

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

Nicola Pasini e Marta Regalia

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

1. The Debate on Regularization: how the "Recovery Decree" came about

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

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

¹ See the detailed study section on the ISMU website: https://www.ismu.org/la-nuova-regolarizzazione-degli-immigrati/

as the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, and it became increasingly urgent as a consequence of the prolonged lockdown on the economy – especially on the agricultural sector. Members of the agricultural sector began to explicitly call for procedures to regularize their workers, be they even partial or temporary, in order to enable farmhands to assist production in agriculture and food production in preparation for the challenges that would come as the harvest season drew closer.

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

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

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

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

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

2. The "Recovery Decree": expectations and requests for regularization

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

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

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

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

3. Interviews with Key Actors

Immediately after the "Recovery Decree" had passed, the ISMU Foundation conducted a set of interviews with key informants (institutional actors and figures from the civil society, special interest groups, and members of the third sector of the economy) with the aim of exploring the contents and implications of the measure. The interviews also aimed at establishing whether a generalized view on the measure could be identified or whether various stances on the matter

could be seen as reflecting pre-existing sectoral interests. As a limiting case, it was entire possible that no agreement was to be found even within the various categories of social actors.

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

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

The analysis of the interviews reveals what follows.

3.1 Importance and Priority of Regularization

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

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

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

3.2 The Various Aspects of Regularization

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

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

Associations and exponents of civil society consider this regularization

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

3.3 Usefulness of Regularization

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

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

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

3.4 Consequences of Regularization

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

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

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

All social actors agree that the matter of asylum seekers remains unaddressed: many of them already have a regular employment, and it is not clear how they can obtain a stable residence permit by regularizing their position.

Table 1. Key actors and their stance on the regularization measure included in the Recovery Decree

	Actors			
Regularization	Employer Associations	Unions	Civil Society	
Is a priority	No	Yes	Yes	
Should have been extended to other sectors	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Will be useful for	Migrants and the economy	The economy	Migrants and society	
Will either raise or lower salaries	No	No	Yes	
Will grant workers higher social protection	Yes	No	Yes	
Will favour irregular immigration	No	No	No	
Could be taken undue advantage of	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Problems	Too many requirements, Lack of clarity, Asylum seekers	Too many requirements, Lack of clarity, Asylum seekers	Too many requirements, Lack of clarity Asylum seeker	

Source: ISMU analysis

4. 2020 Regional elections: what parties campaign for

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

It ought to be noted in this respect that different approaches to the issue in different Italian regions can be attributed, at least in part, to the politi-

cal orientation of the governing coalition.

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

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

From the regional table we gather what follows:

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

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

In Campania, no candidate put the issue of immigration in their electoral manifesto.

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

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

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

"Measures to favour the socio-economic integration of migrants, marginalized communities, and vulnerable groups". Finally, Italia Viva candidate Massardo suggested "managing migration flows with an unbiased approach and in cooperation with the central government"

in a chapter dedicated to social cohesion.

In the Marche region, the winning centre-right candidate Francesco Acquaroli spoke of a

"plan to monitor and contrast criminality and irregular or illegal immigration"

in a chapter on security from his manifesto.

Mercorelli of the Five Star Movement did not make any reference to immigration, whereas Maurizio Mangialardi (centre-left) devoted a whole chapter of his manifesto to the issue, claiming that it was necessary to

"continue the work of implementing the regional plans supported by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) in order to strengthen and secure measures of social inclusion".

In Puglia, neither Fitto (centre-right) nor Scalfarotto (Italia Viva) made any mention of immigration. On the contrary, incumbent president Emiliano highlighted immigration as one of the main challenges for the next administration, suggesting:

"Generative paths and actions aimed at recognizing the value of immigrant people in local communities".

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

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

In Veneto, all candidates elaborated fully and extensively on the issue of immigration. Incumbent President Zaia expanded on it in a long paragraph in the chapter on security of his manifesto, titled

"Solidarity in Veneto, but not without rules: including the government in a stronger control of migration flows."

Presenting data on migrant offenders, Zaia "inevitably" brought together the issues of security and immigration, while acknowledging that the presence of migrants

"has contributed, especially during the past crisis, to compensating for some structural shortcomings of the local community, such as the fall of in birth-rates or the ageing of the population".

Zaia also invoked the need to create Italian language courses to foster the inte-

gration of migrant communities and educate them to

"preventing and reporting conditions of extreme poverty, marginality, and criminality". In matters of labour and production, Zaia's proposals encourage "positive experiences where foreign workers and entrepreneurs work together with local production systems in order to contrast illegal activities, labour exploitation, and no man's lands".

The Five Star Movement candidate Cappelletti, on the other hand, elaborated on migration in reference to social services. He suggested:

"Supporting territorial offices for cultural mediation in order to foster integration in compliance with regional laws and in a way that also takes local culture into consideration".

