Immigration Policy in Italy: Problems and Perspectives

by Costanza Hermanin

ABSTRACT

Taking note of the impasse at EU level concerning both the reform of the Dublin regulation on asylum and the European Union's (EU's) relations with Libya, in 2017 the Italian Minister of the Interior Marco Minniti decided to engage in a migration dialogue with Libya. The deal he reached has worked out in terms of stemming the inflow of migrants in the short term, but it leaves open many questions of compliance with human rights standards as well as considerations of Italy's wider migration needs. Italy has been the target of mass inflows of boat people for much longer than other EU countries involved in the recent crises, but the country has failed for many years to develop an effective migration management system. EU pressure has compelled Italy to fix several flaws in its national asylum system, but it has also discouraged national, joint or charity-led search and rescue operations that have saved many lives in the past. Although in Italy and Europe the political debate focuses exclusively on stemming the inflows, it is time to engage in a discussion on how to improve avenues for legal (i.e. labour) migration in order to address demographic trends, labour shortages and disordered mass inflows.

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Introduction

Italy has faced unique migratory challenges in recent years. Managing migration by sea – and all migrants arriving in Italy do so by boat – is different from controlling land borders. Libya, the country through which most migrants landing in Italy transit, lacks a strong central authority capable of exerting control over the territory. Thus, border management mechanisms such as the EU–Turkey deal of 2016 have not been easy to replicate. Ironically, the EU–Turkey deal has actually put further strain on the central Mediterranean corridor, which remains the only open door to Europe. It is unsurprising that sea arrivals have increased more than tenfold between 2010 and 2016, stabilizing at an average of around 175,000 per year since 2014.

EU responses to the southern migratory crisis have so far failed to deliver appreciable results. A consequence of this for Italy is that the level of public support for the EU is at a historic low.[1] Government and public opinion alike feel that Italy has done its part in dealing with the persistent crisis, while the EU has shown a deplorable lack of solidarity. Although Italy's Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni has made it a point of honour to distinguish between the challenge of migration and the mounting threat of terrorism, populist parties are gaining increasing consensus by alluding to this connection.

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[1] Bruce Stokes, Richard Wike and Dorothy Manevich, "Post-Brexit, Europeans More Favorable toward EU", in *Pew Research Center Survey Reports*, 15 June 2017, http://pewrsr.ch/2tshzvR; Philipp Schulmeister et al., *Parlemeter 2017: A Stronger Voice. Citizens' Views on Parliament and the EU*, Brussels, European Parliament, October 2017, p. 18 and 24, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/20171016PVL00116. See also Italy's Parliameter national factsheet: *Parlametro 2017*, October 2017, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/external/html/parlemetre/parlemeter_2017_it_it.pdf.

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This explains why 2017 has seen a substantial acceleration in domestic migration policy. Minister of the Interior Marco Minniti has silently engaged some contentious Libyan actors in talks over ways to reduce departures. The result has been a sharp drop in the inflows during the summer and an overall decrease in arrivals of migrants. At the end of November, arrivals had fallen by 30 percent compared with the same period in 2016.[2] Minniti has also insisted on the alleged overarching need to have a code of conduct for charities rescuing migrants at sea, which has led many of them to leave international waters while Libyan coastguards have taken back control.

Looking at the recent past reminds us that political turmoil in the Mediterranean led to migratory crises well before the Syrian civil war. A neglected but constant feature of these crises is that Italy has always been amongst the most affected countries. However, the fact that the EU as a whole is responsible for having failed to devise an effective asylum system has become clear only recently. For some time, EU countries had largely assumed that Italy had failed to develop an effective asylum system. This criticism is not completely off the mark. Italy was indeed unprepared to manage migration flows of the size we have seen in recent years. However, the government has taken steps to address the challenge, starting with some improvements of the national asylum system.

