



MAGYC
Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

The Representation of the “Refugee Crisis” in Italy: Constructing a Crisis-Invasion Discourse

Iraklis Dimitriadis
University of Milan

MAGYC: The MAGYC (**Migr**Ation **G**overnance and **AsYlum C**risis) project seeks to assess how migration governance has responded to the recent “refugee crises” and has since been influenced by it, and how crises at large shape policy responses to migration. This four-year research project (2018–2022) brings together twelve international partners: the Hugo Observatory from the University of Liège (Coordinator), Sciences Po, the University of Economics in Bratislava, the GIGA institute of Global and Area Studies, Lund University, the IDMC, SOAS University of London, the University of Milan, the Lebanese American University, the University of Macedonia, Sabanci University, IfPO/CNRS.

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Lead author: Iraklis Dimitriadis, University of Milan

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[D3.5. Conference paper on the crisis narrative of the asylum emergency in Italy, and the multiplicity of actors involved in the asylum governance in Italy]

MAGYC [Presentation of Conference Paper 1]

Abstract. The intensification of the crisis-discourse related to the arrivals of asylum seekers in Italy since 2012 has often resulted in an increasing perception of “invasion”. At the national level, the crisis invasion discourse has been vividly (re)produced by the mass media and the Italian government (after the electoral victory of anti-establishment parties in 2018) that claimed an ‘exponential’ increase of inflows, mainly consisted of African males arriving by sea. At the local level, local communities have often presented themselves as the “victims” of an “invasion”, and thus they have to defend themselves from those (asylum seekers and migrants) by which they feel threatened. This is often expressed through a perception of the local territory as a private property, as an extension of home. In addition, at both levels, asylum seekers are also represented as welfare scroungers during a period in which a big number of Italian citizens still face economic hardships. In the light of these considerations, this paper seeks to understand how crisis and invasion discourses have been shaped in Italy. It explores how different actors, at different levels, apprehend ongoing migration-related realities and (re)produce crisis invasion discourses and narratives to make sense of them. Research is based on secondary data analysis and 40 in-depth semi-structured interviews with local and national policymakers (from different political orientations), experts, civil society associations and major news media representatives.

Neuchâtel Graduate Conference of Migration and Mobility Studies

University of Neuchâtel, 12 – 13 September 2019

Panel 8 - Representations of the “Refugee Crisis”

The Representation of the “Refugee Crisis” in Italy: Constructing a Crisis-Invasion Discourse

Iraklis Dimitriadis, Ph.D.

Research Fellow, University of Milan

Department of Social and Political Sciences



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Premises

- **MAGYC project:** how European migration policies are influenced by political crises triggered by migration
- **Work Package 3:** how different actors, at different levels, apprehend ongoing **migration-related** realities and produce **discourses and narratives** to make sense of them
- Since the midst of the recent economic crisis immigration in Italy has been characterized by **increasing inflows** which followed the “Arab Springs”, whereas over 2015 and 2016 arrivals peaked: “**refugee crisis**” became the predominant frame
- **Representations** of inflows have been initially much more **positive** in the public debate (humanitarian discourses), while the term “**invasion**” has predominantly associated with new arrivals from 2015 onwards to describe “**unwanted migration**”.
- Invasion became the *leitmotiv* of any **anti-migrant narrative** in press coverage and political statements at the national level. Local actors, namely governments, press and civil society actors also represented **new arrivals** as invaders who **entered** local communities **by force or in an annoying way**, affecting the lives of peaceful local communities (Campomori & Ambrosini 2019) (juxtaposition of ‘**us**’ and ‘**them**’).
- Invasion frame legitimates the implementation of policies of exclusion at the local level (Ambrosini 2020; Marchetti 2020) and national restrictive policies. In 2018, Italy adopted decrees that cut resources destined to asylum seekers reception and could fine NGOs involved in rescuing operations (criminalization of NGOs accused of collaborating with human smugglers)

Research Questions and Methods

1. How do experts try to constitute what the so-called refugee crisis is about in Italy and in Europe?

2. How do representations of refugee crisis (de)legitimate (restrictive) national policies and inclusion or exclusion of migrants at the local level?

