

REPORT ON XENOPHOBIA, HATE CRIME AND RADICALISM

COUNTRY: ITALY

PERIOD: 2020-2022

AUTHOR: DR. ANNA CASTRIOTA
St Clare's International College, Oxford,
University of Northampton

Oxford, 31 March 2023

INTRODUCTION

The present report covers a two-year period (2020-2022) in Italy assessing the level of xenophobia, hate crime and radicalism present in the country. The report is being written based upon the consultation of Italian government and agencies official documentations and archives, as well as relying on the information available from NGOs and charities that in the country, on various grounds, monitor, report and assess the level of xenophobia, radicalism and hate crime that targets the several minorities present on the territory. All the documentation consulted to produce the present report can be find in the attached bibliography at the end of this document. The two-year period taken into consideration for the report concerns mainly the break out and spreading of the SARS COVID-19 virus pandemic affecting mankind globally in the period under examination. Undoubtedly, the break out of the pandemic registered some incidents in matter of hate crime and xenophobia especially against representatives of the Asian and Chinese communities in the country with several episodes of Sino-phobia and, more in general, diffidence and discrimination against immigrants as it will be better explained and illustrated in the dedicated section of the report. The centre-left government in charge in the period 2020-2022 produced several improvements in matter of legislation concerning minorities and immigrants while in the Italian society we can register an increase of racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism with also several cases of homophobia and clear discrimination against women. The dedicated sub-sections of the present report will explore and analyse in details the changes

in legislation and assess the phenomenon of hate crime among the population. Interesting results came from the analysis of the phenomenon of radicalization and radicalism on Italian soil. The threat of Islamic radicalism and the presence on the territory of far-right or white-supremacists' groups and organizations have risen serious concerns. The latter seem to gain more control and strength on the territory especially in urban destitute and impoverished areas of big cities like Rome or Milan. A sub-section is being dedicated to the analysis of the far-right radicalism in the period under examination. A section is being dedicated to the LGBTIQ+ communities considering that most of the legislation changes aimed at improving the community's civil rights by Italian law is now being under scrutiny by the current far-right coalition government in power after winning the general election in September 2022.

We can conclude that the country went through several changes between 2020 and 2022 in matter of legislation, while the society turned toward stronger anti-immigrant and overall xenophobic and homophobic feeling with strong pockets of anti-establishment attitude in the general public especially during the peak of the pandemic period (2020-2021) with a worryingly large anti-vax movement using widely social platforms to voice their position and anti-establishment attitude as explained in the dedicated sub-section of the present report.

The other element that emerged from the report is that in Italy the far-right anti-establishment political side is gaining progressively the consensus of the general electorate with an increasingly prominent role of the far-right party *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy) led by the current president of the council of ministers, Giorgia Meloni. The party already in the aftermath of the electoral victory in September 2022, shadowed the allied parties of *Lega Nord* (Northern League)¹, and *Forza Italia* (C'mon Italy), the party of the Italian tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. The political change in the last months of the year 2022 and in the first part of 2023, is threatening constitutional rights and law, and the progressive changes made in the last few years in matter of protecting minorities and migrants' civil rights.

Another important event that has somehow influenced the political and social climate in the country, is the Russia-Ukraine war started in February 2022. The international conflict has had consequences in the Italian political and social climate already characterized by an increased polarisation of the party alignment and of the public opinion overall. Again, the victory of a far-right coalition with strong ties with Putin has made the official position of Italy, a NATO member state, quite unclear and murky with leaders of *Forza Italia*, Silvio Berlusconi, and *Lega's* Matteo Salvini making statements in favour of Putin's geopolitical strategy while

¹ In the present text, the *Lega Nord* party will be from now onward named in its shorter form, '*Lega*'.

having the far-right party *Fratelli d'Italia* upholding strong and official aligned positions with the NATO and western powers like Great Britain, European Union and the US.

Overall, the present report highlights how, although some changes by the political authorities in the period 2020-2022, in matter of civil rights of the minorities or migrants' law, there is still space for improvement within the Italian legislation and judicial powers; and how society has not improved much in matter of tolerance and xenophobia or anti-Semitism but how instead, the outbreak of the pandemic has worsen the level of xenophobia and how the COVID-19 has been weaponised creating an anti-establishment front. Events like the pandemic or the current conflict in Ukraine, have also contributed to further polarise the public and the political parties, and therefore, to contribute to the process of radicalisation with extreme positions taken by several political actors and igniting the already instable Italian society. We have also seen an increase of Islamisation on the territory and anti-Semitism. The current far-right coalition government has in a few months since it came into power, attempted in many occasions to the constitutional civil rights of the citizens and minorities present in the country, creating grounded fears for the future of Italy worryingly growing closer to the political positions of countries like Poland or Hungary. The recent tragedy of Cutro (26 February 2023) in which 89 people died (including several children) is a direct consequence of the new Italian government led by Giorgia Meloni and the anti-migrants' laws issued since her coalition government is in charge, as well as the recent legislative decree that aims at eroding the LGBTQ+ communities' rights as for instance, the surrogate maternity or the legal recognition of gay marriage and consequent adoption of children. But this is a topic to be discussed into another report.

1. CHANGES (POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE) IN THE LEGISLATION AFFECTING THE INTEREST OF MINORITIES

The period 2020-2022 is characterized by the centre-left government of the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement-M5S) and of the *Partito Democratico* (Democratic Party-PD) in the 2020 and 2021 during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and by a technical government led by the former European Central Bank governor Mario Draghi in the office of the president of the council of ministers (the denomination of prime minister and government in the Italian parliamentary system). In the last period of 2022, the new general elections brought into power a far-right coalition government led by the post-fascist party *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy-FdI), the ultra-nationalist party *Lega Nord* (Northern League- LN), and the centre-right party

Forza Italia (C'mon Italy-FI) of the Italian tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. The change in the country's leadership is fundamental to understand the progress made during the first part of this two-year period in matter of civil and human rights and the further changes occurring since the last election in September 2022 which have overruled and completely turned previous legislation in matter of minorities, hate crime, and protection of civil rights as it will better explained in the course of the present report looking at the specific subsections as explained in the introduction of this report.

The change in legislation occurred in 2020-2021 affected many social categories and minorities with attention to migrants, LGBTQI+ communities and foreigners and migrants present on the national territories. The ministries' mandate was to promote actions aimed at the prevention and elimination of discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, ethnic origins, religion and personal beliefs, age, sexual orientation, gender and disabilities. On August 2021, it was presented to the Italian government the first national strategy for gender equality (covering the period 2021-2026). This project seemed to be inspired by the document 'The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2025'.² Italy appointed its national focal point for the implementation of the EU charted and appointed a professor of Constitutional Law at the university of Milan for the institutional role required.

However, Italy failed to pass a law to protect LGBTQIA+ people from hate crime. In October 2021, the Italian senate decided not to proceed with a parliamentary session of a draft law (already approved by the chamber of deputies in 2020) which would introduce strong protective measures tackling hate crime on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, gender, identity and disability. This issue should now be discussed in the current 2023 legislature.

Another change of the legislation worth of mention is that third-country nationals with temporary residence in Italy must be included among the beneficiaries of welfare provisions. In September 2021, the EU Court of Justice issued a decision stating that third-country nationals who hold a single work permit must be entitled to a childbirth allowance and maternity allowance as provided by the Italian legislation as per Italian nationals.

Regarding asylum and migration, there is not relevant development in the period 2020-2022. In October 2021, the ministry of disability launched a public consultation aimed at collecting contributions and proposals for the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The contributions

² https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en.

were eventually assessed and considered during the national conference on disabilities policies on 13 December 2021.

A draft law was under discussion of the parliament to prevent and tackle discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Among all the measures adopted, the draft law intended to improve the already existing aggravating measures present in the Italian criminal code (Art. 604-bis and 604-ter) on the crime of discrimination on grounds of race and ethnicity. The draft law was approved by the chamber of deputies in November 2020. However, on 27 October 2020, the legislative debate was suspended by the Italian senate. Therefore, making impossible any further debate and possible approval of the law. In the Italian system, this means that a new draft law needs to be discussed in the new legislation started after 2022 general elections. At the time of writing the present report there is no evidence that the draft law on discrimination has been discussed or presented neither in chamber of the deputies, nor in the senate. Undoubtedly, the draft law on discrimination seems quite important because it was extending the category of ‘vulnerable person’ to the victims of those types of abuse by making compulsory for the judicial authorities to adopt procedural safeguards in place to avoid secondary victimization (such as avoiding any contact between victim and perpetrator during the trial, the involvement of experts, the adoption of protective measures during the judicial questioning of the victims). Also, on 17 May 2020, it was established the national day against homophobia, lesbophobia and trans-phobia. The National Anti-Discrimination Office of the Italian Government (*Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazione Razziali a Difesa delle Differenze – UNAR*) was entrusted with a draft law on national strategy to tackle this type of discrimination. Eventually, the draft was intended to get 4 million Euros to the already existing ‘Equal Opportunity Fund’ to be used for financing policies, preventing and tackling this type of discrimination and to establish specific shelters for the victims of such discrimination.

