Globalization and Migrant Rights in Post-Pandemic Italy: Navigating Economic Dependency and Policy Exclusion

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Abstract

The study examines the impact of globalization on migration governance and migrant rights in post-pandemic Italy, emphasizing the contrasts between the country's economic reliance on migrant labour and the enforced, more restrictive policies. The research employs a qualitative, desk-based approach to analyse how migration flows have changed due to globalization, the primary human rights problems faced by immigrants, the effects of Italian and EU migration policies, and the socio-economic barriers to integration. The study examines the impact of border securitization, labour market conditions and the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant experiences, with a focus on the increasing importance of civil society and grassroots activism in advocating for migrant rights. By analysing academic literature, policy documents and institutional reports, this research aims to provide a critical understanding of the challenges facing migrants in Italy and how current policies influence their access to legal protections, employment and long-term social stability.

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Globalization can be operationally defined as a dynamic and multidimensional process that intensifies interconnections among states, markets and societies, fundamentally reshaping the conditions of human mobility. While it facilitates the flow of capital, technologies and information, this transnational integration also produces asymmetrical effects on the movement of people, particularly migrants. Economic flows circulate with relative ease, whereas individuals face increasing legal restrictions, border controls, and exclusionary practices that establish hierarchies of access to rights and citizenship (Held & McGrew, 2007). This interconnected system not only generates new opportunities but also restructures global inequalities by creating mechanisms of selective inclusion and systemic vulnerability (Castles et al., 2014). Human mobility, therefore, is not a mere consequence of international integration but a central domain of tension, where the contradictions between economic interdependence and national sovereignty become most visible (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013). In this sense, the current global order should be understood as a regime of differential governance over mobile populations, shaped by policies that can both enable and restrict access to protection, rights and recognition.

Therefore, this phenomenon has transformed migration into an increasingly complex and multifaceted phenomenon, with profound implications for human rights. As economic, political and technological interconnectedness increases, migration has become both an opportunity and a challenge, transforming and altering the economic and social fabric of host countries, while at the same time exposing migrants to unstable conditions. One of the primary reasons global interconnectedness tends to promote international migration lies in the growing economic disparities between regions, which globalization itself helps expose and accentuate. As transnational markets expand and production chains are outsourced, labour demand increases in certain countries while opportunities shrink in others, pushing individuals to migrate in search of stability and employment. Moreover, the spread of communication technologies has enhanced awareness of living standards and opportunities abroad, creating a powerful "aspirational mobility" effect (*Ibidem*). Globalization facilitates the rapid movement of goods, capital and information across borders, lowering barriers in trade and finance. However, this openness does not extend equally to people. In fact, national and supranational institutions often respond to increased mobility with stricter immigration controls and securitized borders. This creates a fundamental paradox: while individuals around the world are more exposed to

global opportunities – through media, communication technologies and economic networks – at the same time, they face growing obstacles to legal and physical movement (Bauman, 1998; Sassen, 2014).

Italy, which is one of the main migration destinations in Europe, is facing these tensions, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated the already vulnerable conditions of migrants. Migration flows, once primarily dictated by economic factors, have increasingly become entangled in securitization narratives, restrictive border policies and debates on national identity, leading to a deepening of inequalities and the erosion of fundamental rights (Caneva, 2014; Castles, 2020; Isakjee et al., 2020).

The impact of globalization on migration is directly linked to changes in labour markets, the development of political discourses focused on sovereignty, and the expanding role of transnational governance in managing migration. Reflecting global trends, Italy has fluctuated between policies aimed at integration and those focusing on security and containment (Gattinara, 2016). The pandemic revealed the vulnerability of migrants' access to essential services, as lack of legal status, economic precarity and political rhetoric influenced the extent to which migrants were able to exercise their rights. While globalization facilitates mobility, it also reinforces socio-economic disparities, as restrictive immigration policies and labour market segmentation create hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion (Parati, 2005). The Italian case is particularly instructive in this regard, as post-pandemic economic downturns resulted in labour shortages, even as political discourse intensified against migration, highlighting the inconsistencies of an economic system that relies on migrant labour while restricting their rights (OECD, 2023).

