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The external dimension of Italian migration policy in the wider Mediterranean

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ABSTRACT

This article provides the first systematic and comprehensive analysis of the external dimension of Italy's migration policy (EXMIPO) in the broader Mediterranean, over the past three decades. Building on an original dataset spanning over 30 years and 125 instruments, it investigates how and to what extent Italy cooperated with countries of origin and transit in the management of migration flows. The article argues that the external dimension of Italy's migration policy is far richer than initially expected. From the immediate neighbourhood, Italy's EXMIPO has gradually extended well beyond its geographical borders. If initially, it relied on a strategy of issue-linkage between quotas and return agreements, this gradually faded away in favour of more informal tools. While governments' political ideology did not play a key role in defining the direction of Italy's EXMIPO tools, we find that the evolving dynamics of migratory flows, and the pursuit of flexible tools to promptly address rising numbers, were crucial aspects behind the country's external migration policy.

1. Introduction

Over the last twenty years, Italy has played an increasingly central role in the management of migration across the Mediterranean and to the European Union (EU). Due to its peculiar geographical position at the crossroads of the Mediterranean and as one of the EU's southern external borders, the country has emerged as a crucial hub for migratory flows.

In this context, migration has become not only an important domestic issue at the top of Italian political agendas (Fontana 2019; Geddes & Pettrachin, 2020; Longo, 2013; Rosina 2022; Urso 2018). It has also emerged

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

as a key challenge in terms of the country's foreign policy and bilateral external relations. Since the end of the 1990s, the involvement of third countries of origin and transit in the Mediterranean region has become a strategic tool for the management of migration at the Italian borders, with an expansion and diversification of cooperation patterns. Since the mid 2010s, such efforts have intensified, acquiring new domestic and international significance. Thus, Italy has gradually developed an *External* dimension of its Migration Policies (EX-MIPO), with actions aimed at managing migration at and beyond its physical borders, through cooperation with third countries.

Despite the relevance of this dimension, little attention has been paid to its analysis in the Italian case. In fact, most of the existing literature focuses on the analysis of the external dimension of EU migration policies (see among others, Carrera et al. 2018; Boswell, 2003; Carrera et al., 2015; Geddes, 2005; Longo & Fontana, 2022; Panebianco, 2022a; Reslow, 2017, 2019), overlooking the investigation of this dimension in the case of individual Member States (MS), Italy included, if not for a few exceptions (Cassarino, 2022, 2010; Zotti & Fassi, 2020; Panizzon, 2012, Fontana & Rosina 2024).

The neglect of MS' external migration policy is puzzling, given the burgeoning literature on the same topic at the EU level. While initial analyses expected that the EU would take a leading role in the Union's EXMIPO (Cassarino et al., 2023, p. 48; Weinar, 2011), recent examples ranging from the Spanish-Moroccan 'strategic partnership' on migration[1] to the migration protocol between Italy and Albania,[2] testify the continued relevance of MS' own external migration policies.

We contend that the lack of attention to the MS' level is a notable gap in the realm of Europe's external migration policies and that, for a deeper understanding of the latter, research extending to the national level is needed. In other words, we argue that the external dimension of migration policy is not an exclusive remit of the EU, but rather exists and proliferates at the national level too.

Thus, our article aims to enrich the academic debate on the external dimension of migration policies, by providing a thorough examination of Italy's EXMIPO in the wider Mediterranean. We do so by identifying, classifying, comparing, and analysing the many tools adopted by Italy with countries of origin and transit, and their temporal and geographical evolution. Specifically, the article poses the following questions: what tools characterize the external dimension of Italian migration policies? How have they changed across time, space and policy priorities, and why?

Theoretically, the article departs from a specific stream of the literature on EU external migration policies, namely the analysis of 'externalization instruments', and readapts it to the analysis of the MS. Specifically, Italy is selected as a case of a MS that has developed an extensive network of

EXMIPO (see Cassarino, 2022). Empirically, our study is based on an original dataset[3] encompassing Italy's agreements with 17 countries across the wider Mediterranean region, between 1990 and 2022, and including a total of 125 records.[4] The dataset represents a unique quantitative attempt to systematically and comprehensively identify and categorize the tools of the external dimension of Italy's migration policy. As such, it is crucial to enhance our understanding of the country's modes of cooperation, objectives, and regional partners.