In December 2021, the Italian Parliament passed the law number 238/2021 in which it is established the commitment by Italy to implement the European Union legislation into the Italian law.³ Among other measure, this law reformed the legislative decree 2/6/2003 implementing a law 2000/78 where the term ‘nationality’ was added to the prohibited discrimination factors and extended the scope of the legislative decree beyond the employment

³ Parlamento Italiano, legge del 23 Dicembre no. 238/2021, ‘Disposizioni per l’Adempimento degli Obblighi Derivanti dall’Appartenenza dell’Italia all’Unione Europea-Legge Europa 2019-2020, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/01/17/22G00004/sg>.

sphere that constituted the original scope of application of such directive, thus including access to housing and social and fiscal advantages.

As one can see, efforts were made by the governments in charge during the period 202-2021 affecting LGBTQ+ community's rights and, in general, attempted were made in the legislations to accommodate minorities rights in working and housing areas, where still those categories were find opposition and hostility.

2. LAW ENFORCEMENT PRACTICES AFFECTING MINORITIES

The period taken into consideration (2020-2022), sees some progress in law enforcement at tackling discrimination and at preventing forms of discriminations against or affecting minorities. One of the most relevant episodes in this sense, is to have established a ministry to protect and defend minorities groups of all kinds especially in the labour market but also in the social context. On 15 March 2021, it was established the ministry of Equal Opportunity (*Ministero per le Pari Opportunità*) with the decree of the president of the council of ministries.⁴ The ministry's mandate includes the promotion of actions aimed at preventing and eliminating discriminations on the grounds of sex, race, ethnic origins, religion, personal beliefs, age, gender orientation, and sexual identity. The legislative framework in combating discrimination, racism, and xenophobia in the Italian legal system goes back to the law 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 and further amended and implemented under criminal law between 2016 and 2018.⁵

The insurgence and the spread of the SARS-COVID-19 started in Italy in the late February 2020. In those extraordinary circumstances never faced before by the Italian authorities, the president of the council of ministers Giuseppe Conte and its government implemented a series of law enforcement affecting the Italian populace overall, and as well, the minorities living in the country. The implementation of Draconian laws to contain the spreading of the virus, translated into coercive measures on the constitutional liberties and civil rights of the individuals like a rigid lockdown system, and a series of legal practices in the work place or in public spaces, among those the vaccination, the obligatorily of wearing the face mask, and

⁴ <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/07/01/22A03808/sg>.

⁵ Law no.115 of 16 June 2016 and the legislative decree no. 21 of 1st March 2018, <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2016/06/28/16G00124/sg%20>.

finally, the holding of the green pass (as evidence of being vaccinated) in order to access to work (lack of which was charged with heavy penalties in money).⁶ It is also worth mentioning the employment of the Armed Forces in implementing the law enforcements of the anti-Covid legislation as well as the role of the Italian navy and army alike to contrast the migratory influx coming from Africa either by the sea route or for Turkey following the earth route. During the pandemic period, it has been conceded the prorogation to the town halls of cities and town hosting large communities of migrants, or being the place for migrants' hotspots, of all those projects that were concerning the hosting of migrants. Furthermore, the council of ministers conceded the prorogation of visas, and enforced a rigorous screening of all those foreigners and migrants, especially those hosted in the migration hot spots present in the country. From 1 June to 15 August 2020 there have been presented more than 200.000 applications for regularising the illegal migrants living and working in the country predominantly as agricultural labourers or ad domestic and care givers workers.⁷ With a decree of 26 March 2020, the Italian interior minister has decreed a rigorous monitoring of all the migrants present in the centres for immigration with a mandatory medical visit at the arrival and an obligatory quarantine of 14 days.⁸

On 13 July 2021, the organizations for the protection of civil rights ASGI and *Rete Linford* released a public plea '*L'Uguaglianza o è per tutti o non-lo è*' (Equality must be for everyone or is not at all).⁹

On 26 February 2021, the National Statistics Institute (*Istituto Nazionale di Statistica-ISTAT*) launched a public survey referring to the period 2020-2021 on discrimination targeting LGBT+ people in the labour market.¹⁰

On 17 May 2021, the ministry of education issued a document against homophobia and in promoting the national day against homophobia.¹¹

⁶ <https://temi.camera.it/leg19/temi/iniziative-per-prevenire-e-contrastare-la-diffusione-del-nuovo-coronavirus.html>.

⁷ <https://temi.camera.it/leg19/temi/iniziative-per-prevenire-e-contrastare-la-diffusione-del-nuovo-coronavirus.html>.

⁸ <https://temi.camera.it/leg19/temi/iniziative-per-prevenire-e-contrastare-la-diffusione-del-nuovo-coronavirus.html>.

⁹ <http://www.informareunh.it/o-e-uguaglianza-per-tutti-e-tutte-oppure-non-lo-e/>.

¹⁰ <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/268470>.

¹¹ Circolare Ministero dell'Istruzione 17 maggio 2021, oggetto: 17 maggio- giornata Internazionale contro l'omofobia, la bifobia e la transofobia, <https://www.miur.gov.it/-/17-maggio-giornata-internazionale-contro-l-omofob-1>.

On 30 June 2021, The UNAR signed three protocols with the Italian Federation of Professional Estate Agents (*Federazione Italiana Agenti Immobiliari Professionali-FIAP*) aimed at preventing all kinds of discrimination in access to the house market by minorities.¹²

As we can see, the law enforcement was mainly common during the pandemic (especially the first period 2020-2021) and affecting with restrictive measures the overall population, but that affected especially minorities as migrants and foreigners whether already resident in the country although illegally, and the new arrivals detained in the migrants hot spots and centres where the preventive measure anti-Covid were applied rigorously as often considered a vehicle of infection by the far-right nationalists. The decree of 17 April 2020 by the interior ministry, the ministry of health and safety, and the ministry of defence established that Italian ports would no longer considered ‘porti sicuri’ (safe areas) for migrants arriving on the Italian shores until 31 July 2020 and coming from countries outside the SAR area as established by the Hamburg agreement.¹³ Such a decision meant several problems especially for the NGOs vessels that at the time were rescuing in the Mediterranean sea individuals at risk of sinking from the crashing of their boats. Another aspect that could be considered discriminatory for the migrants’ residents or not, was the difference in treatment in putting into practice the law enforcement of the anti-Covid protocols. The obligation to a period of more than 14 days confinement, and the mandatory regularization or immediate expulsion of the foreign workers, and finally, the non-obligation to rescue at sea those migrants coming outside the SAR area, although justified as preventive measures to protect the indigenous population from the spreading of the virus, have in matter of fact, penalised further the minorities of foreigners and migrants arriving or already living in the country.

3. THE ATTITUDE OF THE SOCIETY TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS, ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS AND SEXUAL MINORITIES

In the Italian society the perception and acceptance of immigrants, ethnic and religious and sexual minorities are sensitive topics to discuss. If it is true that in the last thirty years Italy is

¹² Protocollo d’Intesa UNAR/FIAP del 30 giugno 2021, <https://www.asgi.it/notizie/unar-e-fiaip-siglano-un-protocollo-dintesa-volto-alla-prevenzione-e-al-contrasto-di-ogni-tipo-di-discriminazione-nel-settore-immobiliare/>.

¹³ <https://temi.camera.it/leg19/temi/iniziative-per-prevenire-e-contrastare-la-diffusione-del-nuovo-coronavirus.html>.

becoming increasingly a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic country, and the progressive secularization of the Italian society has improved the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ communities, it is also true that episodes of discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance towards those who are perceived as different is still quite widespread within the society's fabric.

According to the Italian constitution, in Italy their full freedom of religion, and tolerance of minorities whether they are linguistic, ethnic or sexual. However, the main groups that finds discrimination and are victims of hate crime by the Italian society are-concerning the religious minority- the Jewish and Islamic communities and citizens, the Roma gypsies, the LGBTIQ+ community. Starting with the Jewish minorities, we can say that according to several reports, the cases of anti-Semitism have increased in the number of 241 cases compared to the 226 of 2021, with 164 cases online, and 77 face-to-face (2 aggressions, 10 threats, and the vandalism of the synagogue in Trieste).¹⁴ There are some considerations that need to be made to explain those data. First, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with its limitations and restrictions and obligation to vaccination, green pass, etc., has generated a general frustration in the population easily manipulated by those far-right leaders online and in the political world that needed an escape goat. Since the outbreak of the pandemic have become popular especially online, anti-government, anti-establishment conspiracy theories that have rescued the old anti-Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world, and therefore, anti-Semitism has become more visible and widespread especially in those social groups with little education (15,6% of Italians are convinced that the Shoah never happened)¹⁵, and with unstable working situations. The hate of the 'Other' has therefore been facilitated by the economic precariat worsen by the pandemic.¹⁶ The old prejudice common in the Catholic community of Jews as 'God's killers' is coming back aided by the underground world of online groups or individuals that preach Holocaust denial. For 23.9% of Italians, Jews control the financial and economic sector, more than a fifth of Italians is convinced that Jews control the media, the 26,4% of Italians believe that Jews control the US political choices domestically and on an international level.¹⁷ According to the majority of Italians, the cases of anti-Semitism occurred during the pandemic period and in 2022, are isolated cases and therefore, the society is not anti-Semite

¹⁴ <https://www.cdec.it/relazione-annuale-sullantisemitismo-in-italia-2022/>.