Analysis of secondary data

- Literature review on public discourses on immigration in Italy
- Exploration of studies focusing on media discourses analysis
- Online newspaper articles, empirical evidence and statistical data coming from various reports, websites and surveys

40 in-depth interviews with “engaged” experts

- National level: journalists, scholars, political parties’ representatives, trade unionists, representatives of migration-related associations (15 out of 20 so far)
- Local level: representatives of local governments, associations, journalists, religious actors (1 out of 20 so far)
- Selection: coverage most of the narratives by interviewing experts with pro-, against and neutral views on immigration
- Lasting 1 hour on average

Representations of the “Refugee crisis”

Discursive strategies and ideologies underpinning legitimization of restrictive immigration policies (1)

Constructive strategies (negative other presentation)

- ... it's **not** an emergency, it's **not** a humanitarian crisis, but it's about **population transfers** to Europe [...] we cannot talk about immigration but a **mass clandestine immigration** governed by **criminal organizations** that are linked with **Islamic terrorist movements** as all Intelligence services tell us. [Journalist, N2]

Moral evaluations – system of values

- ...when I was in [African country], I was talking to them (prospect migrants): “Guys, there is **no work even for our children (Italians)** in Italy. (they replied): No, (we're not looking for) not a job, we come to Europe because **you will give us everything**: the house, the car; we saw on television the Italian navy brings us to Europe [Journalist, N2]
- **These** guys (asylum seekers) who in any way have a soup plate, have a roof to shelter... or, they are even given some Italian classes... **they** have no convenience to get a real job, and so they have often jobs in the black market, even **contiguous to criminality**... This plays in the hand of those who make simplistic slogans “Send them back home”, but unfortunately these slogans are not based on nothing, they are based on an **actual situation** [Politician-Scholar, N2]

Representations of the “Refugee crisis”

Discursive strategies and ideologies underpinning legitimization of restrictive immigration policies (2)

Mythopoesis

- Today, 4 people arrive, **tomorrow 4,000**, the day after **tomorrow 8,000...** and I have to find a place for everyone. So, **it’s not me who decides** to accept them, where to put them, how many to receive and, therefore, it is an invasion... If you have 50,000 Nigerians in a city and those rebel, they make a **mess**, then **civil war breaks**. You have to send the army. **If** then, you distribute them in small towns, so to say that you send 150 twenty-year old Nigerians to hill towns of 300-400 inhabitants, mostly elderly, the perception they have is the same as when the Americans arrived in 1944; that of the **invasion**. [Journalist, N2]

Representations of the “Refugee crisis”

Discursive strategies and ideologies underpinning legitimization of restrictive immigration policies (3)

Rationalisation: economic arguments

- During the Senate hearings, some NGOs had a very questionable stance in relation to (role of) the State (on rescuing operations). There was almost an idea of opposition... they refused to accept police officers on board... **probably** they didn't cooperate with the **smugglers in a direct way**, but already the fact that you position yourself in a certain place (at sea), and these people (smugglers) bring you other people; maybe it's not about cooperation, it's not about communication but ... [Politician-Scholar, N2]
- They (Italians) must find themselves in a position to compete with those who demand less in the labour market... My speech is not sovereign now, it is **Marx**, because Carl Marx in 1850 in the "Capital" described an equal situation when it came to talking about the English workers... This is what is happening here, I am not a Marxist, but we must be **objective**. [Journalist, N2]
- Integration policies have been largely bankrupt because they address populations of the **Islamic** world that **historically cannot be integrated** into societies based on **human rights**, that is the Universal declarations of the Human rights... They cannot be integrated into a cultural model like ours which is based on the fact that you and I and that girl there have that same rights. For them it is not like this. [Journalist, N2]

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Thank you for your attention!

Iraklis Dimitriadis, Ph.D.

Research Fellow, University of Milan - Department of Social and Political Sciences

Email: iraklis.dimitriadis@unimi.it

Researchgate.net: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Iraklis_Dimitriadis2

Academia.edu: <https://unive.academia.edu/IraklisDimitriadis>



MAGYC

Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

The governance of
asylum issue as a
battleground: empirical
evidences on (non)-
deportation of rejected
asylum seekers in Italy

Maurizio Ambrosini and
Iraklis Dimitriadis

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MAGYC [Presentation of Conference Paper 2]

Abstract. Starting from the Italian experience, the paper asserts that the governance of immigration, especially at local level, can be considered a “battleground” involving different actors. Beyond the idea of a “negotiated order” as the result of the interaction among actors (mainly institutional) in the multilevel governance framework, the management of asylum at a local level is the output of conflict and cooperation, alternative views and political actions, official policies and practical help, formal statements and informal practices.