The legal and institutional frameworks governing migration in Italy and the European Union have evolved in response to shifting socio-political dynamics. The post-pandemic period has witnessed an intensification of border controls, the expansion of hotspot detention centres, and a security-focused discourse that categorizes migrants as both economic liabilities and public health risks (Crawley, 2021; Fabini & Firouzi Tabar, 2023). Policies like forced refoulement, surveillance technologies and containment strategies have not only impeded mobility but also contributed to systematic marginalization, with migrants finding themselves legally trapped between asylum procedures and the denial of basic rights (Fontana, 2022). Political responses to migration have fluctuated between humanitarian rhetoric and discriminatory practices, contributing to a general trend of securitization in migration governance. Italy's agreements with third countries like Albania and Tunisia show how border control is being extraterritorialized. Non-EU states are increasingly outsourcing migration management, which is effectively used

as a deterrence mechanism under the guise of humanitarian concern (BBC, 2024).

Beyond state-led responses, civil society and prosocial networks have played a crucial role in mitigating the vulnerabilities faced by migrant communities. The rise of associative networks and pro-migrant activism demonstrates that institutional responses are not effective in ensuring migrant access to healthcare, housing and employment (Bonizzoni & Hajer, 2023). These networks, which are often situated at the intersection of humanitarian aid and political activism, challenge state policies by means of advocacy, legal support and direct service provision, representing a different narrative than the dominant securitization discourse (della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021). The conflict between activism and institutional politics is increasing, with pro-migrant groups using civil disobedience methods to challenge restrictive migration policies and expose systemic injustices (Daminelli, 2022; Perolini, 2024). However, the growing influence of associative networks does not merely reflect a humanitarian impulse but signals a broader shift in the governance of migration, where non-state actors assume roles traditionally occupied by political institutions (Biorcio and Vitale, 2016).

Faced with state inaction and exclusionary policies, civil society organizations have taken on a crucial role in both advocating for migrant rights and exposing the deep-seated marginalization affecting migrant communities. The efforts of pro-migrant activism, which involve grassroots initiatives, legal assistance and humanitarian support, not only challenge restrictive migration frameworks but also reveal the systemic barriers that hinder migrants from obtaining basic rights, economic security and social inclusion (Della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021). This would seem to highlight the contradictions of globalization.

The intersection of globalization and migration is further complicated by labour dynamics and economic transformations in the post-pandemic era. While globalization has facilitated the mobility of capital, goods and information, labour mobility remains heavily restricted, particularly for migrants from the Global South. The Italian labour market illustrates this paradox: although there are labour shortages in key sectors such as agriculture, construction and domestic work, political discourse continues to frame migration as a threat rather than an economic necessity (IDOS, 2022; OECD, 2021). Migrants frequently experience precarious employment conditions, since they are often excluded from labour protections and social safety nets, which reinforces patterns of exploitation and economic marginalization (ISTAT, 2019). The pandemic made these inequalities even worse by leaving migrants more vulnerable to job losses, housing insecurity and the digital divide in education, with many of them unable to receive state assistance due to their irregular status (Save the Children, 2020).

Cultural and social integration is still a contentious issue that is shaped by narratives about national identity, belonging and exclusion. The post-pandemic period saw a resurgence of anxieties surrounding cultural homogeneity, with migrants increasingly perceived as both economic competitors and cultural outsiders (More in Common, 2018). The framing of migrants as the 'Other' reinforces processes of racialization and exclusion, with integration being seen as an obligation to adhere to dominant cultural norms instead of a reciprocal process (Avineri & De-Shalit,1992). However, the very notion of cultural homogeneity is challenged by the realities of globalization, where migration is not a temporary or exceptional phenomenon but an intrinsic feature of modern societies (Tshibambe, 2020). The Italian case illustrates the relationship between migration governance and broader political struggles over national identity, economic policy and human rights, where the discourse of security frequently trumps considerations of justice and equity.