The article demonstrates that the external dimension of Italy's migration policy in the wider Mediterranean has developed quantitatively and qualitatively across time and space. Through the adoption of ten different types of instruments, Italy's approach has mainly centred on the control of *irregular* migration, with a prioritization of partners according to the geography of flows. If, initially, the country relied on quotas as conditionalities for the conclusion of return agreements, it later favoured informal tools such as political dialogue and technical agreements. While governments' political ideology did not play a key role in defining the direction of Italy's EXMIPO tools, we find that the evolving geography of migratory flows, and governments' pursuit of flexible instruments to promptly address rising migration numbers, were crucial aspects behind the country's external migration policy.

The article is organized as follows. First, we theoretically explore the concept of the external dimension of migration policies, and review existing debates on Italy's external migration policy. Next, we identify the toolbox of Italy's EXMIPO and detail the methodology and sources. Finally, we outline the development of Italy's EXMIPO and discuss the empirical results, examining the evolution of Italy's EXMIPO in the wider Mediterranean across time, space, and policy priorities.

2. When migration policies 'go abroad': Theoretical debates

2.1. Shifting the focus from the EU to the member states in the study of externalisation

As the EU's migration management strategy expanded to include countries of origin and transit through a myriad of instruments, academic discourse evolved to incorporate terms such as 'externalization of migration policies', 'external governance', and 'remote control' (Balzacq, 2009, p. 2; Boswell, 2003; Geddes, 2009, Léonard 2010, quoted in; Longo & Fontana, 2022; Niemann & Zaun 2023; Panebianco, 2022a; Rijpma & Cremona, 2007; van Munster & Sterkx, 2006). This varied terminological landscape reflects the EU's efforts to manage migration through engagement with non-EU countries, leveraging foreign policy cooperation to enhance the effectiveness of migration policies and integrating policy realms traditionally seen as internal matters,

like immigration and asylum, into its external relations (Carrera et al. 2018; Carrera et al., 2015; Dimitriadi, 2016).

While there is an extensive amount of research on the EU's external dimension of migration policy (for a review see Longo & Fontana, 2022, Fontana & Rosina 2024), the application of this concept to the migration policies of the MS, including Italy, has not received the same level of scrutiny. This oversight is unexpected for at least three reasons.

To begin with, MS are integral to the development of the EU's external migration strategies, especially in the Mediterranean region. Though crafted outside the EU's sphere, bilateral agreements like the 2017 Italy-Libya Memorandum and the 2012 Spain-Morocco Deal highlight the relevance of national-level initiatives that have become key, and at times contentious, pillars of the EU's approach to managing migration in the Central and Western Mediterranean. Moreover, while 'EU Mobility Partnerships' have increasingly featured as an important element of the EU's overall migration strategy in the region (Abderrahim 2019; Panebianco & Cannata 2024; Seeberg 2017), the dimension of 'mobility' remains largely contingent upon MS' initiatives and capacity to offer legal migration opportunities, including bilateral labour agreements and quotas (Reslow 2019).

Second, despite the legal primacy of EU readmission agreements over those made by individual Member States with the same third countries, the latter are more numerous. For instance, while the EU has not yet managed to conclude readmission agreements with North African countries, MS have concluded several agreements in this sense (e.g., Italy's agreements with Tunisia and Morocco; Germany's readmission deals with Algeria and Morocco; Spain-Morocco Readmission Agreement etc.). This trend is not solely due to the preference of origin countries for bilateral cooperation outside the EU's scope (ECA, 2021). It also stems from the fact that MS had established bilateral cooperation on migration well before the external dimension of EU migration policies was formalized by the Tampere European Council in 1999. Since the early 1990s, there has been a significant increase in such bilateral treaties outside the EU framework (Cassarino, 2010), linking migration and foreign policy goals to address the shortcomings of unilateral action.

Third, the external dimension of migration policies is linked to the concept of 'migration diplomacy'. Migration diplomacy encompasses both the ways in which states leverage migration for other goals (e.g., for more funding), and how they employ other policies to secure agreements on migration issues (e.g., through issue-linkage strategies) (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2018). As academic debates on the topic almost quintupled from 2011 to 2019 (Rosina, 2024), exploring the tools of the external dimension of MS' migration policies can contribute to a deeper understanding of European migration

diplomacy, by shedding light on the often-hidden means by which such diplomacy is conducted.

Surprisingly, despite its importance, the external dimension of migration policies at the MS level has seen limited research. Panizzon (2012) investigates bilateral readmission agreements and the inherent authority distribution between the EU and MS. Cassarino (2010) explores the factors behind bilateral readmission collaborations, noting a preference for such agreements among neighbouring countries, particularly when migration is not politicized in the origin country, and the destination country provides sufficient incentives. However, these studies concentrate solely on readmission agreements, leaving the variety of bilateral instruments used in MS external migration policy – their EXMIPO 'policy toolbox' (Longo & Fontana, 2022) – underexplored.