From one side, anti-establishment and xenophobic political forces reached a wide audience in Italy as in other countries, spreading fears and accusations against asylum seekers, the NGOs rescuing them, and the cooperatives providing reception services. Many Italian municipalities also mobilized against refugees’ reception, enacting various forms of protests.

On the other side, we find “supporters” acting in favour of asylum seekers in various ways, for moral, political or religious reasons. Civil society is at the forefront, developing manifold activities in favour of refugees, ranging from political protest to the provision of services.

The restrictions enacted by the State indeed are giving more space to alternative providers of services. Furthermore, the radicalisation of the struggle on asylum and migration policies is giving a political meaning also to ordinary actions of help and support. Then the practical governance of immigration and asylum is not only determined at an institutional level; it is also influenced by the reactions and the initiatives on the part of civil society. The concept of battleground, beyond the literature on the multi-level governance of immigration and asylum, tries to grasp this contentious dynamics.

In the light of these considerations, this paper aims to explore the role of local institutional and civil society actors in influencing policies around deportation of rejected asylum seekers in Italy, and how they frame legalization. Although the recent legislative initiatives aimed at tightening deportation of irregular migrants, poor results obtained so far, recalling the limited ability of Italian authorities to implement such policies. By delving into perceptions and analysing actions of different actors in a local migration ecosystem in Northern Italy, our paper shows how local governments, solidarity networks and actors, as well as those opposing migration interact and shape the (non) implementation of deportation policies of rejected asylum seekers. The paper is based on the first results of the H2020 project MAGYC. In particular, it draws on 30 interviews with representatives of local governments, municipal civil servants, journalists in local newspapers, religious actors, members of pro-migrant associations or solidarity/advocacy networks, those engaged in associations or movements opposing migration, managers of reception centres, and refugees themselves. The concept of battleground permits us to show the complexities of interaction between these actors in relation to (non) deportation of rejected asylum seekers, and advance understandings around

[D3.5. The governance of asylum issue as a battleground: empirical evidences on (non)-deportation of rejected asylum seekers in Italy]

migration enforcement regimes. Concerning how civil society actors frame legalization, the paper shows that logics of individual deservingness prevail, although universal discourses on legalization are also common. Finally, we discuss durable solutions for rejected asylum seekers.

Durable solutions for rejected asylum seekers?

Erasmus University College Rotterdam – 16-17 January 2020

Academic Workshop - Session 2: Lessons from European case studies

The governance of asylum issue as a battleground:
empirical evidences on (non)-deportation of rejected
asylum seekers in Italy

Maurizio Ambrosini and Iraklis Dimitriadis

University of Milan - Department of Social and
Political Sciences



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The governance of asylum issue as a 'battleground'

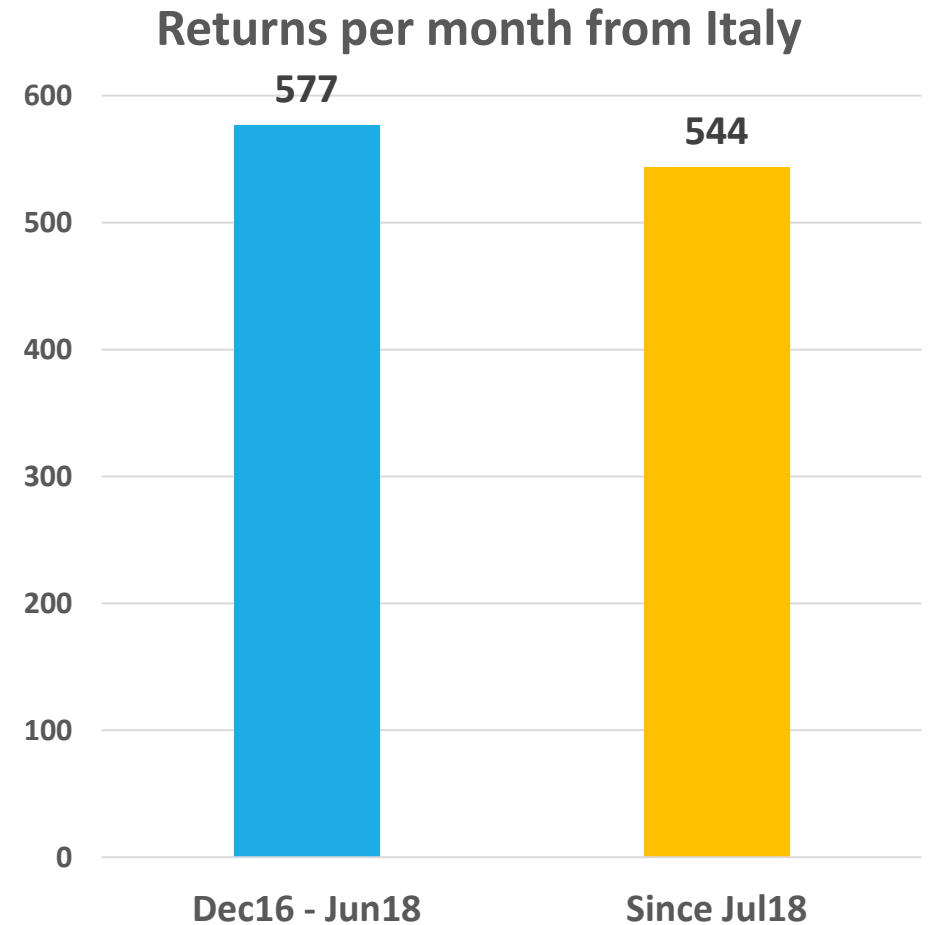
- The concept of 'battleground' (Ambrosini 2018; Campomori and Ambrosini 2020) is a useful tool to comprehend the contentious aspects of multi-level governance of migration.
- The multi-level governance framework as a conflictual field where several actors and subjects interact – in a cooperative and/or conflictual way – for the management of migration and asylum processes.
- Analysis of the dynamics of interaction between actors of different nature and at different scale, and how these can shape migration governance.