He also proposed:

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

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

Table 2. Election manifestos and results of the main regional candidates

Region	Candidate	Coalition	Electoral manifesto	References to issue of migration	Chapter
Calabria	Jole Santelli 55.29%	Centre- right	Yes	No	/
	Francesco Aiello 7.35%	Five Star Movement	Yes	No	/
	Filippo Callipo 30.14%	Centre-left + Italia Viva	Yes	Sì	Law and order
Romagna Borgo 43.6 Sime Ber 3.4 Stef Bona	Lucia Borgonzoni 43.63%	Centre- right	Yes	No	/
	Simone Benini 3.47%	Five Star Movement	Yes	Yes	Civil rights
	Stefano Bonaccini 51.42%	Centre-left + Italia Viva	Yes	Yes	Rights and duties
Campania	Stefano Caldoro 18.06%	Centre- right	Yes	No	/
	Valeria Ciarambino 9.93%	Five Star Movement	Yes	No	/
	Vincenzo De Luca 69.48%	Centre-left + Italia Viva	No	/	/
Liguria	Giovanni Toti 56.13%	Centre-ri- ght	Yes	Yes	Security
	Ferruccio Sansa 38.90%	Five Star Movement + Centre- left	Yes	Yes	Education and culture
	Aristide Massardo 2.42%	Italia Viva	Yes	Yes	Social cohesion

Region	Candidate	Coalition	Electoral manifesto	References to issue of migration	Chapter
(Francesco Acquaroli 49.13%	Centre- right	Yes	Yes	Security
	Gian Mario Mercorelli 8.62%	Five Star Movement	Yes	No	/
	Maurizio Mangialardi 37.29%	Centre-left + Italia Viva	Yes	Yes	Migration policy
	Raffaele Fitto 38.93%	Centre- right	Yes	No	/
	Antonella Laricchia 11.12%	Five Star Movement	Yes	Yes	Internatio- nalization
	Michele Emiliano 46.78%	Centre-left	Yes	Yes	Social policy
	Ivan Scalfarotto 1.60%	Italia Viva	Yes	No	/
Toscana	Susanna Ceccardi 40.45%	Centre- right	Yes	Yes	Law and order
	Irene Galletti 6.39%	Five Star Movement	Yes	No	/
	Eugenio Giani 48.63%	Centre-left + Italia Viva	Yes	No	/
Veneto	Luca Zaia 76.79%	Centre- right	Yes	Yes	Security
	Enrico Cap- pelletti 3.25%	Five Star Movement	Yes	Yes	Social services
	Arturo Lorenzoni 15.72%	Centre-left	Yes	Yes	Inequality and Social policy
	Daniela Sbrollini 0.62%	Italia Viva	No	/	/

Source: ISMU analysis on data from the websites of eandidates and of the Ministry of the Interior

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

5. Conclusions

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

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

As suggested in the second half of this chapter, the regional elections of 2020 did not attract the attention of citizens and the media as much as one would have expected (unlike they did on other occasions, see also Chapter 15 of this Report). Nonetheless, the analysis of the electoral manifestos gives some indication about the relative importance accorded to the issue of immigration by the various political parties and coalitions. Their framing of the issue is consist-

ent with the decades-long socio-political cleavage that has divided coalitions, movements, and political parties between the law-order-security pole and the inclusion-solidarity-integration pole. Once again, the various stances on the matter are firmly anchored to deep-seated convictions, as if they were not liable to change.

References

Acquaroli F., *Ricostruiamo le Marche, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.francescoacquaroli.com/programma-elettorale (last access 22 October 2020).

Aiello F., *Liberi di cambiare, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.stelledicalabria.it/articoli/regionali-calabria-2020--il-programma (last access 22 October 2020).

Benini S., *Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.simonebenini.it/index.php/category/programma/ (last access 22 January 2020).

Bonaccini S., *Un passo avanti, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://stefanobonaccini.it/un-passo-avanti/ (last access 22 January 2020).

Borgonzoni L., *L'Emilia-Romagna è di tutti, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://borgonzonipresidente.it/programma (last access 22 January 2020).

Caldoro S., 10 idee per la Campania, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020 [online] available at: https://www.lacampaniaditutti.it/wp/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Callipo F., *Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.cosenzachannel.it/2020/01/03/calabria-2020-il-programma-elettorale-di-pippo-callipo/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Cappelletti E., *Per un Veneto migliore, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: http://www.enricocappelletti.it/?p=2208 (last access 22 October 2020)

Ceccardi S., *Toscana, ci siamo, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.susannaceccardi.it/programma-elettorale/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Ciarambino V., *La Campania per noi Vale, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.valeriaciarambino.com/programma/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Emiliano M., Futuro in corso, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020 [online] available at: https://www.micheleemiliano.it/il-nostro-programma/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Fitto R., *La Puglia che funziona, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.raffaelefitto.com/programma-elettorale/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Galletti I., *Toscana, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.movimento5stelletoscana.it/homepage-newspaper/chi-siamo/programma-regionale/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Giani E., *Toscana più forte e unita, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.eugeniogiani.it/valori/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Laricchia A., *Programma M5S – Puglia 2020, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.puglia5stelle.it/programma-m5s-puglia-2020/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Lorenzoni A., *Tutto un atro futuro, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.lorenzonipresidente.it/programma/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Mangialardi M., *Programma*, *Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://mauriziomangialardi.com/le-marche-in-testa/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Massardo A., *La Liguria Vera, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.massardoperlaliguria.it/puntiprogramma (last access 22 October 2020).

Mercorelli G.M., *Ricominciamo, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.mercorellipresidente.info/programma-movimento-5-stelle-marche/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Sansa F., *Una Liguria diversa: ora!*, *Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.ferrucciosansa.it/programma/(last access 22 October 2020).

Santelli J., *Calabria protagonista, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.jolesantelli2020.it/il-programma/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Scalfarotto I., *La Puglia è di più, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: https://www.ivanperlapuglia.it/strategia (last access 22 October 2020).

Toti G., *Liguria sulla rotta giusta, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020* [online] available at: http://www.giovannitoti.com/programma/ (last access 22 October 2020).

Zaia L., #SCELGOZAIA, scelgo il buon Governo!, Programma per le elezioni regionali 2020 [online] available at: giovannitoti.com/programma https://www.legaveneto.it/programma-politico/ (last access 22 October 2020).