FRA, 2018). According to data gathered in 12 European countries in 2018, antisemitism is on the rise: 9 Jewish respondents out of 10 suggest that, in the 5 years preceding the questionnaire, antisemitism has grown in the countries in which they live. According to respondents, antisemitism is particularly problematic online and on social media (89%), in public spaces (73%), in traditional media (71%), and in political life (70%). A 2019 Twitter analysis has highlighted how hate tweets against Jews have considerably grown in number, revealing a common pattern in Italy, in other European countries, and in the USA.

The rise of antisemitism – which has been already noted in the XXIV ISMU Report – is especially reason for alarm in Italy: in 2018, 73% of Jewish respondents considered antisemitism a significant problem, with an increase by over 10 percentage points compared to 2012 (FRA 2018). Like in other countries, the internet is the main place where antisemitic slurs and attacks take place in Italy. In addition, the percentage of Italians who deny the existence of the Shoah worryingly went from 2.7% in 2004 to 15.6% in 2019, i.e. in just 15 years (Eurispes, 2020). This figure appears even more alarming in that its context is one of scarce awareness of the seriousness and magnitude of antisemitic episodes, which almost two thirds of respondents consider as simply isolated incidents while ignoring the historical and social complexity of the phenomenon (Ibid.).

2.3 Antiziganism

Multiple discriminations and marginality are the constant elements of the presence of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti ethnic groups in Italy (Sigona, 2005; Ambrosini, 2010; Amnesty International, 2013; ECRI, 2016; Alietti e Riniolo, 2019). Almost 80% of Italians (compared with a European average of 61%) believe that discrimination against Roma people is very widespread in Italy (Eurobarometer; 2019b). Similarly, half of the respondents, with a difference of over 20 percentage points compared to the European average (28%), declares that they would not want Roma people in top-level political positions. Moreover, among European countries Italy has the highest percentage of people who would not work with a Roma person (39%, compared with a European average of 17%) (Eurobarometer, 2019b). Italy is also the only European country where the percentage of those who do not wish to work with Roma people is greater than that of those who would have no qualms in having a Roma colleague. Such deep differences highlight a picture of exclusion and discrimination against Roma which is particularly worrisome when comparing Italy with other countries: the percentage of Italian people that have a negative view of Roma people in Italy is greater than 80%, much greater than in the United Kingdom (23%), Sweden (29%), and the Netherlands (40%). This is an open issue that the National Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti has not, to date, been able to contrast effectively (Alietti e Riniolo, 2016; 2019).

3. During the pandemic: the virus of racism

The pandemic broke out in a long-standing context of discrimination and exclusion: rather than providing new scapegoats, the new coronavirus has exacerbated racism and existing inequalities (ENAR, 2020; FRA, 2020a; Human Rights Watch, 2020). This has prompted the Secretary General of the UN to make an appeal in May 2020 for addressing and countering hate speech. The appeal denounced that “the pandemic continues to unleash a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering. Anti-foreigner sentiment has surged online and in the streets. Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories have spread, and COVID-19-related anti-Muslim attacks have occurred. Migrants and refugees have been vilified as a source of the virus – and then denied access to medical treatment.”

The seriousness of the situation has also led the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) to take an official stance on the matter on May 19th 2020, warning on the mounting violence and hate speech against minority groups in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis.

Overall, the pandemic has had two effects on discriminatory and racist dynamics. On the one hand, it has been a multiplier of existing inequalities. (COVID-19 turned out to be much less democratic than initially thought). On the other, it has exacerbated xenophobic and racist attitudes that were already on the rise in the previous years.

Regarding the first aspect, the pandemic has not affected all citizens in the same way. Some sectors of the population – the poor, black people, temporary workers, workers employed in specific occupational sectors – have been more exposed to the virus compared to other categories of citizens who, thanks to telework, have been able to continue their job without risking infection. In the US, for example, African American citizens have been among the most vulnerable to the virus, presenting a high percentage of infection, hospitalization, and COVID-related death (Hawkins, 2020; Shah et al., 2020). This can be linked not...
only to the presence of co-morbidities, but also, and above all, to specific social reasons, such as living in more densely populated neighbourhoods, reduced access to healthcare, a lower probability of being able to work from home compared to white people, and the concentration in specific occupational sectors at higher risk of infection (Hawkins, 2020; Shah et al. 2020). Therefore, ethnic and racial inequalities have played a central role in the possibility of becoming ill.

The virus, however, has not only infiltrated and unearthed the existing widespread social inequalities. It has also contributed to resurrecting some classic categories of racist discourse, further amplifying them. The fear and uncertainty generated by COVID-19 required the construction of an enemy which – once again – was found in the foreigner (Andrisani et al. 2020).

Upon hearing about the epidemic that was shaking up China, with the city of Wuhan as its epicentre, a wave of sinophobic sentiment against people of Chinese or East Asian origin has risen in Italy and in the whole world (even when targeted people had had no direct or recent contact with areas actually affected by the virus) (Haokip, 2020; Roberto et al., 2020).