1. The struggle to reform Italy's asylum system

Forced migration to southern Italy began thirty years ago. On a single day, in March 1991, 30,000 Albanians arrived in Apulia. The history of the Albanian migration crisis has much in common with the current migratory crisis. One similarity is the visual perception of it: the images of boats loaded with thousands of people arriving in Italian ports created then (as they do now) the impression of an "invasion". Another common feature is the human cost: the boats crossing the Adriatic between 1991 and 1997 caused, especially in later years, hundreds of deaths at sea. A third similarity is the Italian government having to issue exceptional short-term humanitarian visas and create reception centres from scratch. A fourth is the later U-turn in the policy of supplying visas once it was confirmed that the inflow of people would not stop and other EU countries started worrying about secondary movements. Fifth is the flourishing of a smuggling industry and, sixth, the adoption of tentative military responses to counter it, including resorting to a naval blockade in the case of Albania. In 2009 the then interior minister, a member of the anti-immigration Northern League party, tried to solve the problem by ordering *refoulement* on the high seas. The European Court of Human Rights

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[2] Italian Ministry of the Interior, *Cruscotto statistico giornaliero* (Daily Statistical Dashboard), last update 7 December 2017, http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/node/1300; Manuela Perrone, "Migranti, il patto con la Libia frena gli arrivi: da luglio -68%", in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 27 August 2017, http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2017-08-26/migranti-patto-la-libia-frena-arrivi-221553.shtml.

outlawed this policy in a landmark ruling concerning a boat full of Eritreans that had been pushed back to Libya, then considered as an unsafe country for people in need of protection.[3] What has happened since 2000 up until today in the Strait of Sicily is almost a repetition of this sequence of events.

The experience of the Albanian migratory crisis seems to have taught the EU and Italy very little. Prior to the current crisis, Italy did little to bring about action by the EU or set up a proper domestic migration and asylum management system. Since then, successive governments have continued to declare a state of emergency for the extraordinary influx of irregular migrants almost every year, a policy that has delivered a scattered reception system, built up in the wake of crises through fast-track tender procedures. Recent enquiries led by Italian prosecutors have demonstrated how organized crime has taken advantage of such emergency frameworks, originally intended to speed up works and reconstruction after natural disasters. The "Roma Capitale" investigation of 2014, for instance, exposed links between Rome's city council administration and organized crime networks in the running of Europe's largest reception facility for asylum seekers, at Mineo in Sicily.[4] In 2017, police arrested seventy suspects affiliated to the *'Ndrangheta*, the powerful mafia of the southern region of Calabria, on charges of profiting from the management of another reception centre in Calabria itself.[5]

Although migration policy has developed within the broader context of the Common European Asylum System and EU norms on legal and irregular migration, Italy's difficulty in managing arrivals from the Mediterranean in full compliance with EU rules has been clear for some years. Proper identification and processing have traditionally been a central issue. According to the so-called Dublin asylum regulations, if asylum seekers enter the EU without a valid visa and do not have close family elsewhere in Europe, they should apply for refugee status and have their request processed in the EU member state in which they arrive first. Yet migrants generally tend to see Italy as a transit country. Their aim is to travel north to richer places, and therefore try to avoid proper identification in Italy. A reason for fleeing Italy (and Greece) is that the system for processing applications and supplying decent lodging and integration conditions is worse than elsewhere. As the *New York Times* has reported, many confirmed refugees have ended up in

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[3] European Court of Human Rights, Judgment of the Grand Chamber on the Case of *Hirsi Jamaa and. Others v. Italy* (Application No. 27765/09), 23 February 2012, http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-109231.

[4] Italian Chamber of Deputies, *Relazione della Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sul sistema di accoglienza e di identificazione ed espulsione, nonché sulle condizioni di trattenimento dei migranti e sulle risorse pubbliche impegnate* (Report of the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission on the Reception, Identification, and Expulsion System, as well as on Migrants' Detention Conditions and Earmarked Public Resources), 3 May 2016, p. 148-151, http://www.camera.it/_dati/leg17/lavori/documentiparlamentari/IndiceETesti/022bis/006/INTERO.pdf.

[5] Grazia Longo, "Smantellata la cosca Arena: controllava la gestione del centro per migranti di Isola Capo Rizzuto", in *La Stampa*, 15 May 2017, http://www.lastampa.it/2017/05/15/italia/cronache/smantellata-la-cosca-arena-controllava-la-gestione-del-centro-per-migranti-di-isola-capo-rizzuto-hTLDLUq0Nr5byBFpRUoTaO/pagina.html.

slums in the periphery of Rome.[6]

But a second reason, unknown to many, is that Dublin's "take charge" system – whereby asylum seekers can lawfully be transferred to and processed in other EU countries of destination – has also been very dysfunctional up until now. Many refugees, in particular Syrian families, have managed to escape registration, as have unaccompanied Eritrean and Afghan minors. Italian authorities, for their part, have been reluctant to use force to take fingerprints. They have also had an incentive not to do so, as non-registration means that the Dublin rules do not apply. As a result, many have moved on to other EU countries without being properly identified in Italy.

