

MIGRATION FLOWS AND MOBILITY: ECONOMIC AND LEGAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

In recent decades, immigration and the labor market have become a priority for the EU, which has adopted a series of migration control policies and instruments, such as the Schengen Agreement, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), and readmission and cooperation agreements with migrants “countries of origin and transit. Furthermore, the EU has introduced a series of directives and regulations to harmonize Member States” immigration and asylum policies and promote the free movement of workers and citizens within the Schengen area. However, the EU's approach to immigration and labor market management has sparked controversy and debate over its effectiveness, proportionality, and respect for migrants' human rights. The concept of nation, which is not identified with nationalism and sovereignty, contrary to the provisions of the Republican Constitution, remains fruitful as a basis for ensuring internal cohesion, but without closing itself off to international collaboration to manage epochal phenomena that exceed the capacity of a single state to intervene. The increase in the number of foreigners between 2000 and 2010 highlighted the need for structural inclusion policies and effective management of migration flows, which was not always guaranteed by the measures adopted. In this regard, the Lazio Region, and more specifically the city of Rome, is an important migration hub, characterised by strong economic attractiveness and an increase in cultural and religious pluralism. The study proposes a holistic approach to sustainable migration, based on a combination of active labor policies, education, international cooperation, and human rights protection. In conclusion, the research argues for an integrated model of migration governance capable of combining security, solidarity, and social inclusion, promoting safe, orderly, and regular migration in compliance with the fundamental principles of the European Union.

Keywords: migration –UE- labor market – sustainable – policies - regulatory harmonization

1. Introduction

This article addresses this complex issue through an analysis that links the economic and legal dimensions in order to deconstruct the often implicitly accepted idea that migration is a dependent variable that can be regulated exclusively through emergency or restrictive policies. The article starts from the premise that migration policies, especially in destination countries such as Italy, suffer from a structural lack of coordination between the planning of labor migration flows and the real needs of the labor market, creating a divide between regular presence and forms of exploitation or irregularity.

Despite the free movement of people within the Schengen Area, the European Union is still facing major challenges in developing a unified and coherent migration policy. At the heart of this difficulty lies a structural mismatch between the design of legal labour migration channels and the concrete — and often unmet — needs of the labour market in destination countries such

¹ Rossi E. and Iafrate P. (2016), *The EU Agreement with Turkey: Does it Jeopardize Refugees' Rights?* Center for Migration Studies Essays; Iafrate P., (2022) *Immigrazione nella Prima Repubblica*, in *Dialoghi Mediterranei*, , 3 ss.

as Italy. This misalignment creates a persistent gap between legal status and the precariousness of irregularity, ultimately calling into question the principles of EU law and migrants' fundamental rights.

This article examines this complex issue through two central research questions: First, to what extent do recent Italian migration policies respond to the real needs of the national labour market, and what consequences do they have for migrants' fundamental rights? The second question is what lessons can be learned from the case study of Rome and Lazio to inform the development of a more sustainable and integrated approach to migration governance.

After outlining its methodological framework, the article addresses these questions. It then contextualises the analysis within the broader global context of migration flows before focusing on the Italian case, paying particular attention to the integration of Balkan communities and providing a critical assessment of recent legislative developments. It then focuses on the Rome-Lazio region as a microcosm revealing Italy's broader political contradictions. The conclusion summarises the findings and offers an alternative paradigm based on the principles of integrated governance.

1.1. Methodology: The methodology is based on three main approaches, using a methodology that combines comparative analysis of European and national legislation with a policy evaluation framework, this study aims to go beyond a mere review of legislation to offer new critical insights. In particular, the analysis focuses on the case study of the Rome-Lazio area, a major migration hub whose demographic and economic evolution reflects Italian and European contradictions.

The study is based on a multidisciplinary approach that integrates legal and economic analysis, and the methodology on three main topics.

In particular, a critical analysis of primary and secondary legal sources is carried out. These include international conventions (e.g. the Geneva Convention), European Union regulations and directives (e.g. the Schengen Borders Code, the Dublin Regulation, the Pact on Immigration and Asylum, the Frontex Regulation 656/2014, the Return Directive 2008/115/EC) and national legislation (e.g. the Consolidated Law on Immigration, the Bossi-Fini Law, the Security Decrees, the Cutro Decree and Decree Law No. 146/2025). The contribution critically reinterprets statistical data from authoritative sources to support its arguments. This includes data on global migration trends from the United Nations (UN DESA), specific flow dynamics along the Balkan route from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and detailed demographic and labour market data on foreign residents in Italy of the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT). The data is used to identify trends and challenge arguments in order to base legal analysis on empirical reality. The Rome-Lazio area was selected as a strategic case study for several reasons: (a) its historical role as a major early migration hub in Italy; (b) its high concentration of migrants (>50% in the urban area of Rome), which creates a unique sociological and economic dynamic; (c) its function as a laboratory for observing the practical results of national policies; and (d) its representation of the broader Italian and European contradictions between the need for migrant labour and the political challenges of social inclusion.