Hence, this article aims to investigate the external dimension of migration policies in the Mediterranean looking at the MS and employing a policy instrument perspective.

Our analysis builds on the strand of the scholarship on EU external migration policies that focuses on 'externalization instruments', namely the broad array of tools the EU employs to engage third countries in its migration policy goals. Scholars identify bilateral and multilateral migration dialogues, visa facilitation measures, mobility partnerships, readmission agreements, EASO and FRONTEX operational protocols among the key instruments of EU EXMIPO (Carrera et al., 2015; Czaika et al., 2023; Longo & Fontana, 2022; Reslow, 2017; Trauner & Wolff, 2014). Their aim is varied, and can include controlling migration (through measures on irregular migration, smuggling, returns, border surveillance etc.), mitigating its underlying causes, or promoting legal pathways (Carrera et al., 2018; Chou & Meng-Hsuan Chou, 2009; Eisele, 2016; Meng-Hsuan Boswell, 2003). The nature of these instruments can vary too, spanning the legal spectrum (like formal agreements), the political arena (including statements and memorandums), and operational activities (such as joint technical cooperation ventures) (Carrera et al., 2015). While many of these instruments (such as return agreements) are designed in collaboration with external partners, others are developed internally without direct third-country collaboration, but still have a significant external impact (ibid.). Examples include the designation of 'safe countries of origin' or the inclusion of nations in the Schengen visa waiver list.

Readapting this literature to the study of Italy, in this article we analyse the tools of Italian EXMIPO in the wider Mediterranean. Before delving into Italy's EXMIPO instruments, however, it is necessary to discuss the crucial role of the region in Italy's external relations.

2.2. Italian EXMIPO between migration and foreign policy

The Mediterranean region holds unique significance for Italy's foreign policy. Indeed, the country's foreign policy has traditionally been interpreted through the metaphor of the 'three circles' (Casola & Baldaro, 2021; Cristiani, 2021; Felsen, 2018), as resting on the three pillars of Atlanticism, Europeanism, and the Mediterranean. If Atlanticism reflects Italy's prioritization of interdependence with the USA and NATO, Europeanism encompasses cooperation and integration with European countries and the EU. The Mediterranean, meanwhile, stands as the third pivotal pillar of Italy's foreign policy, representing a region often regarded as the country's 'geographic backyard', where Italy enjoys strategic autonomy (Casola & Baldaro, 2021, p. 8).

The concept of the third circle has expanded in recent years to include the *wider* Mediterranean, as a geographical area that extends far beyond the physical basin of the sea, going East towards the Middle East and Asia, and south towards the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa (Campelli & Gomel 2022; Di Cecco 2002). Traditionally, Africa (except for the Maghreb countries) has played a marginal role in Italy's foreign policy, as exemplified by the fact that no Italian prime minister visited Sub-Saharan Africa in the 29 years between 1985 and 2014 (Casola & Baldaro, 2021, p. 9). Yet, since the early-to-mid 2010s we have seen a 'strategic *re*-orientation' of Italy's foreign policy towards the Sahel, driven by the numerous security crises in the region – from insurgencies to terrorism – and their expected impact on migratory flows to Europe (Casola & Baldaro, 2021, pp. 6, 9, 20; Ceccorulli & Coticchia, 2020; Coticchia & Mazziotti di Celso, 2024; Strazzari & Grandi, 2019). The shift in Italy's priorities is such, that some authors speak today of the Enlarged Mediterranean as replacing the traditional Mediterranean circle with a 'third circle and a half' (Casola & Baldaro, 2021, p. 9; Cristiani, 2021). Despite the relevance of the region, academic attention to Italy's overall migration policy in the area is still limited.

The scant existing literature on Italy's EXMIPO highlights that, since 2015, governments increasingly addressed migration as a matter of external affairs (Casola & Baldaro, 2021; DiFilippo & Palm, 2018, Felsen 2018; Strazzari & Grandi, 2019; Zotti & Fassi, 2020). Scholars highlight the role of key ministers – first of whom, Marco Minniti – in making Italy a 'champion' and a leading actor in the EU's externalization efforts (DiFilippo & Palm, 2018, p. 66; 86; Zotti & Fassi, 2020, p. 108), as illustrated by Italy's role in the negotiation of migration agreements with Libya in 2017 and with Tunisia (on the EU's behalf) in 2023. They also point to the gradual transformation of the role of interior ministers, which have gradually assumed responsibilities that were traditionally in the hands of foreign affairs ministers (first of which, EXMIPO

itself) (Strazzari & Grandi, 2019; Zotti & Fassi, 2020, p. 105). Finally, a few studies debate the extent to which Italian EXMIPO is characterized by (dis) continuities across governments of different political orientation (Abbondanza, 2017, 2024; Cetin, 2015).