Pressure from the EU and other member states eventually compelled the Italian authorities to improve their system to register incoming people, based on so-called "hotspots". In addition, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the EU's border agency Frontex and a special team of the Commission's Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs have set up offices in Rome and Sicily.

The increased number of arrivals and greater implementation of EU rules have led to exponential growth in the number of asylum applications. With 123,000 requests, in 2016 Italy ranked third among the members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).[7] In recent years trends have stabilized, with around 40 percent of applicants granted protection at the administrative stage, including 5 percent who receive refugee status, 15 percent international protection and 20 percent national humanitarian protection. Nigerians form the bulk of those who register upon landing and apply for international protection. Tunisians and Moroccans constitute a fair share of the boat people who apply, but they are outnumbered by Eritreans, Afghans and Somalis. The Syrian refugee crisis of 2014–15 touched Italy marginally in comparison with the so-called Eastern European corridor, and in recent years a large majority of those departing from Libya (and Tunisia) have come from the Gulf of Guinea, but also Pakistan and Bangladesh. The number of unaccompanied children landing on shore has doubled since 2015, leading parliament to adopt *ad hoc* legislation on their reception and protection. Unlike other EU countries, authorities have not drawn up a list of safe countries or devised fast-track proceedings for specific groups of applicants.[8]

The government has made some significant reforms in the years since 2013. Importantly, it has stopped adopting emergency decrees to manage the overall system of reception. Other measures have included increasing the number of

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[6] Elisabetta Povoledo, "Migrants in Rome Try to Recover after Ponte Mammolo Camp Is Destroyed", in *The New York Times*, 15 May 2015, https://nyti.ms/2BFLuFU.

[7] Eurostat, *Asylum and First Time Asylum Applicants by Citizenship, Age and Sex. Annual Aggregated Data (Rounded)*, 4 October 2017, http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_asyappctza.

[8] See asylum statistics the website of the Italian Ministry of the Interior: *I numeri dell'asilo*, http://www.libertaciviliimmigrazione.dlci.interno.gov.it/it/documentazione/statistica/i-numeri-dellasilo.

committees scrutinizing asylum applications fourfold, and recruiting trained officials to staff them. Another innovation concerns the creation of specialized court sections for immigration and the – very contentious – abolition of one degree of judicial appeal to speed up proceedings. Thus far, courts have overturned close to one-third of the administrative decisions of rejection, but asylum proceedings have overwhelmed the judiciary system. This has allowed many applicants to remain in Italy pending the final determination of their status, as almost half of those who are rejected appeal the decision.

A consequence of the more thorough application of the Dublin rules is that reception capacity has had to be boosted to unprecedented levels. As of September 2017, state-sponsored centres and programmes were host to 196,000 people, even though almost two-thirds of them were not included in the standard reception programme (SPRAR). In contrast to Germany, in Italy there is no compulsory distribution key and municipalities adhere to the standard reception programme voluntarily. Wherever municipalities decline to participate, the central government can still place migrants in extraordinary facilities (hotels, apartments or other kinds of accommodation). Increased financial incentives to municipalities are slowly improving the situation, and a recent reform of the system of procurement for reception centres will hopefully deliver also in terms of enhanced transparency.

For those whose applications for protection are rejected, forced repatriations from Italy face the same hurdles as in the rest of Europe. The police are not able to detect even one-tenth of the estimated irregular migrants. In addition, readmission agreements established at the EU and national levels are few and do not involve nationalities of "concern". Thus, assisted voluntary repatriation (AVR) involves a few hundred people annually and forced repatriations around 4,000,[9] whereas almost 35,000 receive an expulsion order. Only some Tunisians, Moroccans and Egyptians are sent back to their home countries upon arrival. Others are pushed back at land borders or to Greece. Many of those who do not manage to regularize their migration status cannot enter the regular labour market and thus end up in criminal or, worse, trafficking networks. It is thus not surprising that a third of the Italian prison population is made up of foreigners awaiting trial for petty crimes.