The objective is twofold: on the one hand, it aims to verify whether recent reforms – such as the legislation and the subsequent Decree Law 146/2025 – represent an effective and proportionate response to labour demand or rather a regression in terms of fundamental rights; on the other, it aims to demonstrate how a multidisciplinary approach, integrating international cooperation and structural inclusion pathways, is the only way to achieve sustainable mobility governance. In this sense, this paper aims to contribute to the academic proposing an interpretative paradigm that focuses on the migrant's capacity for agency and the added value

of their participation in the labour market, with a view to mutual benefit for countries of origin and destination.

Having made these brief methodological considerations, let us briefly examine the statistics on global migration flows.

2. Migration flows in the global context

According to UN estimates (International Migrant Stock 2024, Key facts and figures, 2024), there are 304 million migrants worldwide, accounting for 3.7% of the world's population. Africa accounts for 16% of the world's population and 13% of migrants. Italy, which has less than 1% of the world's population, accounts for over 2% of the world's immigrant population, but this does not mean that Italians abroad (over 5 million) are portrayed as invaders².

It emerged that 710 million people wish to emigrate permanently, just under a sixth of the world's population. Sub-Saharan African countries will experience the highest migratory pressure, with 31% of the adult population intending to emigrate. The propensity to emigrate will also be high in non-EU European countries (27%) and Latin American countries (23%).

The main destination is Europe (with over 100 million), followed by Asia (85 million) and North America (79 million). This mobility is generated by a combination of economic inequalities, demographic dynamics, climate and political crises, conflicts, and social networks. It is a geography of global migration flows that reveals, among other things, the asymmetry between the North and South of the world. The European Union, with 450 million inhabitants (5.5% of the world's population), accounts for 14.2% of global GDP, with an average per capita income of \$62,000: it is developed, but has an aging and shrinking population (-29 million by 2050), increasingly dependent on immigration (63 million international migrants, accounting for 14.1%).

Africa, on the other hand, is young and demographically growing (+1 billion inhabitants by 2050), but remains marked by low incomes (\$6,700 per capita). Asia, with its 4.7 billion inhabitants, is instead the world's demographic center of gravity, where, with large internal disparities, the Gulf model stands out, based on the labor contribution of 31 million

Unprecedented scenarios will also emerge regarding the destination of these flows, as seen in the case of China. At this stage, therefore, the overrepresentation of Africans in current migration flows does not currently correspond to the data.

This situation will be comparable to the current situation in countries like Australia, Canada, and Switzerland, which have a high incidence of immigrant populations, which they leverage for national development.

A fundamental opportunity arose at the European Union level after the June 2024 elections, with the renewal of the European Parliament and the European Commission³, which have already expressed their support for overcoming⁴ the imbalances contained in the Dublin Regulation and for a fair distribution of new arrivals⁵.

² International Migrant Stock 2024, Key facts and figures Advance unedited version.p.6

https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2025_intlmigstock_2024_key_facts_and_figures_advance-unedited.pdf

³ A. Geddes, *The Politics of Migration and Immigration in Europe*, 2nd edition, London ; Thousand Oaks : SAGE Publications, 2016, 74 ss - <https://hdl.handle.net/1814/46225>

⁴ E. Guild, *Security and Migration in the 21st Century*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009, 36.

⁵ S. Lavenex, *Shifting up and out: The foreign policy of European immigration control*, West European Politics, 29(2), 329–350, 2006, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380500512684>

3. The Western Balkan: stable presence and new dynamics

While these global trends provide the backdrop, the Italian experience offers a specific and instructive case study of how a country of emigration has transformed into a major destination for migrants, particularly from the Western Balkans.