This study aims to critically examine these interrelated dynamics by addressing the following objectives: (1) to analyse the impact of globalization on migration patterns and the human rights of migrants in Italy, particularly in the light of the post-pandemic socio-economic context; (2) to identify the primary human rights challenges faced by migrants in Italy, including access to healthcare, housing, education and employment; (3) to assess the role of civil society and pro-migrant networks in advocating for migrant rights and challenging restrictive policies; and (4) to evaluate how the post-pandemic period has influenced the cultural integration of migrant communities in Italy, analysing the impact of economic challenges, ethnic awareness and national identity on public attitudes and government policies.

By placing the Italian case within wider global trends, this study aims to provide a more complete understanding of how globalization has both enabled and hindered migration, creating new opportunities while also reinforcing existing inequalities. It argues for a rethinking of migration governance that prioritizes human rights, social inclusion and economic justice, rather than securitization and exclusion. The findings of this research will highlight the urgent need for policies that connect globalization with the ethical values of human dignity and mobility, moving beyond the restrictive paradigms that still shape migration discussions in Italy and beyond.

Methodology and Research Objectives

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on desk-based analysis, critically analysing academic literature, government reports, NGO publications, media articles and policy documents to examine the intersection of globalization, migration and human rights in post-pandemic Italy. Based on critical migration studies, the research investigates how global economic,

political and social transformations have influenced migration flows, policies and migrant rights (Castles, 2020; Isakjee et al., 2020).

The research is structured around the following key questions: How has globalization affected migration flows to Italy in the post-pandemic context? What are the main human rights challenges faced by migrants in post-pandemic Italy, particularly in terms of healthcare, housing, education and employment? In what ways have Italian and EU policies influenced the protection of migrants' rights during the post-pandemic recovery? How has the post-pandemic period influenced the cultural integration of migrant communities in Italy, and how have economic challenges, awareness of ethnic diversity, and national identity shaped public attitudes and government policies?

The study aims to analyse the impact of globalization on migration trends, assess the effects of COVID-19 on migrant rights, evaluate the role of Italian and EU migration policies, and explore the socio-economic challenges of migrant integration. Special attention is paid to the contradiction between economic dependence on migrant labour and restrictive migration policies (IDOS, 2022; OECD, 2023).

Using critical thinking and engaging with policy frameworks, legal measures and civil society responses, the research highlights structural barriers to migrant inclusion, with a focus on prosocial activism in addressing exclusionary policies (Bonizzoni & Hajer, 2023). The findings aim to contribute to discussions on migration justice by advocating for policies that place human dignity, social inclusion and economic equity above securitization and containment.

Globalization and its impact on migrants and their fundamental human rights

Globalization has transformed migration, both offering opportunities and exacerbating inequalities, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. While economic interdependence has made mobility easier, national and supranational policies have progressively restricted access to migration, strengthening a migrant hierarchy that favours offering work to unskilled African migrants but denies them rights (Castles, 2020). Italy, a prominent European destination, reflects these tensions due to its economic dependence on migrant labour, but its political discourse and policies increasingly prioritize border control and exclusion over integration and protection (Gattinara, 2016; OECD, 2023). The pandemic revealed the vulnerable conditions of migrants, including economic vulnerability, health care exclusion and housing instability, which are part of wider trends of structural marginalization (WHO, 2020).

The effects of globalization on migration are paradoxical. On one hand, global interconnectedness has accelerated transnational mobility, driven by economic disparities, climate change and political instability (Desai, 2003; Tsapenko & Sautkina, 2018). On the other hand, migration policies have become increasingly restrictive, as states reinforce legal and physical barriers to regulate who can move and under what conditions (Dokos, 2017). The post-pandemic period has reinforced these contradictions, with European policies prioritizing securitization and deterrence over protection and integration, resulting in the expansion of border surveillance, detention centres and bilateral agreements with non-EU states to process asylum claims offshore (BBC, 2024; Fabini & Tabar, 2023).