¹⁵ <https://it.usembassy.gov/it/irf-2020-italia/>.

¹⁶ <https://www.cdec.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Impaginato-ita-web.pdf>.

¹⁷ <https://www.studenti.it/giornata-della-memoria-chi-sono-negazionisti-olocausto.html>.

(61,7%), however, at the same time, the 60,6% of Italians believes that those cases of anti-Semitism are the consequence of a type of hate language quite widespread based on racism; the 47,5% believes that those cases are a worrying signal of a worsening of the racism in the country, while only the 37,2% believes that is only pranks and ‘teasing’ without any intention to offend or with a racist and derogative significance.¹⁸

The Muslim presence in Italy is now quite stable and well inserted in the social context. In Italy up to 2021, the number of Muslims with foreign citizenship is of 1.533.000, while the number of Muslims with Italian citizenship is 1.220.000 for a total of 2.753.000.¹⁹ The Muslim religion in Italy is the second in number after the Catholic religion professed-at least-by tradition- by most of, much of Italians, and is well rooted in the territory (4.5% of all Italians). The process of naturalization in Italy, makes possible to talk of second or even third generation of Italian Muslims.²⁰ The Italian society is getting accustomed to the presence of Muslims on the territory although episodes of racism and intolerance are still present on the territory, especially in the north of the country with parties like the *Lega* and his leader Matteo Salvini that often use Islamophobia for electoral purposes. Considering that in Rome there is the largest mosque in the country, and that the Muslim presence is well-established, the attitude of the society is different from the period of Islamic terrorism where the racial profiling determined prejudice and discrimination towards Muslims.

Regarding immigrants, unfortunately, the Italian society is still reluctant in accepting migrants from other countries, especially if coming from the African continent. In the period 2020-2022, as already explained in the other sections of the present report, migrants have been object of a hate campaign from parties like the *Lega* and other right-leaning politicians who saw the vehicle of COVID-19 infections in migrants arriving from Africa. One of the post on the *Lega*’s official Facebook page says ‘there are hotels for immigrants, but not hospitals for Italians’.²¹ The Italian radical right (*Lega* and *Fratelli d’Italia*) has exploited the emergency of the pandemic in an anti-establishment, anti-PD perspective. Always on Facebook, one member of *Fratelli d’Italia* posted that ‘while Italians are lacking vaccines and there is lockdown emergency, the PD is only thinking of birth right citizenship for migrants’.²² The anti-migrants’

¹⁸ <https://www.studenti.it/giornata-della-memoria-chi-sono-negazionisti-olocausto.html>.

¹⁹ <https://www.lenius.it/musulmani-in-italia/>.

²⁰ <https://www.lenius.it/musulmani-in-italia/2/>.

²¹ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=368299950909843>.

²² <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=141623457846835>.

rhetoric sported during the pandemic by the radical right has further worsen the Italian society attitude toward migrants generating even more intolerance, racism and xenophobia.

The same discourse is for the LGBTIQ+ community and the level of intolerance perceived by those members of those community (see section on hate crime), as well as Roma gipsy community ever since object of popular prejudice that goes across the social classes regardless the census and the level of education. In all those cases, the perception of those minorities by the Italian society is very much influenced and manipulated by the rhetoric of the radical right parties like League and Brothers of Italy. This worsen the already difficult climate that minorities in Italy must deal with.

4. COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ITS IMPACT ON THE LEVEL OF XENOPHOBIA AND THE RADICALIZATION OF THE SOCIETY

The SARS-COVID- 19 virus pandemic that affected the world in the period 2019-2021, had also an impact on Italy, which was one of the first country in western Europe to be heavily affected by the pandemic (especially in the initial phase, the north of the country was the worst affected by the spreading of the virus). The period of the COVID-19 pandemic, saw several problems surfacing in matter of civil rights of citizens on which a strict lockdown was imposed by the Italian authorities, and the appearance on the social and political scene of the anti-vax movement as in other part of the world. In the present sub-section, we will discuss the level of xenophobia and to what extent the society became radicalized and polarized following such dramatic turn in mankind history.

I would to start with a plea that several medical and NGOs associations made to the Italian authorities on February 2021 regarding the medical assistance and, in the specific, the right to free vaccination for third-country citizens living in the second phase of the pandemic on Italian territory. On February 2021, the civil society associations with has among its members organizations like Board on Immigration and Health Care (*Tavolo Immigrazione Salute-TIS*), the Association of Legal Studies on Immigration (*Associazione Studi Giuridici Immigrazione-ASGI*), Caritas Italiana, Medicines Du Monde, Doctors Against Torture (*Medici Contro la Tortura*), Doctors Without Borders, Border Healthcare (*Medici per i Diritti Umani –MEDI*), Italian Society of Immigration Medicine (*Società Italiana di Medicina delle Migrazioni*) sent an open letter to the Italian ministry for the healthcare concerning the possible exclusion of the vulnerable non-Italian citizens, including European citizens not regularly registered and in the

conditions of economic disadvantage and social exclusion. According to the above-mentioned associations, even if the guidelines of the Italian Drug Agency (*Agenzia Italiana Farmaco-AIFA*) recognises the right of third-country citizens without any regular enrolment in civil registers and deprived of a valid identity document to have access to the vaccination, reckoned that the norm according which one could have access to vaccination only if registered with a local general practitioner quite discriminating.²³ For this reasons, the above mentioned associations asked the Italian healthcare authorities to introduce a different protocol in order to make possible access to the vaccination programme the most vulnerable, mainly, foreign citizens living in poor economic conditions and not in possess of valid documents to live and work in the country. The discrimination of foreigners or immigrants not regularly registered or with a valid visa fed a discussion between the Italian authorities and the civil society organizations and NGOs concerning the different treatments of immigrants regarding the right to get a free vaccination. The UNAR issued a statement in August 2021²⁴ in which it is stated that hindering the access of those individuals to the vaccination programme was to be considered an institutional discrimination, for it would have deprived people to access to the ‘green pass’ necessary for working and other social activities. On 26 August, the extraordinary commissioner sent a formal letter to the Italian regions governors²⁵ asking them to give access to COVID-19 vaccination for irregular migrants and other categories of people not registered in the Italian healthcare services.

Since the first period of the spreading of the virus, several international institutions-among those the OSCE-have stressed that the pandemic would have had an unbalanced effect on foreigners and migrants. Those categories of individuals due to the precarious living conditions, and little economic support, were in the position of more exposure to the infection. But on these groups of individuals, the pandemic has had also another effect. As often it happens in situations that elude human control, there was the search for an escaping goat.

²³ UNAR, ‘Accesso alle vaccinazioni anti-SARS-COVID-2/COVID-19 da parte di persone senza permesso di soggiorno, in proceduta di emersione o senza dimora’ (11 August 2021), <https://www.unar.it/portale/documents/20125/63457/LETTERA+UNAR+AL+COMMISSARIO+FIGLIUOLO.pdf/f03dd1b9-7b02-cd15-8ad9-24c66bf1e470?t=1629>.

²⁴ UNAR, ‘Accesso alle vaccinazioni anti-SARS –COVID-2/COVID-19 da parte di persone senza permesso di soggiorno, in, inn, in procedura di emersione o senza dimora’ (11 August 2021), <https://www.unar.it/portale/documents/20125/63457/LETTERA+UNAR+AL+COMMISSARIO+FIGLIUOLO.pdf/f03dd1b9-7b02-cd15-8ad9-24c66bf1e470?t=1629>.

²⁵ Struttura di Supporto Commissariale per l’emergenza COVID-19, ‘Accesso alle Vaccinazioni Anti-SARS-COVID-2/COVID-19 da Parte di Persone Senza Fissa Dimora, Codice Fiscale o di Residenza’ (26 August 2021), <https://www.governo.it/it/cscovid19>.