Italian diplomatic efforts have so far failed to persuade enough other EU countries to revise Dublin's "first country rule" to adopt a solidarity mechanism that would allow for an immediate redistribution of asylum seekers. The failure of the emergency measures agreed in September 2015 at the EU level to relocate in two years 160,000 persons from Italy and Greece to EU member states have been a warning sign. Relocation from Italy, in fact, only happened for 11,000 persons.[10]

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[9] Eurostat, *Third-country nationals who have left the territory by type of return and citizenship*, last update 31 October 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/migr_eirt_vol.

[10] Italian Ministry of the Interior, *Cruscotto statistico giornaliero* (Daily Statistical Dashboard), cit.

2. The high seas and the countries of transit

The most difficult part of Italy's migration management equation, however, is what happens outside the national borders: on the high seas, on the one hand, and in countries of origin and transit, on the other. At least on the latter point, diplomacy has had more success than it has on the reform of Dublin.

Over the past five years three different naval operations have been deployed in the waters of the Strait of Sicily, with scarce results in terms of reducing sea crossings and, more importantly, the number of deaths at sea. The Italian Navy's Mare Nostrum (Latin for "our sea") operation, established following a deadly shipwreck off the island of Lampedusa in October 2013, was closed down after one year due to its massive costs (9.5 million euros a month) as well as widespread allegations that it was a pull factor for migrants. Its primary mission was indeed search and rescue (SAR). The EU border agency's Triton – an ongoing operation – took the baton, but refocused its mandate narrowly on border management activities further away from Libyan waters. After shipwrecks killed one thousand people in a week in April 2015, the EU tripled Triton's budget from the initial 3 million euros a month and deployed another joint operation under the coordination of Italy. This time it was a military operation, EUNAVFORMED Sophia. Sophia's mandate ranges from analysing smuggling routes to destroying smugglers' boats and training Libyan coastguards. However, coordination with Libyan authorities, including training, has proved almost impossible, and therefore many of the "operational assets" involved in Triton and Sophia have ended up in SAR activities.[11]

Since mid-2015 charities have also started operating their own SAR operations. After the first initiative of the Maltese Migrants Offshore Aid Station, more European non-governmental organizations (NGOs) came along with vessels, including Sea Watch, Sos Méditerranée with Medecins sans Frontières, Proactiva Open Arms, Life Boat, Jugend Rettet and Save the Children. Frontex calculated that, in the second half of 2016, NGOs were performing up to 40 percent of rescues.[12] The Italian Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre coordinated all these activities, as well as those of the EU border agency, EUNAVFORMED and the occasional commercial vessels involved. Nevertheless, over the past three years the percentage of people dying at sea rose from 1.9 percent of the total who attempted the crossing in 2014 to 2.5 percent in 2016. Almost 10,000 people have lost their lives in those three years.

This tragic reality has prompted a debate on whether search and rescue efforts continue to be a pull factor. Populist groups have even alleged that charities

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[11] Daniel Howden, "The Central Mediterranean: European Priorities, Libyan Realities", in *Refugees Deeply*, October 2017, http://issues.newsdeeply.com/central-mediterranean-european-priorities-libyan-realities.

[12] Frontex, *Risk Analysis for 2017*, February 2017, http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2017.pdf.

have cooperated with smugglers mainly to obtain financial gain from facilitating rescues, or to support a conspiracy for a mass invasion of Europe. These allegations have been sufficiently widespread, or at least politically expedient, so as to trigger two parliamentary inquiries. Eventually the Italian Ministry of the Interior imposed a code of conduct on the charities involved in SAR. The new rules have led many NGOs to disengage. Meanwhile, judicial inquiries (separate from the parliamentary ones) have concluded that, if charities behaved in a way that could facilitate irregular migration in a few instances, they only did so for humanitarian purposes. Thus it is highly unlikely that enforcement of the code of conduct has played any role in stemming the flows during the summer of 2017. It is, rather, the latest bilateral diplomatic initiatives by Italy that explain the decline in the inflows.