While these studies shed important light into Italy's external migration policy, they leave many questions too, particularly on the tools, partners and policy areas prioritized by Italian EXMIPO. Moreover, while they delineate general trends in Italian external migration policies, a systematic and comprehensive study of Italy's EXMIPO in the Wider Mediterranean is, to our knowledge, still missing. This is precisely what this study sets out to do, by adopting a policy tool approach. In the next pages, we therefore conduct a systematic analysis of Italy's EXMIPO instruments from 1990 to 2022, to shed important light on the tools employed by the country, and their evolution through time, space, and policy priorities.

2.3. The tools of Italy's EXMIPO

To unpack Italy's EXMIPO, this article takes a 'policy tool' approach. Understanding policy tools as the 'techniques through which governments [...] implement policy options' and achieve policy goals (Capano & Howlett 2020), we start from the premise that policy instruments are tangible indicators of external migration policies. As such, they can enhance our understanding of countries' EXMIPO, and capture any changes in its scope and magnitude.

To understand and identify the many instruments that that make up Italy's EXMIPO, we build and expand on the typology developed by Fontana and Rosina (2024). The authors start from the literature on EU EXMIPO instruments (Longo & Fontana, 2022) to identify a set of tools that make up *member states'* EXMIPO toolbox (Table 1).

Table 1. Italy's EXMIPO: Main tools.

EU EXMIPO tools	Italy's EXMIPO tools
EU Readmission Agreements	Readmission Agreements (1)
Political Dialogue	Political dialogue (2)
Migration issues in CSDP Operations	Military Missions (3)
Visa Facilitation Agreements; Mobility Partnerships	Quotas (4); Agreements on Labour Migration and Circular Mobility (5)
Regional Protection Programs	Humanitarian corridors (6)
EASO Arrangements	Extraterritorial processing of Asylum (7)
Frontex Arrangements	Technical & Operational Agreements (TOAs) (8)
Migration Bilateral Agreements	Migration-specific agreements (9)
Migration clauses in broader agreements	Migration clauses in broader bilateral agreements (10)

Source: Authors' elaboration. EU EXMIPO tools are adapted from Longo & Fontana (2022), Italy's EXMIPO tools are adapted from Fontana & Rosina (2024).

First, the typology includes those categories of EU tools that might have an equivalent at bilateral level. This includes: Readmission Agreements (RAs) (1) – which are a crucial element of any external migration policy (Cassarino, 2010; Panizzon, 2012); political dialogue (2) – understood as the political and diplomatic exchanges or high-level meetings that cover migratory issues on their agenda; and military missions (3) – namely MS' missions in which migration plays a role.

Secondly, the categorization considers instruments that are typically associated with the EU, but might indicate similar tools at the MS level. This includes EU Visa Facilitation Agreements, Mobility Partnerships, EU Protection Programs and EASO Arrangements. This led the authors to explore bilateral tools that facilitate legal mobility and legal protection pathways, including: quotas (4), labour migration agreements (5), humanitarian corridors (6) and extraterritorial processing of asylum (7).[5] Quotas are limits set by MS on the annual number of migrants, primarily to control labour migration based on domestic market needs (EMN, 2014). They may be part of bilateral agreements or set unilaterally, influencing external migration strategies and possibly motivating further agreements. Labour migration and circular mobility agreements deal with labour market access, including seasonal or circular mobility, and partnerships for graduates and professionals, aligning with job market demands. Finally, humanitarian corridors provide safe, legal transfer and integration of vulnerable refugees. Though typically not bilateral and involving multiple national and international actors, they are crucial for cooperation with countries of origin and transit. Extraterritorial processing of asylum involves a variety of practices through which applications for international protection are examined and processed in third countries, outside the MS' external borders (European Parliament 2024).

Finally, the typology also includes Technical and Operational Agreements (TOAs) (8); Migration-Specific Agreements (9) and Migration Clauses in Broader Bilateral Agreements (10). TOAs are protocols and memoranda emphasizing technical cooperation, such as capacity building, training, and equipment provision, particularly in border management and police cooperation. Migration-Specific Agreements refer to agreements focusing exclusively on migration, but extending beyond the scope of technical, readmission, and labour agreements, while integrating several aspects. Examples include Framework Agreements for cooperation on migration issues, Memoranda of Understanding on migration, Joint declaration on migration etc.[6] Migration Clauses in Broader Bilateral Agreements refer to agreements that, despite their varied objectives, incorporate migration cooperation aspects, like Treaties of Friendship, Strategic Partnerships, and cultural or scientific agreements.