In Italy, the post-pandemic economic downturn exacerbated migrant precarity, particularly in key labour sectors such as agriculture, construction and domestic work, which rely heavily on foreign labour (IDOS, 2022; OECD, 2021). Even though they are crucial to the economy, migrants, particularly those with irregular status, have been excluded from financial relief measures and forms of social protection, revealing the contradictions of an economic system that relies on their work while also restricting their rights (Caritas Europe, 2021). Housing insecurity has worsened, with reception centres operating at over 15% capacity, leaving many migrants in overcrowded or makeshift accommodations, increasing their exposure to both disease and economic exploitation (Red Cross Italy, 2020). Additionally, during the pandemic migrant children were disproportionately affected by the digital divide, as many lacked the necessary resources for remote learning during school closures, deepening pre-existing educational inequalities (Save the Children, 2020).

Although globalization has been considered a factor for economic and social progress, it has also exacerbated socio-political tensions, resulting in a rise in nationalist rhetoric and the securitization of migration policies (More in Common, 2018; Parati, 2005). The Italian government, in line with broader European trends, has tightened migration laws, restricted asylum rights, and enlarged detention and deportation mechanisms, further depriving migrant communities. The bilateral agreements between Italy and Albania or Tunisia, which externalize asylum processing and shift migration control beyond EU borders, demonstrate a growing reliance on deterrence rather than protection, raising serious human rights concerns (BBC, 2024).

Despite these obstacles, civil society organizations and prosocial networks have emerged as significant players in the fight for migrant rights, filling the gaps that states have neglected (Bonizzoni & Hajer, 2023; della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021). Migrant advocacy groups have been essential in providing legal aid, securing emergency housing, and pressuring institutions to uphold human rights standards, but they still face increasing restrictions

(Fabini & Tabar, 2023). Pro-migrant activism illustrates the evolution of migration governance, as state institutions disengage from social responsibility, and NGOs and advocacy groups are entrusted with mitigating the consequences of discriminatory policies (Biorcio et al., 2016).

The conflict between globalization, migration, and human rights is especially evident in Italy's efforts to recover from the pandemic, where economic imperatives clash with restrictive policies that prioritize political expediency over social justice. The Italian case highlights the urgent need for a radical change in migration governance, shifting from securitization to an approach that recognizes the economic contributions, social integration, and fundamental rights of migrant communities. To address these disparities, policies must be established that reconcile economic realities with human dignity, so that migrants are not always excluded from society but are recognized as essential players in shaping Italy's post-pandemic future.

The Role of Italian and European Policies in the Post-Pandemic Management of Migration

The intensification of economic interdependence and cross-border mobility due to globalization has resulted in migration governance becoming deeply entangled in political and security discourses instead of human rights imperatives. Despite the fact that labour migration is necessary due to economic globalization, state institutions still prioritize border control, restrictive asylum policies and surveillance mechanisms, which strengthens the contradictions of current migration governance (Castles, 2020). The post-pandemic era has worsened these tensions by balancing migration policies with security, deterrence and exclusion, often at the cost of human dignity (European Migration Network, 2024). Italy, a focal point of Mediterranean migration, has played a pivotal role in shaping and implementing restrictive policies, aligning itself with broader European strategies aimed at externalizing border control and limiting access to asylum procedures (OECD, 2023; Fabini & Tabar, 2023).

One of the defining trends in contemporary migration governance is the increasing securitization of migration, evident in the expansion of border surveillance, the proliferation of detention centres, and the criminalization of irregular migration (Fontana, 2022). Italy's response to the COVID-19 pandemic exemplifies this approach, as the closure of ports and mandatory quarantine measures disproportionately affected migrants, reinforcing their social and legal marginalization (Crawley, 2021). Migrants were not just physically immobile in reception centres and hotspots, but they were also portrayed in public discourse as public health threats, which increased the legitimacy of exclusionary migration policies (Fabini & Tabar, 2023). The securitization of migration is a political strategy that aims to reinforce

narratives of control and national sovereignty while consolidating state power over mobility (Bonizzoni & Hajer, 2023).