In recent years, Italy has been pushing other EU member states to engage in a migration-focused dialogue with the countries of origin and transit. From the Khartoum Process with the Horn of Africa, to the establishment of a multibillion-euro African trust fund launched at the Valletta Summit of November 2015, the EU has embraced many of the ideas summarized in an Italian non-paper known as the "Migration Compact".[13] The Compact urged greater EU collaboration on border control, security and the fight against smugglers, enhanced investment projects in Africa through a new EU fund for investment, cooperation on readmission and returns, resettlement programmes and aid in stepping up local asylum systems. Most of these points ended up in the EU's Migration Partnership Framework, which includes pledges for about 8 billion euros for the period 2016–20.[14]

Most of these measures, however, are for the long term. Thus, in order to provide an immediate solution to the increasing number of arrivals, in 2017 Italian Interior Minister Minniti established a direct dialogue with Libya's government, as well as local and non-state actors in the country. After signing a memorandum of understanding with the al-Sarraj government in February 2017, Minniti held a series of meetings in both Libya and Rome, first with a group of mayors and, at a later stage, with General Khalifa Haftar, the influential military leader in Cyrenaica. The meetings delivered a plan whereby Italy commits to providing funds (an estimated but unconfirmed 40 million euros), infrastructure and technical assistance for local development, in exchange for help in fighting human smugglers.[15] At the end of the summer, a meeting between the Italian, French, Spanish and German leaders, to which Libya, Niger and Chad were also invited, endorsed the Italian approach. Unsurprisingly, Minniti has become the second most popular member of government, and the international press has described him as the first European

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[13] Italian Government, *Migration Compact: Contribution to an EU Strategy for External Action on Migration*, 15 April 2016, http://www.governo.it/node/4509.

[14] European Commission, *European Agenda on Migration: Good Progress in Managing Migration Flows Needs to Be Sustained*, 6 September 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-3081_en.htm.

[15] "Libia, il patto che 'regala immunità ai contrabbandieri' a danno dei migranti", in *Redattore Sociale*, 8 September 2017, http://www.redattoresociale.it/Notiziario/Articolo/545544; Tom Kington, "Italy Offers Libyan Mayors €40m to Stem Flow of Migrants", in *The Times*, 13 July 2017.

politician capable of getting Italy's migration policy under control.[16]

But Italy's actions in Libya have not gone unnoticed, and human rights groups as well as international organizations such as the Council of Europe have expressed grave concern about the initiative. Investigative journalists, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which are present in Libya, have regularly described conditions for migrants in Libya's official detention centres and unofficial prisons as inhumane and degrading. Most of the boat people interviewed in Europe claim they have suffered torture and forced labour. Women, in most cases, speak of rape as well as gang rape. In addition, the charity boats have denounced incidents with the Libyan coastguard in which guards have menaced them and even shot at them.[17] Thus, even though negotiations with various Libyan interlocutors made sea crossings fall sharply in the summer months, concerns about the respect of basic human rights for migrants stuck in Libya have so far not been acted upon. Italy and the EU are discussing with the UNHCR a plan to set up an evacuation camp on the ground, but an operational solution to implement it is still out of sight.

3. *Kein Einwanderungsland*? Between denial and unpreparedness

The entire political debate around migration – in Italy as well as in Europe – focuses nowadays on how to cope with waves of unwanted migrants. Managing migration policy, however, does not only involve dealing with successive mixed inflows of people fleeing war, persecution or starvation. Policy on regulating and allowing labour migration is an integral part of successful migration management.

Unlike Germany, Italy has never even had a debate on whether it is, or is not, becoming a country of immigration. One reason this has not been discussed is that in the past Italy experienced massive emigration. Around 30 million Italians, more than from any other country in Europe, avoided starvation by leaving their motherland between 1860 and 1985.[18] People became less likely to leave when economic conditions improved in the 1960s, and the migratory balance tilted back by the end of the 1970s. But the net increase in foreigners – Moroccans, Tunisians, Senegalese, Filipinos – only took place at the end of the 1980s and was not addressed by any specific government policy.[19]

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[16] Istituto Piepoli, *Elezioni politiche in Germania e top five Ministri Governo italiano*, 22 September 2017, http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it/GestioneSondaggio.aspx; Jason Horowitz, "Italy's 'Lord of the Spies' Takes on a Migration Crisis", in *The New York Times*, 4 August 2017, https://nyti.ms/2huwOTL; Jérôme Gautheret, "Marco Minniti, apparatchik de l'ombre devenu 'M. Anti-migrants' en Italie", in *Le Monde*, 14 September 2017.