In Italy, too, many Italian citizens or long-term residents of East Asian origin faced hostility, prejudice, and hate speech. As documented in the Fifth White Book on Racism in Italy (2020: 213), between January 20th and March 8th 2020 61 episodes of insults, discriminations, incendiary attacks and aggressions targeted foreign citizens, mostly of East Asian origin, in connection with the spread of COVID-19. Such a climate of intolerance has led some citizens to organise a social media campaign called “I am not a virus”11. Tensions were further exacerbated as a result of the fact that some – including the President of the USA – had renamed the coronavirus the “Chinese virus” or the “Chinese flu”. The risk (and sometimes the intention) was that of depicting foreigners as threatening and dangerous (Reny & Barreto, 2020), as well as of reinforcing the stigma connected to national or ethnic origin.

Due to COVID-19’s sometime asymptomatic nature (symptoms of the virus are not always evident among those infected) some phenotypic traits, such as being of Asian origin, have been (mis)associated with being contagious, with dramatic effects in terms of the rise of prejudice against certain groups of citizens (Roberto et al., 2020). Such prejudice, however, has not been created ex-nihilo by COVID-19; on the contrary, COVID-19 has contributed to fuel already existing sentiments of hostility, combining with old dynamics.

In Italy, a rhetoric has spread connecting migrants with “carriers of disease”, as various news events have highlighted. In Mondragone, for instance, an outbreak of new coronavirus cases among Bulgarian agricultural workers in Southern Italy led to an outbreak of rage and conflict between locals and migrants, with the latter being immediately labelled as “virus spreaders”.

**4. Future scenarios**

Overall, the COVID-19 virus seems to have fuelled hostility against the Other, reinforcing existing racist and xenophobic tendencies. In particular, the pandemic has favoured the rise of stigma and of prejudice first against citizens of East Asian origin and, later on and more generally, against all immigrants – considered to be “virus spreaders” on the basis of classic categories of racist discourse. Once again, the foreigner, as Aime (2020: 182) wrote, becomes “the icon of all evil, carrier of disease, terrorism, unemployment, cultural unease”.

The reasons for this increase in the number of episodes of hatred and racism are mostly to be found in the climate of fear and uncertainty generated by the virus. In April 2020, according to Eurobarometer (2020a) data, over half of respondents in Italy has declared that they were experiencing uncertainty (53%) and almost one fourth was reportedly experiencing fear (23%). The percentage of those who indicated rage (16%) among their prevalent emotions is also striking. Fear and uncertainty represent the main ingredients for the spread of racism and xenophobia.

To this picture one must add the data relating to the economic situation gathered in June 2020 (Eurobarometer; 2020b). In Italy, 37% of respondents declared that they experienced a loss in income since the beginning of the crisis (compared to a much lower European average, equal to 28%, almost 10 percentage points less). One fifth of all respondents (21%) reported difficulties paying their rent or facing other expenses (a much higher percentage compared to the European average of 14%). The economic crisis – the magnitude of whose impact is still to be evaluated – risks leading to a “dog-eat-dog” scenario in the bottom strata of society, when resources are scarce, aversion and hostility towards migrants are especially considered legitimate and acceptable (Alietti e Padovan, 2005). In these cases, the rejection of foreigners in favour of the “nationals” is transformed into a right to be reclaimed (Ibid.), thereby leading to a process of “victimization of the autochthonous population” (Aime, 2020: 195). The perception of weakness, economic insecurity, and absence of social support fuels an anti-migrant attitude (Messing e Ságvári, 2019).

The worsening of life conditions can easily be manipulated in political discourse, resulting in an increased risk of hostility to foreigners (Heidenreich et al., 2020). As Palano observes, a new wave of populisms similar to the one that spread after the economic and financial crisis of 2008 is likely to rise (Palano, 2020). Populist and xenophobic movements try to mobilize the rage and frustration of those sectors of the population that are most vulnerable to social and economic transformations, and successfully gather their support (Zanfiri, 2016;
Aime, 2020). Thus, in a context of “normalization” of hate, where explicitly racist positions are legitimated (particularly on the web), the outbreak of COVID-19 with its socio-economic consequences risks exacerbating tensions and leading to the search for a scapegoat.

In this uncertain and rapidly changing scenario, the impact of the virus in terms of unemployment, poverty, and insecurity can become a further “rational” justification for hate against migrants, and fuel the new racisms accordingly.

References


The 26th Report on migrations by ISMU Foundation, now in its thirtieth year of operation, situates migration phenomena in Italy within the broader framework of the sudden outbreak and spread of COVID-19. The report analyzes the enduring impact of the pandemic on migration flows as well as on foreign residents in Italy. Statistical aspects and analyses of health, labour, and education are complemented with an in-depth study of the Italian legal framework, with particular regard to the most important legislative innovation on migration introduced in 2020: the regularization of migrant workers. The report is further complemented with detailed analyses of the link between immigration, politics, and the media, of racism, and of discrimination during the pandemic. Finally, the report devotes particular attention to the European arena, focusing on the new perspectives for European migration policy.