Alongside global flows, the Western Balkans⁶ play an important role for Italy. This region, comprising Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, represents not only a historical source of human mobility for Italy, but also a trading partner and an area of growing strategic interest, as demonstrated by investment flows and trade. Analysis of data updated to 2025 confirms and details the phenomenon of stabilisation of the Balkan component in Italy. The Albanian community: With 414,622 residents (7.72% of the total number of foreigners), Albania remains the second largest foreign community in Italy after Romania. The decline compared to previous years (when the number exceeded 440,000) is attributable to the process of acquiring Italian citizenship (over 31,000 in 2024 alone). The other nationalities from the Balkan area, although numerically smaller, make up a widespread and well-established presence: North Macedonia and Kosovo are at similar and stable levels, with 47,372 and 36,180 residents respectively. More specifically, the Kosovar community has a significant and slightly growing presence. Serbia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, on the other hand, have smaller but consolidated numbers (28,426 and 18,600), determined by migratory flows linked to the dynamics of the 1990s and beyond. Montenegro, with 1,979 residents, represents a smaller presence but is still part of the fabric of Italian-Balkan ties. Overall, the Western Balkans provide Italy with a pool of almost 550,000 foreign residents (547,179). This data highlights how migrants from the Balkan area are well integrated in Italy and contribute significantly to the country's development, as evidenced by their employment levels and family reunifications. The IOM report⁷ for the fourth quarter of 2025 paints a complex picture of the so-called “Balkan route”. The migrants interviewed come mainly from Afghanistan, Egypt, Sudan, Syria and Morocco. They are mostly young (18-29 years old) and single men, with a low average level of education. Turkey remains a key transit hub. Most migrants leave the country by land, often with the help of facilitators (smugglers). Alongside global flows, the Western Balkans play an important role for Italy. According to ISTAT data updated on 1 January 2025, citizens of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia represent a total of 9.5% of the foreign population residing in Italy, with a particularly significant presence of the Albanian community (over 414,600 individuals).

4. Italy as a country of immigration: the evolution of recent decades

The number of foreigners tripled, these were still low absolute figures, still significant in a major emigration country that only passed the first law on foreign immigration in 1986, previously regulated by the consolidated Law on Public Security of 1930. From the early 1980s until the second half of the 1990s, the foreign population was predominantly made up of those residing for work, very often single men or women, sought for employment in agriculture or family work.

Although the 1990s saw a relatively modest population increase compared to the decade between 2000 and 2009, when annual quotas for new workers increased to 170,000 (exceptionally, to 520,000 in 2006 alone). Family reunifications reached up to 100,000 each year. New births to both foreign parents also increased annually from 8,000 in the early 1990s

⁶ <https://www.tuttitalia.it/statistiche/cittadini-stranieri-2025/?utm>

⁷ International Organization for Migration (IOM), Jan 22 2026. *DTM Western Balkans — Migration Routes & Dynamics Monthly Report* (December 2025). IOM, Europe and Central Asia

to 80,000 (with higher peaks in some years). However, these figures have decreased significantly in recent years.

Another important measure, again of a restrictive nature, is the so-called “security package” of the Minister of the Interior Maroni (Legislative Decree 23 May 2008, n. 92, converted by Law 24 July 2008, n. 125), accompanied by regularization for domestic workers and carers in the following year (Law 102/2009).