[17] Daniel Howden, "The Central Mediterranean: European Priorities, Libyan Realities", cit.

[18] Stefano Baldi and Raimondo Cagiano de Azevedo, *La popolazione italiana verso il 2000. Storia demografica dal dopoguerra ad oggi*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1999.

[19] Enrico Pugliese, *L'Italia tra migrazioni internazionali e migrazioni interne*, 2nd ed., Bologna, Il Mulino, 2006.

This is why, from a policy point of view, Italy's first immigration acts were only passed at that time. The three main features of Italy's long-lasting (but short-sighted) approach to migration management were established in that context. These include the chronic underestimation in annual planning for entry permits for work, widespread amnesty for *sans-papiers* and the emergency decrees in response to unforeseen waves of people. The predominant heritage of Italy's emigration past may help explain such unpreparedness when it comes to regulating labour immigration. The Immigration Act presently in force imposes very limited possibilities to obtain work visas in the framework of annual quotas and establishes that employers can legally recruit foreign workers only when the latter are not yet in Italy. Demand and supply need to meet outside of national borders, and the system makes it very easy to lose one's work visa if one becomes unemployed.

Instead of adapting the quota system to the evolution of the labour market, since 1986 successive governments have adopted five migration amnesties, which have been the only means for millions of third-country workers to get papers.[20] The fact that since 2004 the foreign population has gone up from 2 million to 5 million should thus not come as a surprise. According to academics, about one-third of third-country nationals started their lives in Italy as irregular migrants.[21]

Today, foreigners make up 8.3 percent of residents in Italy. The statistics on the main nationalities counter the widespread perception that Africans have invaded the country. Rather, the main groups of foreigners reflect diverse groups of people that have reached the country during the past thirty-five years. Romanians, who came mainly after 2004, are the first foreign group and make up 23 percent of all foreigners. Each of the other main groups (Albanians, Moroccans, Chinese and Filipinos) accounts for less than half of the Romanian residents.[22]

Almost half of foreigners work in services, mainly care and household work. In 2015, Italian families employed almost 800,000 foreign care workers, mainly to assist the elderly, and estimates are that around 80,000 may be employed irregularly.[23] The other main sectors for work are those traditionally dominated by immigrants, such as construction, restaurants and hotels, and local trade. Agriculture, however, deserves special mention, because most of those without a permit to stay end up in tomato, grape or orange picking. Illegal intermediaries called *caporali* ("corporals") organize this activity in a way that exposes workers – also Italians and confirmed refugees – to labour exploitation. This has led many to

[20] Tito Boeri, "Una grande sanatoria. Quando la prossima?", in *lavoce.info*, 2 December 2002, http://www.lavoce.info/archives/21489.

[21] Asher Colombo, *Fuori controllo? Miti e realtà dell'immigrazione in Italia*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2012.

[22] Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), *National Demographic Balance - Year 2016*, 13 June 2016, https://www.istat.it/en/archive/201143.

[23] Fondazione Leone Moressa, *Il valore del lavoro domestico*, January 2017, http://www.fondazioneleonemoressa.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Infografica_09.01.2017.pdf.

live in the hidden shantytowns that have mushroomed in the southern regions of Apulia, Basilicata and Calabria. Labour exploitation and unlawful intermediation have become so widespread that in 2016 the parliament adopted an *ad hoc* act to increase sanctions against them and organize seasonal work activities legally.

Most sources suggest that *sans-papiers* to date could amount to around half a million, a number that is continually fuelled by those who lose their visas following the end of an employment contract or a failed asylum claim. In 2012 the government stopped opening up annual quotas to third-country nationals, with the limited exception of short-term visas for seasonal workers. Thus foreign EU citizens have become the only ones entitled to enter Italy to seek jobs. As regular channels are closed, most of those who go to Italy from elsewhere to look for work arrive nowadays through the same avenues as asylum seekers. Almost all of them apply for asylum, putting severe strain on a system which, as mentioned, is already fragile.