Recent restrictive legislative initiatives on asylum governance

Abolition of the possibility to appeal a negative asylum decision by the Civil Court to the Court of Appeal (Minniti-Orlando Decree in 2017)

Implementation of the so-called 'Security Decree' during the mandate of right-wing Minister of Interior Salvini, with several dispositions on asylum. Since October 2018, the new Decree:

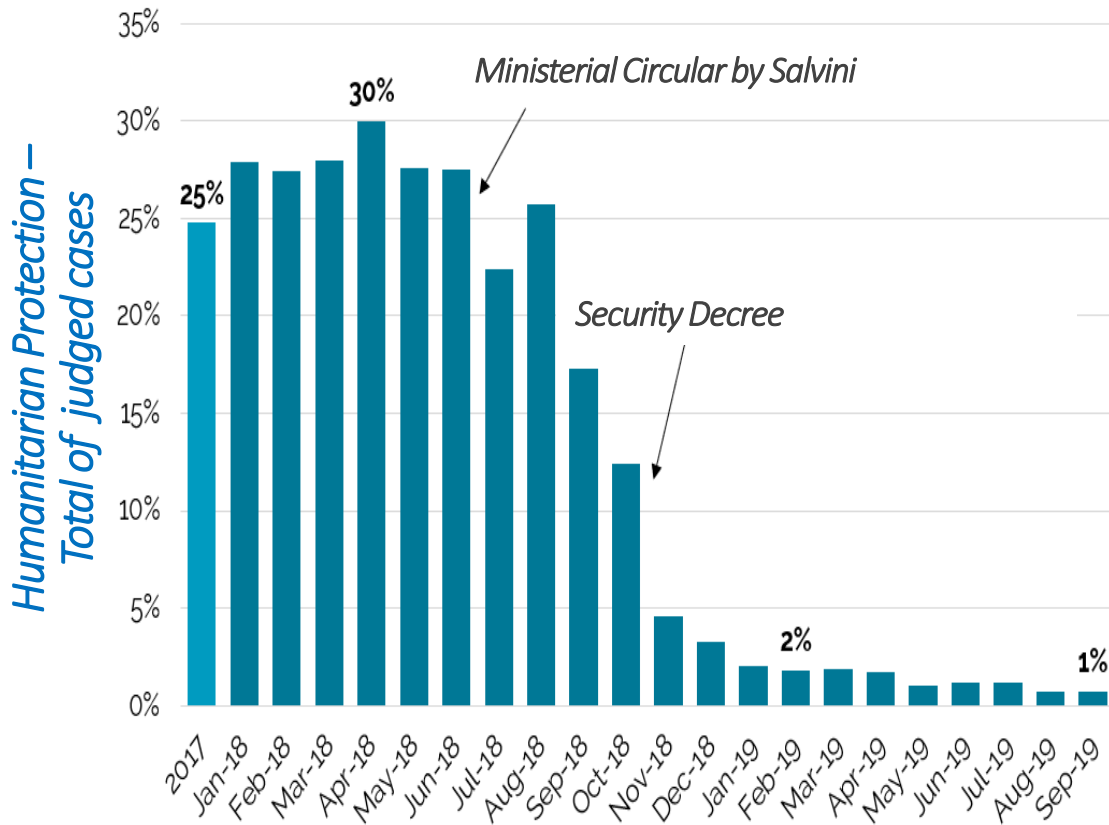
- 1) almost abolished the possibility to receive «humanitarian» protection status – now narrowed only to those facing serious health problems, coming from countries suffering natural disasters, or those who have been abused
- 2) reinstated the 180-day time limit for administrative detention, when it was reduced to 90 days already in 2012
- 3) provided more funds for expulsions