Although these tools vary, they often exhibit similarities in their contents and form. Content pertains to the specific policy area targeted

by the tool, ranging from regular or irregular migration, trafficking, asylum etc. As for form, EXMIPO tools can be either formal or informal, depending on: the type of output (such as declarations or memorandums, as opposed to formal treaties), the procedures followed (such as political dialogues that circumvent traditional parliamentary or treaty-making processes), the entities involved (agencies as opposed to formal diplomats), and their binding or non-binding status (see Cardwell & Dickson, 2023; Ott 2021; Pauwelyn 2012).

Moving from this typology, in the empirical section we combine this 'toolbox dimension' with the 'geographical dimension' to understand the distribution of Italy's different tools in the wider Mediterranean. Moreover, we explore the quantity and contents of tools, as well as their evolution through time and policy priorities.

3. Methodology: Mapping the Italian EXMIPO

Considering the limited research on Italy's EXMIPO, the initial phase of the research entailed tracing its development through a qualitative examination of primary and secondary sources. For this purpose, we conducted a thorough review of all Italian immigration legislation and pertinent secondary materials, to pinpoint notable agreements and trends.

The second step involved mapping the actual instruments of Italy's EXMIPO. The team[7] conducted extensive research to identify all the tools of migration-cooperation between Italy and 17 partner countries, with country selection based on an effort to cover a variety of sub-regions within the Wider Mediterranean: North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia), sub-Saharan Africa (Ivory Coast, Niger, Nigeria), Eastern Europe (Albania, Moldavia), Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey), and South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan). For each country, we took stock of the many memoranda, treaties, agreements, protocols, and exchange of letters that made up Italy's EXMIPO between 1990 and 2022. We selected 1990 as the starting point for the analysis, as that is when the Martelli Law, Italy's first law to extensively address migration, was adopted. Although the data collection covered 17 countries, for Afghanistan, no tools were found.

Finally, we built a dataset of Italy's external migration tools. To that end, the text of all the instruments and agreements identified was analysed and classified according to the ten elements of our toolbox. Each entry was also categorized by year, country, region, instrument type, main objective, and focus area.

Having created the dataset, the final step involved running descriptive statistical analysis on the data entries, to identify trends through

time and space. We also turned the dataset into a map, for easy consultation and visual communication.[8] Of note, the focus of the analysis is on the EXMIPO instruments as they were adopted. As such, we do not delve into the political discourse surrounding the tools, or their implementation.

4. The external dimension of Italy's migration policies in the wider Mediterranean

4.1. Context

Italy is strategically positioned at the crossroads of the Mediterranean Sea. From 2000 to 2023, the country received almost 900,000 asylum requests, ranking as the third EU MS for asylum applications, following Germany and France.[9] Additionally, between 2014 and 2023, over 1.2 million people disembarked in Italy, having travelled via the various routes of the wider Mediterranean. This represents 38 per cent of the overall arrivals to the EU, second only to Greece.[10] The wider Mediterranean is a region where many global political, economic, social, and environmental challenges get closely intertwined (Panebianco 2022b), and in the last two decades it has become a crossroad of migratory flows due to a convoluted combination of structural and contingent factors.

Since the late 1990s and 2000s, instability in the Balkans, in Iraq, Liberia, Afghanistan and North Africa contributed to significant flows of people attempting to take the route to Italy. While the year 2008 suggested that the phenomenon was already set to increase, it was following the 'Arab Spring' uprisings and particularly the Libyan and Syrian civil conflicts, that arrivals to Italy via the Mediterranean Sea recorded dramatically rising trends (Figure 1). Since 2017, figures have fallen steeply, but numbers continued to remain significant, especially if compared with the early 2000s. Asylum requests followed a similar trend, pointing to the mixed nature of the flows. The COVID-19 pandemic did not stop arrivals, and rather amplified existing structural economic, social, and political problems across the region. Indeed, 2020 and 2021 recorded much higher numbers than the pre-pandemic period. The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan in 2021 and the war in Ukraine in 2022[11] further contributed to increasing both arrivals and asylum applications.