The European Union's approach to migration governance has focused on containment rather than protection, as shown by its increasing reliance on third-country agreements, increased border militarization, and restrictive asylum policies. These agreements, which are framed as practical solutions for migration management, effectively absolve the EU of its legal and humanitarian duties, prompting serious concerns about the deterioration of international protections for asylum seekers and the normalization of forced refoulement practices (Nicolosi, 2024).

Civil society organizations and prosocial networks have emerged as key actors in contesting exclusionary policies, providing legal aid and humanitarian assistance, and advocating for migrant rights due to these structural constraints. The growing disparity between state institutions and migrant communities has led to an increase in pro-migrant activism, which involves using collective action and civil disobedience to challenge migration restrictions and state violence (Isakjee et al., 2020; della Porta & Steinhilper, 2021). Organizations such as Kesha Niya[1] and Progetto 20k[2] in Italy and France, along with support groups in Germany like Seebrücke[3], demonstrate how prosocial networks function as alternative structures of solidarity and resistance. These networks often step in to fill the gaps left by state inaction or hostility (Schwiertz and Steinhilper 2021; Daminelli, 2022; Perolini, 2024).

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[1] Kesha Niya was founded in 2016 to support migrants along the Italian-French border. It began in Grande-Synthe, near Dunkirk, providing food, firewood and basic aid to Kurdish migrants. In 2017, the group moved to Ventimiglia to focus on distributing hot meals and monitoring border pushbacks and police actions.
As conditions worsened, Kesha Niya shifted from food aid to documenting violence and directly supporting stranded migrants. Today, it continues to operate flexibly along the border, offering food, monitoring and shelter, and organizing public awareness events, adapting to migrants' changing needs.
More info: https://keshaniya.org
[2] Progetto20k was founded in 2016 in Ventimiglia by a group of local volunteers and activists from various parts of Italy, united by the goal of offering concrete and immediate support to migrants turned away at the Italian-French border. From the outset, the network developed informally, without a rigid hierarchical structure, grounded in the principle of direct solidarity. It represents a grassroots solidarity initiative – deeply rooted in the local territory yet open to external contributions. The group is characterized by its ability to respond quickly and flexibly to the changing needs of migrants and the evolving dynamics of the border context.
For more information, visit their page: https://www.facebook.com/progetto20k/?locale=it_IT.
[3] Seebrücke is a grassroots network founded in Berlin in 2018 by activists reacting to the criminalization of sea rescue NGOs and the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean. It promotes safe and dignified reception for refugees, advocates for legal migration routes, and opposes restrictive EU policies. Decentralized and active in over 180 European cities, Seebrücke organizes protests and actions to demand humane refugee policies.
More info: https://www.seebruecke.org/en

Despite the resilience of civil society, the post-pandemic period has been marked by a tightening of migration laws, which has further restricted access to legal pathways and reinforced precarious conditions for migrants (Ambrosini, 2022). The expansion of deportation mechanisms, the erosion of asylum protections, and the institutionalization of border hotspots signal a broader political shift towards deterrence rather than inclusion (Castles, 2020; Moro, 2010). The reason for this change is not just related to economic constraints; it is a deliberate political strategy to frame migration as a security challenge instead of a humanitarian or socio-economic reality (More in Common, 2018).

As the debate over migration governance continues, Italy and the European Union stand at a crossroads: whether to maintain exclusionary and securitized policies that perpetuate cycles of precarity and marginalization, or implement more inclusive systems that acknowledge the contributions and rights of migrant communities. In order to address these contradictions, a fundamental reorientation of migration governance is required, moving away from a paradigm of containment towards one centered on protection, inclusion and justice. The future of European migration policies will ultimately depend on whether policymakers prioritize short-term political gains or long-term social cohesion and human rights.

Globalization and Migrant Communities in Post-Pandemic Italy: Opportunities and Challenges

While Italian and European migration policies often focus on security and border control, they fail to reflect the everyday realities faced by migrant communities. There is a growing disconnect between political decisions made at institutional levels and the lived experiences of migrants, who continue to face exclusion and uncertainty. In this context, the challenge lies in rethinking globalization not only as a system of movement and regulation, but as a pathway for inclusive development – one that places integration at the heart of social cohesion.