Source: Ministry of Interior, twitter.com/emmevilla

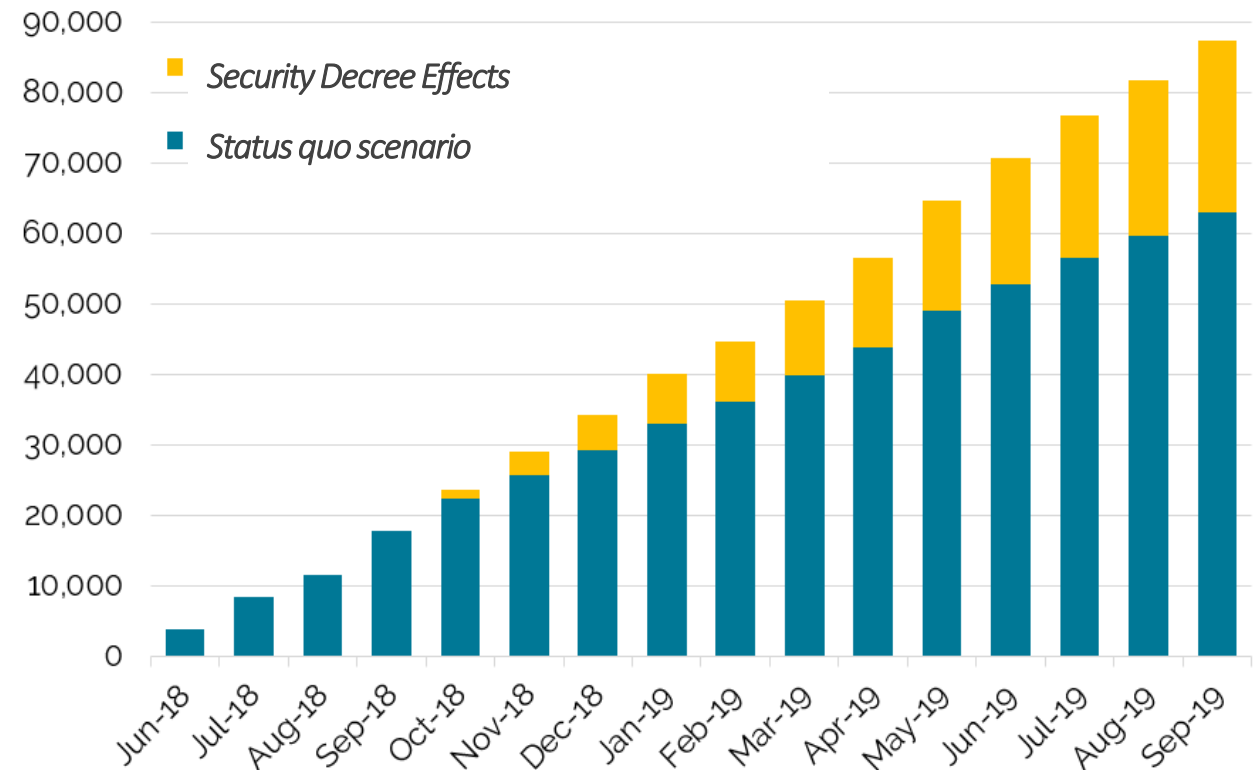
The effects of the 'Security Decree'

The end of the humanitarian protection



Source: Ministry of Interior, twitter.com/emmevilla

The new irregular migrants in Italy (June 2018 – September 2019)



Source: Ministry of Interior, estimated by Matteo Villa 2019 twitter.com/emmevilla

Research Questions and Methods

1. What is the role of local civil society actors in the governance of deportation of rejected asylum seekers in Italy?

2. How do civil society actors frame legalization?

3. What are solutions for rejected asylum seekers?

30 in-depth interviews with actors at the local level (ongoing fieldwork)

