
Right of asylum: fewer arrivals in Europe and Italy also due to pandemic. Migrants: “Pretexts to enact defensive measures”

Europe and Italy are increasingly barred to asylum seekers, also because (or with the pretext) of the Covid-19 pandemic, while increasing numbers of people are fleeing: one in 100 people globally, close to 80 million. The global request for protection from wars, crises, rights violations, economic inequalities, lack of access to food or water, land grabbing, desertification, environmental disasters and terrorist attacks is on the rise. The findings, corroborated by studies and analyses, are contained in the 2020 "The Right to Asylum" report edited by the Migrants Foundation, now in its fourth edition, presented online today. The COVID-19 pandemic, states the Report, has offered “the pretext to enact a number of 'defensive' policies.” For example, in the EU's "New Pact on Migration and Asylum", “protecting people forced to flee, or addressing the causes of their flight, is not a primary shared objective - reads the report – whereas one of the declared goals is to admit as few people as possible into the continent (and into Italy).” Around 2 million people entered irregularly the EU-27 over the last five years. In the same period some 100 thousand people arrived through humanitarian access, accounting for only 5%. Follows a brief summary of the Report.



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At the end of September, only 24 countries had not enforced entry restrictions related to COVID-19. Restrictions are in effect in 77 countries, with exceptions for asylum seekers: the list includes almost all European countries, including Italy. However, entry is barred in 72 countries, including the United States and Russia. At the end of May 2020, access was restricted without exceptions for asylum seekers in 100 countries. In 2020 Italy recorded the lowest number of asylum seekers in recent years. The lockdown imposed during the "first wave" of Covid-19 in Italy slowed down asylum applications, with some 16,855 applications processed as of September 30, two-thirds of those processed in the same period in 2019. In 2020 4 out of the 10 countries of origin counting the highest number of asylum seekers in Italy were Pakistan, Nigeria, Venezuela and Somalia - among the most unstable countries in the world. 2020, 196,620 asylum applications in the EU in six months (-31%). In 2020, asylum applications lodged in the EU (196,620 from January to June, down 31% compared to the same period in 2019) were negatively affected by restrictions and lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, the EU granted protection status to 295,785 people (refugee status, subsidiary or humanitarian protection), with very low recognition rates: 38% were first instance decisions and 31% were final decisions. Italy's first instance recognition rate was 20%: below the European average. More than 9,000 migrants and refugees returned to Libya by September 2020. Between January and September 2020 9,000 refugees and migrants were brought back to Libya by the Libyan Coast Guard (slightly less than in 2019), with new forms of abuse such as the transfer “to unofficial places of detention and their subsequent disappearance, or the expulsion of thousands of refugees and migrants from Libya's eastern region.” In one year, only one out of 140 Libyan migrants reached Europe by sea, and only two out of 140 were turned back. The remaining 137 didn't make it to the sea. Two out of every 140 migrants are detained in "government" detention centres. Central Mediterranean, 23,720 arrivals at the end of September. “Despite incessant political statements on a new wave of uncontrolled arrivals in 2020”, notes the Report, the number of arrivals is still minimal compared to previous years - excluding the blockade imposed by the "closed ports" policy in 2018 and 2019 - with 23,720 arrivals in Italy at the end of September 2020, compared to 132,043 in the same period of 2016 and 105,417 in 2017. Less than one in 5 migrants were

rescued by NGO vessels. **At least 672 dead at sea and 72 by land.** From January to September 2020, Mediterranean and internal European migratory routes recorded at least 672 deaths/missing at sea and 76 by land. The central Mediterranean route to Italy remains the most dangerous, with 70% of all deaths and missing persons estimated by default. **Migrant reception in Italy: 82,100 people, half as many as three years ago.** At the end of September 2020 there were about 82,100 migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Italian reception facilities, the lowest number in the last six years. With respect to the highs at the end of 2017 (almost 184,000 people), there are over 50% less asylum seekers and refugees in Italian reception facilities today. "Reception facilities" in 2020 also include the controversial anti-COVID-19 quarantine ships. By the end of September there were already five, with over 2,200 migrants on board. **There were 562,000 undocumented immigrants in Italy at the end of 2019** according to ISMU estimates (with numbers constantly growing since 2014). However, estimates by the Italian Institute for Political Studies - ISPI - show that the first "Security Decree" of 2018 resulted in more than 37,000 "new undocumented immigrants" until July 2020. Added to 82,000 new "undocumented immigrants" even without the Decree, the total number amounts to almost 120,000 people. **Coronavirus, few cases of infection and only in large facilities.** Despite the many difficulties, only a small number of migrants in reception facilities have tested positive. Significant outbreaks were reported only in large emergency reception centres (CAS) or in homeless shelter facilities, "highlighting the urgent need to reform immigrant reception systems toward forms of widespread reception", notes the Report. **The Balkan route and violated rights.** The Report's study on the Balkan Route evidences a high record of refoulement put in practice by EU Member States to non-EU countries, "using violent methods and applying extra legem procedures." Specifically, so-called "chain- refoulement" has long involved Slovenia and Croatia, aimed at preventing asylum seekers from entering the EU. Italy has also been involved since spring 2020. Situations of greatest difficulty were reported on the border between Bosnia and Croatia, in Bihać and Velika Kladuša. EU external borders crossings from Western Balkan countries in 2020 have increased compared to 2019, with 13,345 arrivals in the first eight months of the year.

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