Several people, even in the political class, have accused in a strong manner migrants as well as foreigners regularly living on the Italian territory, of being a danger from an epidemiological point of view. Therefore, the COVID-19 is not just a virus which compromise the health and well-being of individuals, but also a source of exacerbating xenophobia, hate and exclusion of the Other as stated by Fernand de Varennes at the UN International Conference on minority.²⁶ Such attitude has happened at many levels. Firstly, the migrants arrived in Italy from the middle-east and Africa were accused of spreading the virus even more severe than the COVID. In other circumstances, it has been their customs and traditions to be taken as source of infection and spreading of the virus. In general, foreigners and migrants have been accused of being incapable to keep the social distance and not being able to follow the hygienic norms to avoid the spreading of the virus. Finally, the authorities have been accused to dedicate far too many resources to foreigners and migrants compared to the Italian citizens.

Furthermore, migrants have often been accused of being the carriers of the virus either by being particularly contagious or carriers of a virus even more dangerous because coming from far away, or because incapable to follow the norms to avoid the spreading. Several public figures with institutional roles have expressed such opinions starting from the president of the council of ministers, Giuseppe Conte and two of the former ministers during the pandemic. Both Conte and Matteo Salvini stated that to prevent the spreading of the virus it was necessary to close the ports and even facilitate and speed up the deportations of illegal migrants, while the former minister of the interiors, Marco Minniti has stressed a correlation between the spreading of the virus and migrants on the Italian territory.

Amnesty International has stressed how the hate against migrant has often became a pretext to attack specific political targets.²⁷ Migrants and refugees or asylum seekers seem to be the chosen target of the online haters facilitated by the fact that often migrants cannot defend themselves. Often the online haters are incited by politicians that use this excuse to pressurise the authorities to stop the arrivals of migrants on the Italian shores.²⁸ This is the case of senator Daniela Sentence who accused the president of the ministers, Giuseppe Conte to have first imposed a severe lockdown on the Italian populace and then, to not being able to solve the problem of the virus spreading in the immigration centres, affirming that the migrants were

²⁶ <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k15/k153ohxn0g>.

²⁷ Amnesty International Italia, 'Barometro dell'Odio: Intolleranza Pandemica', <https://www.amnesty.it/barometro-dellodio-intolleranza-pandemica/>.

²⁸ Ibid. Amnesty International Report.

allowed to arrive in the country and vanish while the Italian were forced in their home due to the lockdown. However, the data gathered for the period of the first lockdown (1 February-June 2020) tell us a different story. The level of infection and spreading of the virus in the immigration centres seems to be similar to the one assessed in the Italian populace: 400,68 cases on 100 thousand migrants in immigration centres (11 May-12 June 2020) compared to the total of the Italian population those data are slightly inferior: 369,21 cases on 100 thousand people.²⁹ The majority of the cases were recorded in the immigration centres in the north of Italy, which also saw the highest level of cases in the whole country. However, it should be added that there has been a higher level of participation to the survey in the immigration centres in the north (75,3%) compared to those in the centre (72,5%) and in the south (70,1%).³⁰ In conclusion, the index of positivity to the virus in the immigration centres of the whole country was 0,4% in the period of the first lockdown (May-June 2020).³¹

The Italian regions that reported most of, much of cases of COVID-19 in the period considered were Piemonte and Lombardia (both with 61 cases), followed by other northern regions like Trentino Alto-Adige, Veneto and Emilia Romagna. In the other 12 regions in the same period there were not recorded cases. The number of positive subjects respect to the total of the people held in those centres remains inferior to the 1% in all the regions except Trentino (4%) and Piemonte (1%). On a national level the index of spreading the virus was 0,38%.³² In conclusion, only 0,8% of cases recorded in all the immigration centres of the north of Italy in the period May-June 2020.³³ In the north of the country, there was also a higher level of saturation of the immigration centres if we compare the number of residents with the capacity of hosting people. In general, the immigration centres seem to be more crowded in the north (86.3%) than in the centre (84,2%), or in the south (67,2%)³⁴, and were the virus was more widespread on the territory, consequently, there were more cases also among migrants.

²⁹ <https://www.ismu.org/i-tassi-di-affezione-da-covid-19-tra-le-nazionalita-straniere-in-italia/>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ The survey has been conducted in the period between 11 May 2020 to 12 June 2020 and the results refers to 5.038 centres out of 6.837 centres censused by the ministry of the interior covering circa 73% of the totality of the immigration centres in Italy. The coverage in respect of the number of the guests present in those centres has been estimated to circa 70% considering that according to the data of the ministry of the interior, the total number of people in the centres by 31 May 2020 was circa 85, 730. All the types of centres have been included in the survey (CAS, SIPROMI, CPA and CPR), <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/stampa-e-comunicazione/dati-e-statistiche>.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

Since its beginning the pandemic was perceived in a xenophobic manner. Being the virus for the first time recorded in China, its spreading throughout the world has caused numerous episodes of racism against the Chinese community. According to the NGO, ‘Cronache di Ordinario Razzismo’, between 20 January and 8 March 2020, there have been 61 cases of racism against citizens of Chinese origins with verbal harassments, acts of discriminations, arson attacks, acts of violence.³⁵ Initially, it was the Chinese community to pay the price of the spreading of the pandemic; later, the prejudice and racism extended to all those foreigners and migrants present on the territory. The phenomenon was somehow reconsidered when the pandemic became global and when even Italian abroad (especially in other European countries) were objects of xenophobic acts accused of spreading the virus. If we compare the cases, we can see that in the period between 1 January 2019 and 22 April 2020, the number of cases affecting the foreign population resident in Italy was of 6.395 compared to the 117.809 cases of the Italian population; meaning 2,1% every 1,000 residents and we can conclude that the number of cases in the Italian population was superior to the number of cases recorded in the foreign or migrant community.³⁶ During the pandemic, however, the hotspots that were hosting migrants arriving from Africa were not well equipped to cope with the pandemic emergency situation. One example of the mismanagement due to poor infrastructures and scarcity of specialised staff to take care of the migrants was the hotspot of the island of Lampedusa, a small island off the coast of Sicily. Furthermore, the same protocols adopted to isolate and put into quarantine migrants in order to avoid a possible infection and spreading of the virus, had often compromised or breached the migrants’ individual rights by slowing down their legal procedure of identification and eventual obtaining the visa necessary to be legally in the country.³⁷ Another discriminatory element to consider was the difference of treatment between foreigners and migrants already residents on the Italian territory, and those instead just arrived in the country. The vaccination was more rapidly made available for the latter, while for the former group, the accessibility to the vaccination was at the discretion of the local authorities. In other words, different treatments for migrants already present on the territory, and those who had just arrived. Initially, the Italian authorities had thought to create the so-called ‘quarantine-ships’, basically to keep the migrants just arrived confined on board of the NGOs’ vessels that rescued migrants in the Mediterranean Sea, after medical check-ups of their health conditions. The solution adopted by the Italian authorities of the ‘quarantine ships’ did not solve effectively

³⁵ Ibid. Ismu report Italia.

³⁶ <https://www.openpolis.it/i-discorsi-dodio-verso-migranti-e-stranieri-durante-la-pandemia/>.

³⁷ Ibid.

the problem of possible spreading of the virus and served only to give the message to the public opinion that those arriving from the outside, were kept well away from the indigenous population. But in real terms, the solution of this type of vessels created even more discomfort for the most vulnerable of the migrants trapped on those ships; especially categories like minors, pregnant women and individuals with physical and mental disabilities were suffering most from this solution.³⁸

It also necessary to discuss the process of radicalization occurred in Italy with the ‘anti-vax’ movement and the social and political instability that followed. The Italian expression ‘no-vax’ is the one we will be using from now onward in the report to refer specifically to Italian anti-vax movement. The ‘no-vax’ movement remains a confusing social and political phenomenon that has characterized the period of the pandemic in Italy. What is interesting to notice is its affiliation to far-right parties and movements like the Lega Nord or far-right organizations like ‘Forza Nuova’ for instance. The ‘no-vax’ movement shows a certain degree of millennialism, anti-establishment, and conspiratorial. The ‘no-vax’ movement moves within the so called ‘infodemia’, namely, the disinformation followed by an excess of information without a solid scientific support. In other words, no-vaxers were exposed to fake news, conspiracy theories and manipulated by anti-establishment organizations of neo-fascist imprinting as already mentioned above.

In 2020, the United Nations had warned of the risk that the pandemic would generate an increasing of conspiracy theories and creation of underground protest movements as a result, also due to the forced lockdown and accessibility of people to internet and social media.³⁹ The risk has been of a social laceration and the creation of an anti-establishment front eager to lead street movements.⁴⁰ With specific reference to Italy, the main significant events related to the anti-vax (no-vax) movement were the anti-vax national rally on 9 October 2021 with the storming of the headquarters of the left-leaning trade union CGIL at the hands of no-vax protesters led by a well-known former neo-fascist terrorist and leader of the far-right movement ‘Forza Nuova’ (*New Force*), Roberto Fiore⁴¹, while the other relevant episode of violence,

³⁸ Ibid.; Doctors Without Borders.

³⁹ Press Freedom Critical Countering COVID-19, ‘Pandemic of Misinformation’, UN Chief, UN News, 4 May 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1063152>.