Conclusion

Until very recently, the Libyan situation seemed to be an insurmountable obstacle to achieving an orderly management of migration. The Italian "solution" devised by Interior Minister Minniti has delivered an unprecedented result in preventing sea crossings, but has two fundamental flaws. First, it has failed to ensure that basic human rights are respected for those stranded in Libya. Second, it has left the "taps" of migration in the hands of actors who are likely to cooperate only as long as they profit from the deal. On another front, Italy faces an impasse on the revision of the Dublin regulation and the inability to open up other legal channels for people travelling to Europe, aside a small, privately sponsored resettlement programme led by an alliance of Christian churches.[24]

Public discourse and policy have also failed to address the fact that many of those landing in southern Italy come looking for jobs and that Italy, and Europe in general, has an ageing population. Demographers are clear that, without migration, the population of the EU will decrease by 10 percent by 2050 and, more worryingly, its population over the age of 70 will increase by 62 percent. Neither current inflows of migrants nor the effects of policies aimed to increase birth rates will compensate for this trend in that time frame.[25] This has obvious implications for European welfare states, as statistics indicate that in Italy alone, third-country nationals pay for 640,000 Italian pensions.[26]

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[24] See the website of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation: *Humanitarian Corridors*, http://www.esteri.it/mae/tiny/22926.

[25] Massimo Livi Bacci, "L'Europa ha bisogno di un'immigrazione di massa?", in *Il Mulino*, No. 488 = 6/2016 (November/December 2016), p. 921-935.

[26] Stefano Natoli, "I lavoratori immigrati 'muovono' il Pil e pagano 640mila pensioni", in *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 12 October 2016, http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/commenti-e-idee/2016-10-12/i-lavoratori-immigrati-muovono-pil-e-pagano-italiani-640mila-pensioni-113104.shtml.

Nonetheless, moderate European parties consider it politically dangerous to debate such implications. With xenophobic movements increasing their appeal, taking action towards stemming influxes and focusing on security is a way to regain the trust of voters scared by terrorist attacks, the lingering effects of the economic crisis and a never-fading fear of cultural difference, especially vis-à-vis Muslims. Centrist and right-wing coalitions have sometimes had more space than left-wing parties to adopt measures that have broken with some of the established rules. In Italy, it was mostly centre-right governments that implemented the amnesties that silently allowed for an increase in foreign workers. German Chancellor Angela Merkel took her famous "*Wir schaffen das*" stance vis-à-vis the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015 – overriding the Dublin rules for three months – but resorted to a tough stance on migration shortly afterwards. However, Germany is still the country that relocated the largest number of the asylum seekers involved in the emergency relocation programme (9,000 persons), as well as being one of the few potential supporters of a reform of the Dublin "first country" rule.

The lack of a structured policy for labour migration is generating a schizophrenic system. Aside from failing to stop the inflows, the narrow focus on securing the borders responds neither to the concerns of the electorate nor to the actual needs of some European countries. In his 2017 State of the Union Address, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker declared that the Commission would resume work on a labour migration plan,[27] but the chances of having member states agree on any such legislative act are almost non-existent. In Italy, where demographic prospects are even worse than elsewhere, labour migration had not entered the political debate for many years, until a recently introduced bill of popular initiative (still to be discussed) put it back on the agenda.

In 2016, for the first time, the overall resident population of Italy shrank – in spite of migration.[28] There is little awareness of this or the fact that the foreign population has made a net contribution to the welfare system of around 5 billion euros and that Italy spends 1.2 billion euros less for the management of migration than it gains from it.[29] This of course does not imply that efforts to establish control over irregular arrivals are not necessary. Nonetheless, given the current impasse, politics needs to start addressing this part of the picture as well. This will involve finding a way to play down the alleged migrant invasion and identifying more concrete solutions for legal and safe channels, both for foreign workers and for asylum seekers.

Updated 8 December 2017

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[27] Jean-Claude Juncker, *State of the Union Address 2017*, Brussels, 13 September 2017, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-17-3165_en.htm.

[28] IDOS, *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2016*, Rome, IDOS, 2016, http://www.dossierimmigrazione.it/pagina.php?cid=5_18.

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