Integration is a three-fold issue reflecting the global paradigms of a three-way process: the background to the individual immigration path, the development of the countries of emigration, and the role of the countries of immigration (Caneva, 2014: 8). In this perspective, in Italy the immigrant is put at the heart of the integration narrative. In the aftermath of the pandemic, the acceptance of individuals within the communities they join has faced increased scrutiny based on at least three aspects: 1) the changes in the economic perspectives of native people due to structural developments in labour trends; 2) the increased awareness of ethnic diversity and cultural competition, which has been fuelled by the rise of global virtual communication and the additional time spent on it in the pandemic and post-

pandemic contexts; 3) the materialization and metamorphosis of fear, in the context of new imaginary enemies, and the capitalization of safety and security as central aims (Gattinara, 2016: 20). All these factors may have transformed certain communities of immigrants in Italy into symbols of power, in the political and socio-cultural discourse.

Recent cases of asylum seekers docked in Lampedusa (BBC, 2024) have shown how globalist concern for human rights preservation has been challenged by the sovereigntist narrative of distributional integration in different communities, even beyond territorial boundaries. A report by the *Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS* from 2022 revealed the increase in the number of immigrants to Italy, in 2021, after two immigrant-friendly laws for special protection and regularization (IDOS, 2022) were put into effect. This greater receptivity of the Italian community after the pandemic did not, however, reduce the exposure of migrants in Italy to poverty, vulnerability and exploitation, compared to nationals.

One main reason for this can be found in the re-conceptualized narrative of employment. Moreover, the 'fear' of immigrants has grown since 2023, after Lampedusa became overcrowded (Colombini, 2023), although the border crossing restrictions during the pandemic and the morbidity rates caused by Covid-19 contributed to the relevant curtailment in migrant numbers (OECD, 2021). This fear is rooted in the awareness of ethnic diversity and cultural competition. It promotes differentiation and discrimination rather than integration. Although homogeneity of cultures is not desirable for the future (Parati, 2005:231), respect for cultural diversity and the openness of the receiving countries, as a general trend, must be effective, as long as it does not interfere with the independence of the individual within the limitations of the community (Walzer, 1992: 83).

Continuous stereotyping of Europe "as a fortress" falls under the mismanagement of the public perception of the foreigner as being a threat. This is also relevant in the Italian context regarding Italian identity (More in Common, 2018*)*. Public discourse has suggested that Italians' attitudes towards immigrants are becoming more negative. This has made it difficult for the state and NGOs to assure sustainable aid, especially for African migrants. Notwithstanding the model of the three-way process sustained by Caneva (2014: 8), in the case of African immigrants to Italy, the assistance provided by the state is not always positive. It does not always put the migrant at the heart of the matter. The focus remains on the receiving country that uses its rights for admission or exclusion as a challenge to the principle of freedom to settle in the receiving country. While talking about Cranston's (1973) asymmetric morality of immigration and emigration, Walzer suggested that the right to closure is fundamental to integration and the formation of membership in the host country (1992: 84). Nevertheless, the right to closure

places the obligation to integrate migrants on the receiving country; it does not require migrants to integrate themselves. According to the 2018 data of More in Common, but also media discourse, about 44% of Italians believe that migrants do not make sufficient effort to become integrated into Italian society (2018:5). Employment issues, cultural insecurity or feelings of inadequacy might hinder immigrants from fully integrating into the Italian community. In the context of the post-pandemic world, only changes regarding employment would have a significant impact on the joint integrative efforts of the immigrants and receiving countries. This is sustained by the fact that cultural preservation and the feelings of inadequacy are stable parameters, which also depend on contexts related to the providing countries.