The Consolidated Law has undergone numerous amendments. Law 189/2002 (known as the Bossi-Fini law) strengthened controls on migration flows and linked entry for work purposes more closely to employment contracts. Subsequently, Decree-Law 113/2018 (the so-called security decree) repealed the general “humanitarian permit”, introducing standardised permits and restricting access to the reception system; Decree-Law 53/2019 (security-bis) intervened on public order and sanctions, particularly in maritime contexts. With Decree-Law 130/2020, the legislator reintroduced residual protection through special protection and reformed the reception system, extending access to the Reception and Integration System (SAI), which replaced SIPROIMI. In 2023, Decree-Law 20/2023 (known as Cutro) once again restricted the scope of special protection, strengthened repatriation and detention instruments, and reoriented the planning of entry flows for work. Italy, like the European Union, has planned a reform of migration and asylum rules, adopting stricter criteria for so-called “safe countries of origin”. These policies are in line with the European Parliament's agreement on stricter rules under the Migration and Asylum Pact, which would allow a Member State to reject an application for protection if the application was made by a foreign national from a “safe third country”. This will speed up the examination of asylum applications submitted by citizens of Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, Kosovo, India, Morocco and Tunisia. Under the new rules, it will be up to the applicant to prove that this provision should not apply in their case, due to a well-founded fear of persecution or the risk of suffering serious harm if returned. In 2025, Decree-Law No. 146/2025, converted into Law No. 179 of 1 December 2025, came into force concerning the regular entry of foreign nationals and migration management, with changes to the procedural timelines for work permits and entry quotas. This is part of a broader attempt to manage irregular immigration through regular entry for work purposes. (e.g., at the end of 2025, the Government announced almost 500,000 new work permits until 2028). There are currently bills and a draft decree-law that provide for: greater border control (including naval blockades); more restrictive criteria and procedures for expulsions and repatriations; greater cooperation with migrants' third countries to reduce landings; and stricter criteria for obtaining complementary protection. These recent legislative measures, particularly the Cutro Decree of 2023 and Legislative Decree no. 146/2025, represent the cornerstone of the government's migration control strategy. The government's approach is twofold: it strengthens internal borders through expedited procedures and expanded detention, while externally, it aims to implement extraterritorial migration management, as envisaged in the agreement with Albania. The goal is to discourage irregular arrivals by processing asylum applications and potential repatriations outside of Italy, a strategy that has sparked significant legal and political debate regarding its compatibility with European Union and international law. The draft immigration bill, recently approved by the Council of Ministers, appears to stipulate that individuals intercepted in international waters may be transferred not only to their country of origin or departure, but also to third countries that have signed specific agreements with Italy. In these countries, facilities dedicated to reception or detention should be created, with the involvement of international organizations such as IOM and UNHCR, also with a view to possible repatriation. As envisaged in the “Albania model,” an attempt is being made to open up the possibility of deportation to other countries considered safe, such as Egypt and Tunisia. The provision could constitute a violation of Article 10 of the Italian Constitution, which recognizes any person falling under Italian jurisdiction to have access to our country for an asylum procedure, and could constitute

a series of collective expulsions, prohibited by Article 19 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and Article 4 of the Fourth Protocol annexed to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights. The very provision for the transfer of shipwrecked persons rescued on the high seas to third countries considered 'safe' could violate the international conventions on the law of the sea, which require disembarkation in a safe port as soon as reasonably possible, the European Frontex Regulation No. 656/2014 which those Conventions expressly refer to, and the current European Return Directive 2008/115/EC, not amended by the implementing regulations of the European Pact on Migration and Asylum, which prohibits return operations that do not take place from the territory of Member States. They also reduced the possibility of granting residence for humanitarian reasons and did not register asylum seekers in the regular population registers.

This quick overview of the evolution of legislation and the increase in foreign residents shows that Italy has faced a phenomenon of exceptional magnitude in terms of its growth, concentrated in a very short time.

The 1985 Schengen Agreement represented a milestone in this process, allowing the free movement of people within a common area without internal border controls⁸. In response to these challenges, the EU has adopted a series of measures to manage immigration from third countries, including Directive 2003/86/(EU), (Directive (EU) 2021/1883) on the right to family reunification and Directive (EU) 2009/50 on the Blue Card for highly skilled workers⁹.

In the debate between structural causes of migration flows and legislative interventions, it has not always been recognized that the latter cannot eliminate these causes, but rather address them through a strategy of synergy with migrants' countries of origin or transit and with the European Union's decision-making bodies. At the EU level, it has become more clear that new decisions are needed to amend the Dublin Regulation and not leave coastal countries alone in receiving migrants. Decisions on this matter must now be reached through the work of the new European Parliament and the new European Commission. Regarding repatriations, a complex and unobtrusive operation, no progress appears to have been made.¹⁰

4.1. The outsourcing of borders: The model of Albania: The year 2025 marked an important phase in the externalisation of borders, in particular with the agreement between Italy and Albania to accept asylum seekers whose applications for international protection had been declared manifestly unfounded and, from March 2025, the transfer of expelled foreign nationals detained in repatriation centres. The forced transfers to Albania provided for in the Italy-Albania agreement consist of the forced movement of migrants intercepted at sea to detention facilities located on Albanian territory, under Italian control. This practice complicates recourse to the asylum system and involves extremely restrictive conditions of detention, often in violation of fundamental rights.

However, this phase was immediately marked by significant legal controversies and operational difficulties. The trial judges, the Court of Cassation and subsequently the Court of Justice of the European Union raised questions regarding the classification of "safe countries of origin" and the applicable jurisdiction in Albanian centres. In several cases, the first migrants transferred were returned to Italy following judicial measures that questioned the legitimacy of accelerated procedures for assessing asylum applications outside the national territory.