- Municipal Authorities and civil servants; journalists in local newspapers; lawyers; religious actors, members of pro-migrant Representatives and volunteers of NGOs, Associations solidarity/advocacy networks; those engaged in associations or movements opposing migration; managers of reception centres; and refugees themselves.
- Selection: small-medium cities in Northern Italy where reception has been rejected
- Lasting 1 hour on average

Civil society actors resisting deportation policies (1)

Variety of actions and initiatives by 'Third sector organizations' and citizens during the so-called 'refugee crisis' (Ambrosini 2018; 2020; Bonizzoni 2019; Marchetti 2020; Mayblin and James 2019).

Our empirical data indicate that civil society actors, solidarity networks and ordinary citizens ignore verdicts for rejected asylum seekers' expulsion, shaping the non-implementation of deportation policies:

- Provision of night-shelter and long term accommodation
- Subsistence support such as clothes and food banks
- Financial support
- Language courses
- Rights-based advocacy and legal advice on whether to appeal against the verdict or apply for a different type of protection

Civil society actors resisting deportation policies (2)

The importance of local interpersonal networks (Marzorati et al. 2017), the role of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980; Caponio and Borkert 2010)

[...] I was talking about the **importance of our network**, within a small town... In my opinion, he [employee at Register office] is not doing an irregular task. However, it is clear that he is doing so [dealing a specific case in a favourable light] **with a very particular attention**, because we [NGO representatives] got there. If one [asylum seeker] had arrived at the help desk on his own behalf, in my opinion, he would **not have obtained the same result**. We are the **'roots'** of our guests [asylum seekers]. (LOC.SOC.4)

[...] the Police Headquarters **enables the conversion** of **some** expiring permits for humanitarian reasons into one-year stay permits for unemployed searching for jobs [...] We tried to find all possible solutions, **especially for those** for whom we knew that they would have followed a **good (integration) path** in this area. Because, we know very well that [...] we cannot move strongly when it regards people [asylum seekers] who have made bad integration paths, have ignored all our suggestions, our proposals; it becomes difficult for them to get such a support. (LOC.SOC.5)

Civil society actors' frames around irregularity

The idea of deservingness (Leerkes, Varsanyi and Engbersen 2012; Chauvin and Garcés 2014): logics of individual deservingness even if some activists are in favour of universal legalization at the discursive level

[...] I was talking about the **importance of our network**, within a small town... In my opinion, he [employee at Register office] is not doing an irregular task. However, it is clear that he is doing so [dealing a specific case in a favourable light] **with a very particular attention**, because we [NGO representatives] got there. If one [asylum seeker] had arrived at the help desk on his own behalf, in my opinion, he would **not have obtained the same result**. We are the **'roots'** of our guests [asylum seekers]. (LOC.SOC.4)

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Reflecting on some possible solutions for rejected asylum seekers

Abolition of recent restrictive legislative migration policies

- Repeal the amendment providing the abolition of **humanitarian protection** and extending administrative detention
- Reintroduction of the possibility **to appeal a negative asylum** decision by the Civil Court to the Court of Appeal

Regularisation on individual basis of rejected asylum seekers having demonstrated a positive integration pathway

- Given the possibility of finding a job, or the existence of family ties in Italy, or in case of their absence in the country of origin for **those 'rooted' in their own local territory** and **integrated** (language courses and professional paths, previous work contracts)
- Non-profit sector, Trade Unions and other civil society actors as 'guarantors'

Reflecting on some possible solutions for irregular migrants

Temporary stay permit to look for a job

- Through the intermediation of native employers or EU migrants, work agencies, public job centres, job formation institutes, Consulates and Embassies, Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture or Handicraft; Non-profit organisations

Re-introduction of the sponsorship scheme

- Natives and regular migrants in Italy can invite someone to Italy for work or to look for work

Abolition of the 'Crime of clandestinity'

- Article 10-bis (d.l.25-7-98, n.286) sanctioning illegal entrance and stay in the territory of the Italian State

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Thank you for your attention!

Maurizio Ambrosini - Full Professor of Sociology of Migration, University of Milan - Department of Social and Political Sciences

Email: maurizio.ambrosini@unimi.it

Iraklis Dimitriadis - Research Fellow, University of Milan - Department of Social and Political Sciences

Email: iraklis.dimitriadis@unimi.it