In this context, cooperation with third countries of origin and transit emerged as a key priority for Italy, with migration policy increasingly becoming a missing link between domestic and international agendas. While the nexus between Italy's migration and foreign policies was crucially put under the spotlight after 2015, to understand the country's commitment to
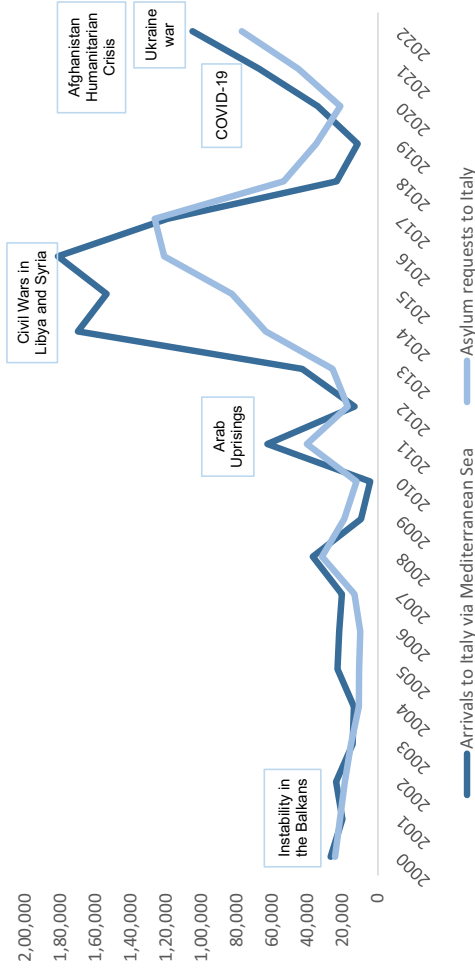
Figure 1. Arrivals via the Mediterranean and asylum applications to Italy, 2000–2022. Source: Authors' elaboration on: Open Polis, UNHCR, Quaderno Statistico anni 1990–2017 and Eurostat

migration collaboration with partners in the broader Mediterranean, we need to go back to the late 1990s.

4.2. Political priorities and development: EXMIPO as a cross-party issue

Just like the 1990s saw the initial development of Italy's internal migration policy through the Martelli Law, the external dimension of migration policy was then yet in its infant stages. By the late 1990s, however, cooperation with third countries had emerged as a key pillar of the Italian migration management approach.

In 1998, for the first-time, the Turco-Napolitano Law officially heralded international cooperation as a key element to manage both regular and irregular migration. The Interior and Foreign Affairs Ministries would oversee the conclusion of agreements with countries of origin to 'accelerate' return procedures for irregular migrants. At the same time, the law established the setting of annual 'entry quotas' for seasonal or employed work, some of which to be 'primarily reserved' for those countries that had 'concluded agreements aimed at regulating entry flows and readmission'. The conditional link between the prevention of irregular migration and the provision of legal mobility channels was further strengthened with the 2002 Bossi-Fini Law, which established that: 'while setting entry quotas, numerical restrictions [may apply] to the entry of workers from states that are not adequately cooperating in the fight against irregular migration or in the readmission of their own citizens'.

The late 1990s and the early 2000s were a period of intense migration diplomacy – with Albania first, North Africa then. Overall, between 1998 and 2010, Italy signed readmission agreements with eight partner countries. At the same time, the so-called Flows Decree ('Decreti Flussi')[12] offered preferential treatment in terms of entry quotas to citizens of the countries 'that had signed cooperation agreements on migration'.

Thus, in the early stages of Italy's EXMIPO, the legislator put emphasis on an issue-linkage strategy whereby quotas were meant as incentives for return agreements. As we will see in later sections (section 5.1.2), this was to represent a key pillar of Italy's EXMIPO in the 1990s-2000s.

Moreover, the focus on collaboration with third countries was a key aspect *across* the political spectrum: Not only was the Turco-Napolitano law introduced by a centre-left coalition government (Cetin, 2015, p. 381), but the same government also negotiated multiple migration-related agreements with Albania, to stem the flow of migrants from the country in the 1990s (see section 5.2 too).

The salience of migration as a foreign policy matter further intensified following the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia and the spread of the Arab Spring protests in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011. Dialogue was relaunched with Tunisia, for the conclusion of a new memorandum with the new Tunisian transition government in April 2011. In 2012, the Tripoli Declaration set the basis for political dialogue with the Libyan Interior Ministry to guarantee the implementation of the 2008 agreement, and in the same year a technical agreement on search and rescue (SAR) operations was concluded with Algeria.

It was however in the years of the so-called 'migration crisis' that Italy's EXMIPO efforts saw notable developments.