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⁸ S. Lavenex, *Shifting up and out: The foreign policy of European immigration control*, cit.329-350.

⁹ S. Carrera, A. Faure Atger, E. Guild & D. Kostakopoulou, *Labour immigration policy in the EU: a renewed agenda for Europe 2020*, in CEPS Policy Brief No. 240, 2011, 24 ss.

¹⁰ C. Boswell, *Theorizing Migration Policy: Is There a Third Way?*, in *International Migration Review*, 41(1), 2007, 75-100.

transferred were returned to Italy following judicial measures that questioned the legitimacy of accelerated procedures for assessing asylum applications outside the national territory. This situation created an operational stalemate, with centres in Albania operating below capacity and evolving legal disputes highlighting the friction between state policies and supranational case law. However, the introduction of 500,000 new work permits by 2028 has initiated the influx of new human resources into the labour market, which could be slowed down by highly complex and convoluted bureaucratic procedures.

5. Integration development plan

In an international context, the rights and duties of migrants are rooted in a set of universal and regional instruments that protect the dignity, safety and equality of every person on the move, while balancing the sovereign prerogatives of States with cooperation for the orderly and responsible management of migration flows. This multi-level architecture includes universal human rights instruments (the Universal Declaration and the 1966 Covenants), the Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees with its 1967 Protocol, the International Labour Organisation's instruments on migrant workers and, at the European regional level, the ECHR and European Union legislation (Charter of Fundamental Rights and secondary legislation on family residence, long-term residence and equal treatment). Alongside the supranational dimension, the Italian legal system has developed a regulatory framework which, although inspired by European principles, has its own characteristics, the result of a stratification of reforms and interventions, including emergency measures in response to migration crises. The European Union¹¹ has recognized the importance of integration through a series of policy documents and funding programs. One of the main instruments in this field is the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), which provides financial support to Member States to promote integration, cooperation with third countries, and the protection of migrants' rights¹². This approach involves the adoption of measures that address both migrants and host societies, and that involve various stakeholders, including public authorities, civil society organizations, and the private sector¹³.

6. The great Roman-Lazio migratory hub

A few numbers and significant references help to focus on the Roman-Lazio hub, which was the most important in the early stages of foreign immigration to Italy, and has continued to be relevant even subsequently up to the present day.

As reference years, we take 2010, the year of the outbreak of the global economic crisis, and 2024, the last year for which the 2024 Immigration Statistics Dossier published data.

In Italy, immigrants increased from 3.891.295 to 5.422,426 and their incidence on residents from 6.6% to 9.2%.

In Lazio, immigrants increased from 450,151 to 643,312 (+50.9% and the incidence increased from 8.0% to 11.2%). Foreign births, despite accounting for 9.5% of those born in Italy and 14.2% of all

births in the region (13.5% in Italy), have fallen by 40.7% over the last 10 years. The most common nationality among newborns in 2023 is Romanian (about 1 in 4), followed by Bangladesh, India and Albania.

¹¹ A. Ager & A. Strang, *Understanding integration: A conceptual framework*, in *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2008, 166-191; Carrera, S., Radescu, R., & Reslow, N. (2015). *EU external migration policies in an era of global mobilities: Intersecting policy universes*. Leiden: Brill Nijhoff.

¹² R. Cholewinski, R. Perruchoud, & E. MacDonald, *International Migration Law: Developing Paradigms and Key Challenges*, T.M.C. Asser Press, 2009, 44 ss.

¹³ R. Penninx, D. Spencer, & N. Van Hear, *Migration and Integration in Europe: The State of Research*, ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, 2008, 59 ss.

Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that, with regard to migratory flows, Lazio has been a more dynamic region than the Italian average itself, both in terms of the percentage change in resident immigrants and the consequent impact on the resident population.

Regions with large urban areas are inherently destined to welcome the largest numbers of immigrants, both in Italy and other countries. These areas are characterized by their dynamic growth and diverse origins, the constant need for additional labor, and the need for social spaces for new arrivals. If we think of Lazio as a large, integrated urban area extending from Rome to the other provinces, it's easy to understand that in all municipalities (with a few limited exceptions) globalization is visible, and the communities' geographic origins are diverse (especially in Rome)¹⁴. The metropolitan city of Rome accounts for 83.0% of all foreigners registered with INPS in the region. Among these, Romanians are the most numerous (23.9%), followed by Filipinos and Bangladeshis: together they represent two-fifths of the total (40.8%). The countries with the most workers are China, Bangladesh and India (respectively 95.9%, 93.2% and 90.4%), while the country with the (relatively) lowest percentage is Ukraine (81.5%). More generally, Istat certifies that in the metropolitan area of Rome, the employment rate of foreign citizens (aged 15-64) rose to 65.1% (+2.9 points on 2022), approaching that of Italians (65.3%). At the same time, the unemployment rate among foreigners has fallen to 10.7% (from 12.8% in 2022), but remains much higher than among native Italians (5.8%).