⁴⁰ AGI-Agenzia Italia, ‘Lo Scontro Tra Negazionisti e Resto del Mondo Sul Covid Visto Dai Social’ <https://www.agi.it/cronaca/news/2020-10-14/covid-negazionisti-discussioni-social-9944221/>.

⁴¹ Adnkronos: https://www.adnkronos.com/forza-nuova-attacco-a-cgil-annunciato-in-piazza-unora-prima_11UIT7h1WW1rSdCEhPd3ml.

refers to the anarchist attempts to infiltrate another manifestation in Milan on 16 October 2021.⁴² Other episodes of violence that show the level of radicalisation of the Italian anti-vax movement are summarised in an article by Marco Consoli Magnano San Leo in his article written for the CASD⁴³ and reported in the study made by the Observatory for political radicalism, domestic terrorism, and organised crime where we can read of the claim of an arson attack at the Istituto Superiore della Sanità, which is the Italian higher institutional authority concerning healthcare. Another episode of violence COVID-19 related recorded in the above-mentioned sources, is the launching of petrol bombs against the vaccine hub in the city of Brescia, and a series of parcel bombs sent out between July and September 2020 by the anarchist organization ‘Mikhail Zhlobitsky Nuclei’ targeting the president of the ‘Confindustria’ (Italian industrialists lobby), and against the SAPP (trade union for police and prison surveillance) in Modena, and finally, again the use of parcel bombs addressed to the presidency of ‘Confindustria’ for the Lombardy region in the city of Bergamo.⁴⁴ Another interesting element worth of notice is the transformation of the anti-vax wave into a political party or in a movement structured in a political movement. Such phenomenon seems to have been, however, quite isolated and complex. For instance, the 3V⁴⁵ movement that originated from the anti-vax movement, tried to get into the Italian politics of political parties but without significant results if not a 3% in the city of Rimini for the local elections.⁴⁶ The worrying aspect of the anti-vax movement in Italy has been the presence of far-right organizations and groups as already mentioned earlier in the present sub-section. Particularly, the far-right organization *Forza Nuova* founded by the former neofascist terrorist Roberto Fiore of the ‘Revolutionary Armed Nuclei (*Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari*-NAR). In August 2021, he had expressed his dissent about the green pass policy, but not against the vaccination campaign, announcing the expulsion of members of his group that would have held it.⁴⁷ However, what worried the Italian counter terrorist police was the active presence in the anti-vax movement of a well-known neo-Nazi organization: the ‘Militant Community of the Twelve Rays’ or, simply ‘Twelve Rays’

⁴² Ansa: https://www.ansa.it/lombardia/notizie/2021/10/16/greenpass-tensione-a-corte-milano-cariche-alleggerimento_d2903890-efff-40f3-8287-3d3.84clabd.html.

⁴³ CENTRO ALTI STUDI DIFESA (Centre for Higher Studies of Defence).

⁴⁴ Giuseppe Giliberto, Davide Ravaglino, Lorenzo Scarazzato, “‘No-Vax’ tra Eversismo Radicale e Infodemia”, *Analytica for Intelligence and Security*, Osservatorio per gli Studi su Radicalismo Politico, Terrorismo Interno e Criminalità Organizzata, Turin, 2022.

⁴⁵ The three ‘V’ in the name of the movement stand for (in Italian) ‘Vaccini Vogliamo Verità’ which can be translated in English as ‘Vaccines [we] Want the Truth.’

⁴⁶ Giliberto et al. (2022), p. 8.

⁴⁷ Il Messaggero, 6 Agosto, 2021:

https://www.ilmessaggero.it/politica/greenpass_forza_nuova_espulsione_tesserati_vaccino_ultime_notizie-6124119.html.

(*Comunità Militante dei Dodici Raggi- DO.RA.*) present in Lombardy, especially in the areas of the cities of Bergamo and Varese who expressed their dissent and obstructionism both to the green pass and the vaccination campaign.⁴⁸ We can conclude that in Italy, as in many other countries, the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020-2021 has generated movements of protests that, by using the excuse of extreme measure of protection of the population by the competent authorities, have created disruption in the public opinion and attempted to the public security. The interesting data is how political extremism of different ideological nature has infiltrated the anti-vax movement, radicalised it and attempted to transform it into a legitimate political movement or even a party. However, it must be noted that this operation of ‘politicize’ the anti-vax movement has been made mainly by the neo-fascist, far-right fringe of the Italian extremism rather than by other extreme and radical ideologies with some attempts only by anarchist groups who have used the anti-vax movement as an excuse for channelling their anti-establishment political agenda

5. ARMED CONFLICT IN UKRAINE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE LEVEL OF XENOPHOBIA AND THE RADICALIZATION OF THE SOCIETY

On 24 February 2022, Russia invades Ukraine creating one of the most devastating crisis in post-war international politics, and bringing towards a potential enlargement of the conflict outside the Ukrainian borders. In the first months of the conflict, was clear that the west supported logistically and possibly, financially, Ukraine against Putin’s and the Russian military and political class’ strategic plans to regain control of some of the regions in Crimea. The position of Italy, a NATO member state, aligned with the west, i.e., USA, Great Britain and European Union was unquestionable. However, within the Italian public opinion was soon clear the polarization between those ‘pro-Putin’ and those ‘pro-Ukraine’. If most of, many of the Italians followed the government’s official campaign ‘pro-Ukraine’ with a series of official initiatives involving the civil society and the institutions, it is also evident that the ‘pro-Russia’, or ‘pro-Putin’ front in a few months gained quite a strong position on the social platform, in Italian academia, and in part of the institutions creating embarrassing situations to the official governmental apparatus with both the EU and the US. In the present sub-section of the report

⁴⁸ <https://comunitamilitantedeidodiciraggi.org>.

we are going to analyse and evaluate the repercussions that the Russia-Ukraine conflicts had on Italian society and politics.

It is a well-known fact that, unfortunately, with war, there is a proliferation of xenophobia and racism. Nationalism(s) worsen and we are in the presence of a radical polarization of politics and public opinion. The first element to be considered in the present sub-section is the difference of treatment for the Ukrainian war refugees versus all the other war refugees especially if coming from Africa or the middle-east. This difference in treatment can be observed both at a legal level and in matter of reception from the public opinion. From a judicial point of view by applying the directive no. 55/2001; from an economical perspective by activating extraordinary financial resources to prepare the coming of the war refugees also soliciting the solidarity of the public opinion with the media.⁴⁹

The war in Ukraine has introduced a new hierarchy of the right to asylum by distinguishing between the Ukrainian refugees versus all the others, treated in a different way even if experiencing and suffering from the same dramatic circumstances. The media gave exceptional attention to the conflict with the press giving daily account of the dramatic situation experienced by the Ukrainian people. This did not occur with the other conflicts still in act into the world which seem to get a different level of attention by the national and international media system. And in the account of the Russia-Ukraine war we can see the emerging of prejudices and stereotypes that structure the white eurocentrism.⁵⁰

What we can observe is unanimous solidarity with the Ukrainian people. There is a common attitude that reveals opportunistic distinctions as a sign that barely the tragedy of the war in Ukraine will help to build a culture of welcoming of war refugees and towards a politics that will universally acknowledge the importance of human rights for all the individuals, and not only restricted to certain categories of individuals or groups. In the ten months of the conflict (February-November 2022) the world of arts, sport and culture have adopted a binary logic regarding the ‘fighting against the enemy’ and as a result, we had several cases of obtuse ostracism against Russian writers, athletes and artists and against common citizens of Russian origins.⁵¹

⁴⁹ https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2022/03/24/news/guerra_russia_ucraina_varsavia_accoglienza_profughi-342662322/.

⁵⁰ Chief Commissioner for Human Rights of the European Council, ‘Pushed Beyond the Limits Four Areas for Urgent Action to End Human Rights Violation at European Borders’, <https://www.rm.coe.int/pushed-beyond-the-limits-urgent-action-needed-to-end-human-rights-viol/1680a5a14d>.