In 2015, for the first time, humanitarian corridors were established. Protocols were signed setting up a mechanism for the safe and legal mobility of people in need of international protection from a country of first asylum to Italy (Caritas 2019). Widely praised as a 'good practice' in Italy's migration management toolbox (European Commission, 2020), humanitarian corridors currently operate with Lebanon, Libya, Niger, Iran and Pakistan (as well as Ethiopia and Jordan), and have so far enabled the resettlement of 4,000 people.[13]

By 2016, EXMIPO was presented as a cornerstone of Matteo Renzi's centre-left coalition government. In his proposal for a 'Migration Compact'[14] for the EU, he heralded external cooperation on migration as a crucial strategy that should involve countries of origin and transit at different levels: border protection and security, development of legal migration opportunities, and resettlement.

The following centre-left cabinet led by Paolo Gentiloni and its Interior Ministry Marco Minniti continued and intensified such a 'foreign immigration policy' approach (Zotti & Fassi, 2020). Above all, the government launched new negotiations with President Fayez al-Sarraj for a new agreement with the Libyan Government of National Accord, which led to the controversial Memorandum of Understanding of 2017 (for a discussion of the criticalities of the Memorandum, see Vari, 2020). The government also held various meetings with the Interior Ministers of Niger and Chad, and introduced a '3 Ps' approach, centred on Partnerships with countries of origin and transit, Protection of vulnerable refugees and migrants, and Prosperity through investments in Africa.[15] In 2017, the government established the 'Africa Fund' (*Fondo Africa*) to 'relaunch dialogue and cooperation with African countries of primary importance for migratory routes' (Law 11 December 2016, n. 232, art. 1, c. 621). With a budget of €226 million in 2017–2019, the Fund supported development cooperation projects, but also voluntary returns, information campaigns, training, and equipment transfers (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020, p. 25; Decreto 'Fondo per l'Africa' 200/2017).

The following governments led by Giuseppe Conte (2018–2019 and 2019–2021), supported by the populist Five Star Movement in coalition with the populist radical right League first, and centre-left Democratic Party then, continued to emphasize the external dimension of Italy's migration policy. Although the first Conte cabinet presented itself as 'the government of change', it mostly continued Minniti's 'foreign immigration policy' approach, including in its relations with Libya (Ceccorulli et al., 2023; Zotti & Fassi, 2020, p. 100). The two Security Decrees by Interior Minister Matteo Salvini placed significant attention on the *internal* dimension (for instance, by eliminating permits for humanitarian protection). Yet, they also introduced a new fund to reward countries well-collaborating on returns (see Decreto Legge 14 June 2019, n.53, art.12) and, in the following year, the government expanded the focus of the Africa Fund to non-African countries (Law 160/2019: art.1, c.878).[16]

More recently, Mario Draghi's technocratic government in 2021 maintained and escalated cooperation with third countries, particularly with Libya and Niger, while also intensifying work on humanitarian corridors, with new protocols signed with Iran, Libya, and Pakistan.

Finally, the external dimension of migration policies has stood as a key pillar in Giorgia Meloni's right-wing government (elected in October 2022). In early 2023, Meloni played an important role in facilitating the controversial EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding.[17] Only a few months later, in November 2023, she announced a new agreement with Albania, to set up two migration centres in the partner country for the off-shoring of asylum procedures.[18] Meloni's cabinet also launched the 'Mattei Plan', a €5.5 billion Italy-Africa cooperation framework, largely seen as aimed at addressing both energy security and the root causes of migration (Coticchia & Mazziotti di Celso, 2024; Fattibene & Manservisi, 2024). Finally, the government expanded existing quotas beyond traditional cooperation on readmission, introducing new schemes that reserve some of the entry permits to nationals of states who engage in information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration (Decreto-Legge 10 March 2023, n.20, art.1), thus underscoring the crucial role of EXMIPO for the current administration.

Overall, two considerations deserve attention. The first is that, since its inception in the late 1990s, the external dimension of migration has been a consistent policy priority for both left- and right-wing governments in Italy. The analysis highlights a pattern of bipartisanship in Italy's foreign migration policy (Abbondanza 2024), indicating a significant degree of continuity that transcends the political orientation of governing cabinets. It aligns with previous studies (Ceccorulli et al., 2023; Cetin, 2015; Strazzari & Grandi, 2019; Zotti & Fassi, 2020), suggesting that administrations on both sides of the political spectrum in Italy adopted similar approaches to external migration policies, including with partners of questionable human rights records.

Electoral concerns seem to have played a key role in driving such dynamics, particularly since the mid-2010s, as shown by the fact that in 2017, two thirds (66 per cent) of Italians believed that border security and migration controls should be the top priority of Italian foreign policy (DiFilippo & Palm, 2018, p. 67).