Before the great crisis of 2008, a survey conducted in Rome among mediators from 32 countries in the "Forum per l'Intercultura" group of Caritas Rome found that the majority did not dream of moving to another foreign country and wanted to stay permanently in Italy, despite the difficulties they encountered. The responses then, shared not only by that group of intercultural mediators, would be very different today, as there have been many changes in the economic, employment, and social spheres.

's economy was marked by stagnation in the 1980s, a recovery that began in the mid-1990s, greater dynamism in the following decade, and much less satisfactory performance after the 2008 crisis.

This evolution can be seen in the various editions of the Immigration Statistical Dossier from the Idos Study and Research Center, which significantly featured the title "Immigration in Rome and Lazio" in its first edition in 1991. However, territorial dispersion has been a growing trend, and it is significant to note that in some small municipalities, the incidence of immigrants is well above the 13% found in Rome. In this regard, it goes without saying that Rome is a major employment area in the service sector, not only for Italians but also for immigrants.

The aspects of a society that has become multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious can only be fruitfully addressed by taking into account its complexity, which has not always been the case. For example, the approach taken to analyzing the relationship between immigration and crime, or between immigration and multireligiosity, is not entirely adequate. Rome, the center of global Catholicism, is also a city that has become multireligious following immigration, with the presence of various Christian denominations, the other two monotheistic religions, and even other religions. There is a contradiction in the fact that Italians need immigrants and, especially in this period of persistent economic and employment difficulties, are unwilling to accept them. Both for the Rome-Lazio area and for other regional areas, we must consider the need for a certain demographic balance to face the future.

Therefore, to achieve this balance, we must take responsibility for the integration of existing immigrants and establish, in a rational and orderly manner, annual quotas for new arrivals, which would also help counteract unplanned arrivals.

¹⁴ Summary sheet, *Osservatorio sulle migrazioni a Roma e nel Lazio* 20 edition, edited by Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS and Istituto di Studi Politici "S. Pio V".

7. Conclusion

This study analysed the difference between the European Union's governance framework on migration and the structural realities of its labour market, using Italy and the Rome-Lazio area as a focal point. The analysis confirms that migration policy in Italy remains largely reactive and crisis-driven, rather than proactive and structurally integrated. The detailed overview of legislative evolution—from the Bossi-Fini Law to the Cutro Decree and Decree-Law 146/2025—reveals a consistent emphasis on border externalization and security, which has failed to address the root causes of irregular migration or to effectively match labor demand with supply.

Returning to the core research questions, the evidence suggests that recent reforms do not represent an effective or proportionate response. While the increase in legal entry quotas, as seen in the 2025 decree, is a positive acknowledgment of labor market needs, its impact is undermined by parallel restrictive measures. The "Albania model" and similar proposals for extraterritorial processing raise profound legal and ethical questions, potentially violating international and EU law without offering a sustainable solution. They prioritize a symbolic politics of control over a functional strategy for integration and mobility.

The Rome-Lazio case study powerfully illustrates this contradiction. As a major migration hub with a structurally integrated migrant population, the region's potential for economic and social development is hampered by the absence of coherent, long-term integration policies.

This paper argues for an alternative paradigm: an integrated model of sustainable migration governance. This model must be built on three pillars. First, proactive and flexible labor migration policies that are co-designed with regional economies and social partners, moving beyond rigid annual quotas to more responsive systems. Second, structural investment in integration, moving from emergency reception to long-term inclusion pathways that include language training, credential recognition, and anti-discrimination measures, as partially envisioned by the AMIF framework. Third, a renewed commitment to international cooperation that addresses the root causes of forced migration and creates legal avenues for mobility, thereby reducing the power of smugglers and the dangers of irregular routes.

The benefits of immigration for a country like Italy, with its demographic deficits and labour market inequalities, are clear. Migrants take on vital roles, contribute to social security systems and bring cultural and economic dynamism. However, the realisation of these benefits depends entirely on political will and the shift from a paradigm of control to one of integrated and sustainable governance.

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