⁵¹ Simona Gautieri, ‘Russofobia: Boom Dopo la Guerra in Ucraina (Ma il Fenomeno Non Nasce Oggi)’, <https://www.tio.ch/dal-mondo/attualita/161881739-russi-russia-guerra-ucraina-dischiarato-scuola>; Nicoletta Pasqualini, ‘Guerra Russo-Ucraina. Siamo Alla Russofobia?’ <https://www.semprenews.it/news/Siamo-in-preda->

The following data are updated to 27 March 2023 and are related to the number of Ukrainian war refugees in Italy: 173.213 with Germany (1,056.628), Poland (1,577.289), and Russia (2,852.395) being the countries with the highest number of refugees.⁵² The Ukrainian citizens are exempted from the visa since 2014 and can circulate freely through European Union for a period of 90 days. With the act of the European Council on 4 March 2022 (382/2022), it has been activated the directive no. 55/2001, never activated before to welcome and offer protection to the Ukrainian war refugees. This directive has not been put into action in 2015, following the humanitarian emergency of Syrian war refugees⁵³, nor in August 2021, following the withdrawal of the Americans and their allies from Afghanistan that generated refugee emergency for all those Afghani who fled the country in fear of the Taliban comeback.⁵⁴ The directive no. 55/2001, contemplates the adoption of an immediate and temporary plan of protection in case of ‘massive influx’ of refugees in the EU following situations of emergency generated by wars, violence or violations of human rights in the countries of provenience. The temporary protection contemplates the release of a visa valid 12 months and that can be renewed for another year upon the decision of the European Council.⁵⁵ Under such directive, those with this type of visa have right to work, use the national health system of the European country in which have arrived, and children have right to attend the local schooling system. The Italian council of ministries has agreed to the application of the directive no. 55/2001 for those citizens of the VISEGRAD area, and together with Austria, has managed to restrict the application of such a directive to other third-countries citizens who flee from the same conditions of war and violation of human rights.

The Ukrainian-Russian crisis tells us therefore how the choice of industrialised countries to welcome or reject war refugees is merely a political choice. On 25 February 2022, the Italian council of ministries has declared the state of emergency for the intervention abroad assuring the support of the Italian state to the civil protection plans through extraordinary and urgent intervention.⁵⁶ On 28 February 2022, a further decree by the Italian council of ministries was issued to declare a domestic state of emergency to welcome Ukrainian refugees according to

[alla-russofobia.html](#); Fabio Marcelli, ‘Ucraina, Un Appello alla Russofobia. Bisogna Porre le Basi di Una Giusta Pace’, <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2022/11/17/ucraina-un-appello-contro-la-russofobia-bisogna-porre-le-basi-di-una-giusta-pace/6876228>.

⁵² <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1312584/ukrainian-refugees-by-countries/>.

⁵³ <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/stories/2015/12/56ec1ebde/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis.html>.

⁵⁴ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan>.

⁵⁵ <https://www.eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/temporary-protection-if-there-is-a-mass-influx-of-dispalced-people.html>; <https://www.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ITTXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32001L0055>.

⁵⁶ https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2022-03-10&atto.codiceRedazionale=22A01598&elenco30giorni=false.

the article 10 of the Italian constitution.⁵⁷ The role of the media is crucial in the immediate account of the Ukrainian conflict thanks also to the role of the social network that provide information in real time. The images of destroyed cities, displayed people fleeing their home has had an enormous emotional impact on the viewers. The generosity in welcoming and helping Ukrainian refugees is admirable and correspond to the role of the media by monopolizing the information with detailed accounts of the brutality of the war and of the precarious conditions in which Ukrainian people are forced to experience.

Undoubtedly, this is the first time that Italians and Europeans experience a war so close home since world war two, and the tones of Putin and his ministries, the vicinity to the borders, and the feeling of cultural and ethnic community with the Ukrainian have influenced in how the Italian public has reacted to this conflict. The political class has acted upon political opportunism being Italy part of NATO and member of the EU, and therefore, Italy has agreed to adopt specific plans and strategies like the application of sanctions, logistic aids and emergency plans for the Ukrainian refugees. The war however, has created a polarized and volatile political debates that has deeply divided the Italian public opinion on the Ukrainian-Russian conflict.⁵⁸ The creation of a ‘Pro-Russia’ and ‘Pro-Ukraine’ positions in the public and political debate has seen a strong polarization often in anti-US/NATO perspective for those supporting Russia. In Italy, the parties that have expressed solidarity, or at least, have been less prompt to condemn Russia in the war in Ukraine are the Lega Nord and the 5 Star Movement. However, in the European Parliament, the Italian parties that seem to support more Moscow’s position are the Democratic Party (left) and the 5 Star Movement (centre-left) while Brothers of Italy (far-right) and C’mon Italy (centre-right) strongly opposed Putin’s position on the Ukrainian war, which bring Italy within the European Union context to be aligned with Hungary’s Orban’s position on this matter.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ [https://www. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/03/10/22A01599/sg.](https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2022/03/10/22A01599/sg)

⁵⁸ [https://www.micromega.net/analisi-opinioni-guerra-ucraina-russia/.](https://www.micromega.net/analisi-opinioni-guerra-ucraina-russia/)

⁵⁹ [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P-QOpOHZS9p_ZcwHoRDp8rcG9b57b5_j/view.](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P-QOpOHZS9p_ZcwHoRDp8rcG9b57b5_j/view)

6. ACTIVITIES OF RADICAL GROUPS. RADICAL RIGHT GROUPS AND PARTIES

On 25 September 2022, Giorgia Meloni, leader of the far-right party, Brothers of Italy (*Fratelli d'Italia*-FdI) became the first Italian woman prime minister, but above all, she became the first Italian far-right prime minister since Mussolini's *Ventennio*. She currently leads a far-right coalition government with the parties of Lega and Berlusconi's C'mon Italy. The party Brothers of Italy is the latest permutation of the neo-fascist party Italian Social Movement (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*-MSI) born in the aftermath of the second world war and out of a political compromise in the newly Italian democratic republic between the communist party (PCI) and the centre-right government party (DC) to avoid a possible civil war and to attempt to give political stability to the country after five years of war and twenty years of Fascist dictatorship.⁶⁰ The neo-fascism in Italy has therefore continued under the format of a legal political party although not recognising the Italian constitution, and has had several permutation until the current one that now is the main party within the coalition government. But in Italy, there has always been a quite strong galaxy of the extreme right with the development in the late 1950s and throughout the 1980s of several far-right groups involved in neo-fascist terrorism which has characterised the strategy of tension and the years of lead period.⁶¹ The radical right today active in the country is therefore the heir of this long thread that is lost in history. When we talk of radical right groups in Italy, we need first to mention two groups: *CasaPound Italia* (short CasaPound) and *Forza Nuova* founded by the former far-right terrorist Roberto Fiore implied in the terrorist attack at the Bologna railway station in 1980. These two groups tend to catalyse most of the public and political attention and have the largest number of members.

CasaPound, founded in 2003 as cultural association, became soon the first neo-fascist social centre and in the local election of 2018, managed to get 0,9% with 310.793 votes, and in the following year, the movement now political party, gained 9,1% of vote in the Rome borough of Ostia.⁶² However, the founder, Lorenzo Iannone declared the political party experience concluded and now CasaPound is again a movement or cultural association. Since then it not possible to have more data regarding CasaPound but the most recent data do not regard

⁶⁰ For the history of the neofascist party MSI, see Piero Ignazi, *Il Polo Escluso. Profilo del Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989).

⁶¹ Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy, The Radical Right in Italy After the War* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁶² <https://www.truenumbers.it/estrema-destra/>.

CasaPound's electoral follow up but rather its presence on the social media. The movement has a page on Facebook with 276.000 members and followers but the presence of the group on Facebook is quite low, and it does not have a page on Instagram while instead seem to be more active on the social platform Telegram as for instance, when CasaPound was present in the mass demonstrations organised against the green pass during the pandemic (see relevant subsection of the present report on the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic had in Italy), and on twitter or on the Russian social platform VK (VKontakte). Regarding the movement's membership, the last official data go back to 2017 when the total membership of the movement reached almost 20,000.⁶³ However, at the time of writing, the total number of individuals holding the membership of a far-right group, movement or association is of 427,000.⁶⁴ The other far-right movement quite active on the Italian political scene is *Forza Nuova* (New Force-FN) founded by the former neo-fascist terrorist Roberto Fiore as already mentioned above. FN although not always with its own symbol, is the true far-right party in Italy. It was founded by Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello in 1997 and was born out of the experience of the neo-fascist movement *Lotta Studentesca* (Student Struggle) and ever since its foundation its intention is to be a political party and not only a social movement. In the period between 2003 and 2008, FN collaborated with the party *Alternativa Sociale* (Social Alternative) of Alessandra Mussolini and dialogued with the centre-right political group *Casa delle Libertá* (House of Liberties) although keeping its own political and ideological line. In 2008, FN was for the first time present in the general election with 0.3%. In December 2020, the leader of the FN, Roberto Fiore, announced the party's joining the coalition *Italia Libera* (Free Italy) together to the Yellow Vests and No Mask movements.⁶⁵

The other far-right movements or parties worth mentioning are *Italia agli Italiani* (Italy to the Italians) and *Fiamma Tricolore* (Tricolour Flame) both participating to the 2018 general election. *Fiamma Tricolore* was founded in 1995 from the post-fascist party *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance) as the extreme wing of AN considered to be far too moderate and to have compromised far too much the fascist ideology that had characterised the MSI from which AN derived.⁶⁶ In 2009, gained 246.000 votes but in 2014, went down to 44.000. The two parties, *Forza Nuova* and *Fiamma Tricolore* joined forces in the general election of 2018

⁶³ <https://www.casapound.it>

⁶⁴ <https://www.truenumbers.it>

⁶⁵ <https://www.truenumbers.it/estrema-destra/>.