Conclusions

The human rights challenges faced by migrants in Italy have been exacerbated by border policies, economic marginalization, and institutional failures. Our analysis of the documentation shows that the securitization of migration has intensified since the pandamic, and this is sustained by the tendency of the Italian state to expand detention centres even beyond borders, to practice forced refoulement, and to criminalize irregular migration under new perspectives, following the process model studied by Fontana (2022) and Crawley (2021). The narrative of migrants as public health risks during COVID-19 further legitimized their exclusion from essential services, deepening inequalities in healthcare, housing, and employment, according to early results reported by the WHO in 2020. Nowadays, the political responses to be put under a critical lens are based on nationalist and sovereigntist rhetoric, prioritizing containment over humanitarian protection, and this can be seen in Italy's agreements with Albania and Tunisia to externalize asylum processing (BBC, 2024). At this point we agree with Nicolosi (2024), that such policies for the management of migration do violate international protections for asylum seekers, reinforcing patterns of forced immobility and systematic exclusion.

Our analysis indicates that current political pressures prioritize security over integration, which sustains the claims of Fabini and Tabar (2023); moreover, we have observed that, although there are legal frameworks to protect migrant rights, their implementation is not consistent with the reality in the socio-political context. Thus, the role of Italian and EU policies in shaping migrants' rights reflects a wider trend of shifting responsibilities from national institutions towards third-country agreements, NGO interventions and temporary humanitarian solutions.

However, Italy's policy towards migration that oscillates between employing labour market pragmatism and implementing political deterrence strategies, which was already studied by Bonifazi and Paparusso (2018), is

highlighted from a different perspective in the post-pandemic context, as the precarious status of migrants has not affected the structural conditions that fuel mobility. The gap between economic necessity and legal exclusion was depicted in a 2021 OECD report as the outcome of a short-term politically motivated migration policy, but since this could not offer sustainable solutions for either migrants or host communities, our recommendation and call to action here is to go beyond the political interpretation.

The socio-economic conditions that affect migration integration remain defined by structural barriers to employment, social mobility and legal integration. The post-pandemic period has resulted in an increase in labour competition and economic insecurity, leading to anti-immigrant rhetoric and restrictive policies, even though evidence shows that migrants are beneficial for economic growth, an idea sustained in the More in Common project of 2018 cited in this paper. Considering more particular cases, the lack of comprehensive integration strategies, coupled with racialized perceptions of African and Middle Eastern migrants, has reinforced a fragmented and exclusionary model of social inclusion, which was suggested by Parati (2005) and Colombini (2023). Based on our analysis of perceptions surrounding African, Middle Eastern, and occasionally Eastern European migrants, we propose that integration be reinterpreted as a political approach rather than a social process, which, according to Caneva (2014) further limits opportunities for civic participation, cultural recognition and economic stability. However, precisely because this political tool has also affected the manifestation of relations in Italian society between citizens and migrants, civil society organizations and prosocial networks have become essential players in advocating for migrants' rights. In the wake of new perspectives on the post-pandemic Italian migration issues, the research conducted by Della Porta and Steinhilper (2021) on the resistance against restrictive policies for the provision of crucial services to migrants also highlights the fact that these actions have deepened social oppositions and the rise of anti-migrant debates, spotlighting the instrumenalization of migrants in politics.

On the other hand, the efforts of activists also remain constrained by legal and institutional barriers in the post-pandemic period; therefore, we agree with opinions such as those of Perolini (2024), Daminelli (2022), Schwiertz & Steinhilper (2020) or Gattinara (2016) that state-led governance in Italy would appear to continue to prioritize containment over inclusion, reflected in the security and sovereignty discourses which might restrict progress, because migration is necessary for both demographic and economic reasons.

The tension between economic globalization and restrictive migration policies underscores the urgent need for a fundamental rethinking of migration

governance. Effective reform should go beyond border control and security measures, prioritizing human dignity, legal protection and the recognition of migrants as contributors to society. This includes addressing the public discourse that shapes relations between migrants and citizens, and restoring a conceptual balance between inclusion, discrimination and legality. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed systemic vulnerabilities that future policies must acknowledge and integrate. Without such a shift toward rights-based and inclusive frameworks, both economic recovery and democratic cohesion risk being undermined, while the marginalization of migrants will persist in ways that are neither just nor sustainable (Castles, 2020; Fabini & Tabar, 2023; OECD, 2023).

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