⁶⁶ Piero Ignazi, *Postfascisti? La Trasformazione del Movimento Sociale in Alleanza Nazionale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994).

but gained only 0,4% with 126.207 votes.⁶⁷ Another group worth mentioning because it has a strong presence in the geographical area of reference, is the *Comunità Militante dei Dodici Raggi* (Militant Community of the Twelve Rays) quite active in the north of the country (Milan and Varese). This neo-Nazi organization has been quite active during the pandemic joining the anti-vax and anti-mask campaign with activity on the social media with a website, videos on YouTube, and with its presence on the above mentioned Russian social platform VK.⁶⁸

In conclusion, the activity and the presence of radical right groups in Italy during the period 2020-2022, are related mainly on the territory to the anti-vax and anti-green pass movement in the 2020-2021 period as already explained in the subsection dedicated to the pandemic in this report. The electoral victory of a far-right party at the general election in September 2022, represents a turning to the right of large part of the Italian electorate (more than 26%) that in matter of fact, sealed the failure of the centre-left parties and rewarded the over spreading populism that seems to be a constant of contemporary politics.

7. ACTIVITIES OF RADICAL GROUPS. ISLAMISTS

In Italy, there seems to be a less institutional debate concerning the Muslim citizens presence on the territory. The monitoring of the radical Islamists had its peak during the first decades of the twenty-first century, after the Twin-Towers attack in New York at the hands of Al-Qaeda and later, with the ISIS terrorist attacks throughout Europe. The main official institution that represents the Muslims and often dialogues with the Italian authorities about Muslim's rights or on issues like Islamophobia is the Union of Islamic Communities and Organizations in Italy (*Unione delle Comunità Islamiche in Italia-UCOII*). This organization is also member of the Council of European Muslims (CEM), and has always held an ambivalent or ambiguous nature, for on one hand, seems to be very active on a social and political level, on the other hand, it has often been at the centre of controversy for its links with the group of the Muslim Brotherhood, although always denied by Davide Piccardo, the president of the UCOII.⁶⁹ According to the analysts of Islamism in Europe, Lorenzo Vidino and Sergio Altuna, in reality,

⁶⁷ <https://www.truenumbers.it/estrema-destra/>.

⁶⁸ <https://www.comunitamilitantedeidodiciraggi.org>.

⁶⁹ Usa: Piccardo (UCOII) 'Mai Fatto Parte dei Fratelli Mussulmani', Adnkronos, 20 September, 2011; https://www.1.adnkronos.com/Archivio/AdnAgenzia/2011/09/20/Cronaca/USA-PICCARDO-UCOII-MAI-FATTO-PARTE-DI-FRATELLI-MUSSULMANI_162200.php.

the UCOII is indeed ‘the flagship public organization of Brotherhood milieu in Italy’.⁷⁰ The UCOII has been often at the centre of national controversies as in 2006, when the organization compared the Israeli air raids on Gaza to the Nazi massacre of Marzabotto in 1944 where 800 civilians were killed.⁷¹ Other declarations by Yassine Baradai, the national secretary of the UCOII also created turmoil in the Italian public opinion in August 2020, when he declared that Judaism and Christianity had to be considered ‘heresies’ that ‘manipulated the original meaning of the prophets’ messages and that only ‘Islam came on earth to correct the mistakes made in the earlier Holy Scriptures (Torah and Gospels)’.⁷²

Another organization worth of mentioning is the Islamic Alliance (*Alleanza Islamica*) which is part of the CEM (Council of European Muslims), which is also blacklisted as a terrorist group in the United Arab Emirates.⁷³ Lorenzo Vidino defines the AI as the ‘inner core of the Brotherhood in Italy’.⁷⁴ However, it is the UCOII that seems to attract the attention of the Italian police and intelligence for its representatives and leaders often issue declarations that are quite radical and anti-Semitic or anti-Christian in nature. Those declarations do not find the consensus of moderate Muslims living in the countries and have been often criticised and taken the distances from by eminent personalities in the Muslim community both in Europe and in Italy alike. The Imam of the Great Mosque in Rome has taken the distances from the UCOII several times. The latest in order of time occurred in December 2020, when Abdellah Redouane strongly criticised the statements made by Baradai as reported above, and accused openly the UCOII of being under the Muslim Brotherhood’s rule and stressed that most of Italian Muslims were not to be confused with the UCOII members.⁷⁵

The latest twist occurred in 2021, with a strange alliance between the Sunni and Shia communities in the Lombardy region at the Council for Interreligious Dialogue at the Lombardy Region headquarters where we find Ali Faeznia (Shia) president of the Imam Ali

⁷⁰ Lorenzo Vidino and Sergio Altuna, *The Muslim Brotherhood’s Pan-European Structure* (Austrian Fund for the Documentation of Religiously Motivated Extremism (Documentation Centre Political Islam, 2021), p. 153; https://www.dokumentationsstelle.at/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Report_EU_Strukturen_final.pdf.

⁷¹ Virginia Piccolillo, “Gaza Come Marzabotto”. Bufera Sull’ UCOII, *Corriere della Sera*, 20 Agosto 2006 https://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Politica/2006/08_Agosto/20/piccolillo.shtml; Carmelo Lopapa ‘UCOII, Inserzione a Pagamento sui Giornali “Stragi Israeliane Come Quelle Naziste”, *La Repubblica*, 20 Agosto 2006 <https://www.repubblica.it/2006/08/sezioni/esteri/medio-oriente-16/ucoui.html>.

⁷² Giovanni Giacalone, ‘Le Accuse del Leader Islamico: Cristiani ed Ebrei Sono “Eretici”’, *Il Giornale*, 31 August, 2020, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/segretario-ucoui-ebraismo-e-cristianesimo-storpiature-ed-18886534.html>

⁷³ UAE Blacklists 82 Groups as “Terrorist”, *Al Arabiya*, 15 November, 2014, <https://english.alarabiya.net/News/middle-east/2014/11/15/UAE-formally-blacklists-82-groups-as-terrorist>

⁷⁴ Vidino and Altuna, *The Muslim Brotherhood’s Pan-European Structure*, p.153.

⁷⁵ Giovanni Giacalone, ‘La Grande Moschea di Roma: Siete Fratelli Mussulmani’, *Il Giornale*, 6 December 2020, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/grande-moschea-roma-allucoui-siete-fratelli-mussulmani-1869880.html>.

Cultural Centre (Milan), Mohamed Asfa (Sunni) imam of the Milan Mosque in via Padova and Ali Abu Shwaime (Sunni imam of the Segrate Mosque) having a historic rapprochement between representatives of the two main Muslim denominations. The meeting was considered strange by expert of Islam and middle-east politics, and elicited attention and worries of such an alliance between notoriously rival Muslim confessions.⁷⁶ To be noted that the ‘Imam Ali Centre’ is Shia inspired to the teachings of Khomeini. The centre has celebrated the ‘victory of the Islamic revolution’ at the presence of the Iranian consul in Milan, and commemorated the Qassem Sulaymani, the leader of Iranian’s terrorism killed by US airstrike in 2020. Interesting to notice that among the centre’s associates we find neo-fascists who praise the Iranian regime, Hezbollah, and supporters of Assad.⁷⁷ In 2021, the Charitable Association for Solidarity with the Palestinian People (*Associazione Benefica per la Solidarietà con il Popolo Palestinese-ABSPP*) with its headquarters in Genoa, was considered by the Israeli domestic security agency, Shin Bet, as the Italian emissary of the Hamas organization and linked to the ‘Union of Good’ confederation. The bank account of the ABSPP was shut down in 2021 due to a series of suspicious transactions possibly directed to Hamas.⁷⁸

Undoubtedly, the Italian radical Islamism is part of a transnational network within Europe and with links to the middle-east.⁷⁹ In Italy, the presence of Muslims is rather modest if we compare it with other European countries like Germany or France and Great Britain as it is in 2020 of 2,7 million (4, 9%).⁸⁰ Although the majority of Italian Muslims or Muslim migrants do not have any contact with the organizations and centre above mentioned, the level of radicalism worries the Italian authorities, especially in the light of connections between those Islamist radical groups and the far-right underground, and also for the geographical position of Italy in the area of the Mediterranean sea with the problem of refugees of migrants coming from political hot spots like Palestine, Afghanistan, Syria and others.

⁷⁶ Alberto Giannoni, ‘Alleanze, Liti, e “Strani” Leader. Rebus Islamico nella Consulta’, *Il Giornale*, 4 March 2022.

⁷⁷ Centro Culturale Imam Ali ‘Cerimonia del Quarantaduesimo Anniversario Della Vittoria Della Rivoluzione Islamica dell’Iran’, Instagram, 9 Febbraio, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CLFpjjx_HM7b/.

⁷⁸ Israeli Security Agency, ‘The Union of Good-Analysis and Mapping of Terror Fund Network’, n.d., https://www.shabak.gov.il/SiteCollection/Images/english/Terror/info/coalition_en_pdf.; Massimiliano Coccia, “Finanzia Hamas”. Bloccati i Conti a Una Onlus di Genova’, *La Repubblica*, 12 Settembre, 2021, https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2021/12/09/news/finanzia_hamas_bloccati_i_conti_a_una_onlus_di_genova-329600616/.

⁷⁹ Tommaso Virgili and Giovanni Giacalone, ‘Muslim Brotherhood and Khomeinism, The Told and the Untold’, *European Eye on Radicalization*, 28 May, 2022,

⁸⁰ <https://www.openpolis.it/la-presenza-dei-musulmani-in-italia/>.

8. ACTIVITIES OF RADICAL GROUPS. RADICAL LEFT GROUPS AND PARTIES

In Italy there are several political parties that refer ideologically to Marxism and communism. In the general election held in September 2022, there were several political parties of far-left that participated in the election being Italy a multi-party parliamentary system that adopt the proportional electoral system. The parties are: *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista* (Party o Communist Reformation Party), *Partito Comunista Italiano* (Italian Communist Party), *Partito Comunista dei Lavoratori* (Communist Workers Party), *Partito Comunista* (Communist Party), *Potere al Popolo!* (Power to the People!).⁸¹ These are political parties rather marginal and quite small, popular in the north of the country and Rome due to the strong socialist and communist traditions in those regions. The galaxy of Italian far-left is vast and diverse, and gather together several ideological permutations of Marxism and communism as the names of the parties seem to indicate. Although expressions of different forms of communism, they have all in common the goal to abolish capitalism through strong action and use of political activism. The victory of Giorgia Meloni (Brothers of Italy) has undoubtedly ignited the far-left after years of silence and with an ongoing crisis of the centre-left party, the PD. But the victory of a far-right coalition, with a president of the council of ministers that is the leader of a neo/post-fascist party has reopened the political scenarios once again. We are not at the stage of terrorism or political violence but there seems to be the potential of an explosion of political violence and urban guerrilla warfare as stated in the COPASIR report.⁸² The most extreme left wing party is the Communist Workers Party and is a splinter party of the Reformation Communist Party. The ideological reference of this party is Leninism and the lexicon and the tones of its leader, Marco Ferrando, recalls the 1970s revolutionary tones of the Italian far-left. Also, worth of mention is the ‘red-brownish’ Marco Rizzo who is a representative of this peculiar political and ideological strand that sees national socialism. Rizzo mixes together anti-capitalism and ultra-nationalism and has created a movement that unify radical Marxist and ultra-nationalists

⁸¹ <https://tattoomuse.it/domande-frequenti/come-si-chiama-il-partito-di-estrema-sinistra-in-italia>.

⁸² <https://www.parlamento.it/application/xmanager/projects/parlamento/file/repository/commissioni/bicamerale/copasir18/Doc. XXXIV n. 8 bozza.pdf>.

within an anti-establishment perspective. He is anti-vaccine, and anti-green pass and the former supporters or voters of the 5 Star Movement could find in him a valid political leader to follow. Another strand of the far-left is the 'red-greenish' movement. It is called in this way, because the movement mixes together elements of Marxist anti-capitalism with environmentalist stances in also an anti-establishment perspective. They fight against social inequality, they support environmentalism and they are pacifists and inspired by the Friday's for Freedom Movement.⁸³

As already said above, the election in 2022, have acted as a catalyst for both extreme right and extreme left. The following months have seen more active participation of the general public in rallies and protests, and in the schools and universities, students seem to have initiated to become more involved in the political debate. The awakening of the radical left is an indicator of how the political climate is influencing the response of the Italian society and how it is the extreme left that is voicing the opposition and dissent to the new political asset of the country. Themes like environmentalism, and strong criticism to systems of global production, have also provided fertile grounds for those political extremism to become active in politics. Another element of the revival of the radical left in the country is the new government which has re-proposed old scenarios that the collective memory of the Italians had removed. Whether these groups, parties and movements will become a liability for the political stability of the country, will be clear in the future. Now, the phenomenon is still in its heydays to provide a complete analysis, also because of lack of sufficient material.

9. HATE CRIMES (STATISTICS AND SUMMARIES)

These below are the official data of hate crime in the period 2020-2021 by the police as reported by the OSCE official page. Italy regularly reports to the ODHIR for hate crimes occurring on the territory. Now of the writing, there were no official data for the year 2022. The following categories: homicide, physical assault, damage to property, and threats can also be ascribed into the category of hate crime when including a bias like race, gender, disability, religion and sexual orientation. The OSCE recognises that hate crime can be hugely detrimental to the security of the individuals, communities and can pose a real threat

⁸³ <https://www.policymakermag.it/italia/politiche-2022-viaggio-nella-sterminata-galassia-dei-partitini-di-sinistra-chi-sono-e-quanti-sono/>.

2020	1111
2021	1445

The police recorded figure refers to the number of criminal offences, with one incident potentially involving several offences and one offence potentially involving more than one perpetrator. Data include both substantial crimes and crimes aggravated by a general penalty enhancement. The reported numbers include some cases of hate speech and discrimination. A further 41 hate speech offences committed online and handled by the Postal and Communications Police Service were not included here in this figure.⁸⁴

10. CONCLUSION

In the period 2020-2022, Italy has suffered-like the rest of the world, the effects of the SARS-COVID-19 pandemic. In the last year (2022) of the present report, the war in Ukraine has taken its toll. These two events that had repercussions globally, have also had an impact on Italy and the Italians. In addition to the already problematic sectors of the Italian society, especially on an economic and financial sector, the political class has not often been able to conquest the trust of the citizens with the result of a progressive polarisation of the society as a reflection of the divisions and parochial positions taken in politics. The high level of unemployment (endemic in the south of the country), the increasing presence of the social media with their platform and a misunderstood sense of ‘freedom of speech’ have generate conspiracy theories at the expenses of minorities like the Jewish community, but also anti-establishment movements led by radical political groups on the far-right and far-left alike that have further polarised the population specially in the second phase of the pandemic with popular revolts against the governmental measures to contain the spreading of the virus like the vaccine policy, the adoption of the ‘green pass’ and the obligation to wear face masks. The pandemic has generated a sense of uncertainty in the future, precariat of human life, and incremented fears of the ‘Other’. The psychological and social fragility that derived from the pandemic has

⁸⁴ <https://hatecrime.osce.org/italy>.

created the condition for far-right parties and movements to take advantage and thus exploit the fragility of the Italian electorate as the general election in September 2022 demonstrated. Unfortunately, there is an increase of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and, of racism. An element that emerged from researching for the present report, is the worryingly presence of pockets of Islamism in the country linked to the Iranian government and to the Muslim Brotherhood; on this topic, worrying is the link between Islamists and far-right groups as explained in the subsection.

The polarisation of the society has led to a further radicalisation of the populace that often, especially on the social media, professes hate crime, but also the increase of cases of vandalism and verbal racial and sexual harassment. The society appears more confused ill-grounded and therefore, pray to any form of extremism and radicalism.

11. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The final recommendations I may suggest at the end of this report focus on how to heal the Italian society from the sense of confusion and loosing directions that makes it easy for political parties and leaders to take advantage of such fragility. The electoral victory of the far-right coalition of the League, C'mon Italy, and Brothers of Italy is rather worrying. Already, after a few months in power, Giorgia Meloni's government is showing its true colours. Several laws regarding civil rights of migrants like visa, right to housing, and citizenship are being revised at the time of writing. The right to same-sex marriage and adoption of children by same-sex couples is also being revised and could be reversed. The new government is increasingly proposing a 'fascism for the third millennium' with historical revisionism of the Fascist period and the role of the Italian resistance in that time, and allowing openly expressions of hate speech against minorities or political opponents. Therefore, my suggestions would be that the many charities, NGOs, and left-leaning party should pay more attention, report and denounce such a political and moral derive of the country otherwise, when Italians will finally realise it, it will be too late to so anything to overturn the situation. Education in the school is fundamental in teaching the young generations the value of democracy, tolerance and acceptance of civil and human rights. If the education will fail as well, Italy is destined to follow countries like Poland and Hungary in this type of nationalism that does not lead anywhere. Another recommendation is that political left-leaning parties should do a deep work of restructuring

their core-ideology, their programmes, and approach to the electorate. The Italian centre-left party, the PD, has for many years lacked a strong leadership, and of a well-defined programme. This has generated disaffection in the electorate and has weakened the party's impact on Italian politics. Populism has become increasingly common and has strengthened the radical right with the electoral results that we have seen in September 2022. It is time that the PD regain its purpose and strength to save the country from a populist derive. And I sincerely hope that it will be able to succeed.