Beyond the continuities in Italy's EXMIPO approach, a second notable aspect emerges: the use of conditionalities to encourage third countries to cooperate. This has been developed through both positive and negative incentives, primarily in the form of reserved quotas, and is the subject of the next few pages (see section 5.1.2).

5. Results and analysis

5.1. Italy's EXMIPO through time

5.1.1. Types of instruments . . .

Having discussed the emergence and evolution of Italy's EXMIPO through its migration laws, we now explore its specific instruments. We find that the toolbox of the external dimension of Italy's migration policy comprises all the elements identified in Fontana and Rosina (2024)'s framework.[19]

Overall, between 1990 and 2022, Italy developed a total of 125 instruments with the 17 countries under consideration (Figure 2; Appendix 1). In line with the document analysis conducted above, the review of the dataset reveals that Italy's EXMIPO began taking shape in the late 1990s, with 12 instruments being adopted in 1997–1999. The core of the strategy was then developed in the 2000s, when 51 EXMIPO tools were launched (including 12 in 2000 alone). In the 2010s, 44 tools were then introduced.

Throughout the period (1990–2022), we find a clear predominance of political dialogue and technical and operational agreements, which accounted respectively for 26 per cent and 18 per cent of tools (Figure 3). While the popularity of the former is not surprising, as they are a key tool to boost bilateral relations in preparation for return or other agreements, the latter interestingly mainly target Italy's immediate neighbourhood. Political dialogues and TOAs are followed in relevance by migratory aspects in broader bilateral agreements (17 per cent of cases), linking migration to other policy areas – first of which terrorism, crime and drug trafficking. Work and legal mobility agreements were the fourth most common type of tool, making up 10 per cent of cases in 1990–2022. Humanitarian corridors, while only recently introduced, have assumed key relevance, representing 12.5 per cent of all new instruments launched since 2015. Quotas and RAs made up 9 per cent of overall agreements each, and Italy launched two military missions in which migration played a role (with the latest example being the MISIN mission in Niger, meant to 'counter illegal traffics and
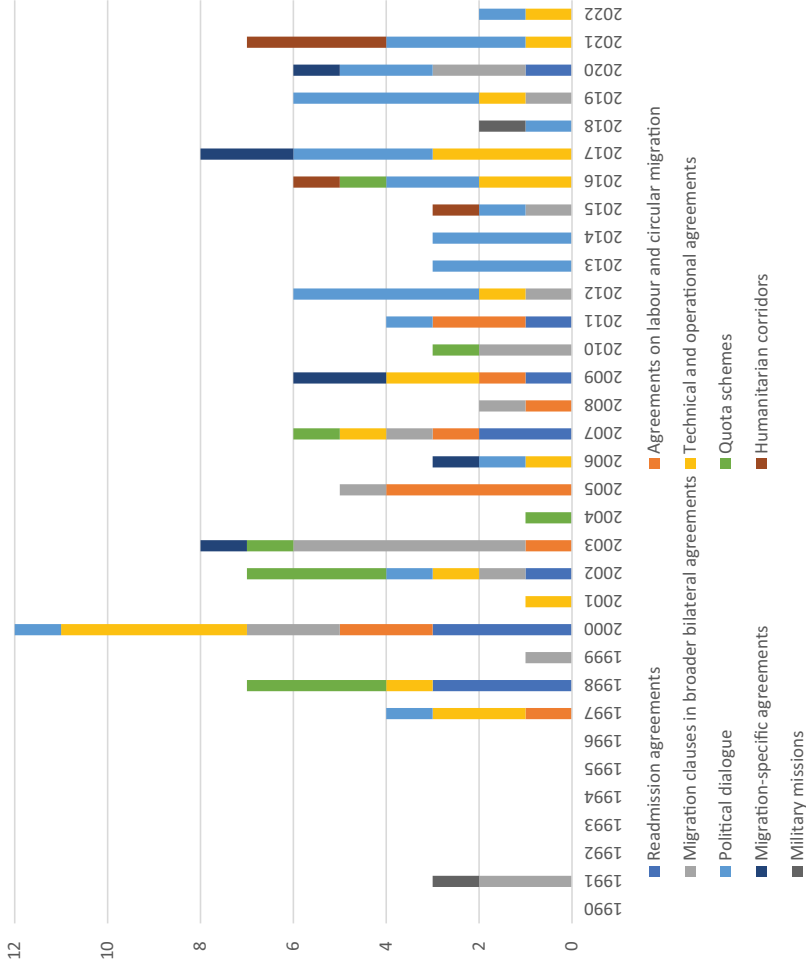
Figure 2. Number of agreements by type and year, 1990–2022. Source: Authors' elaboration.
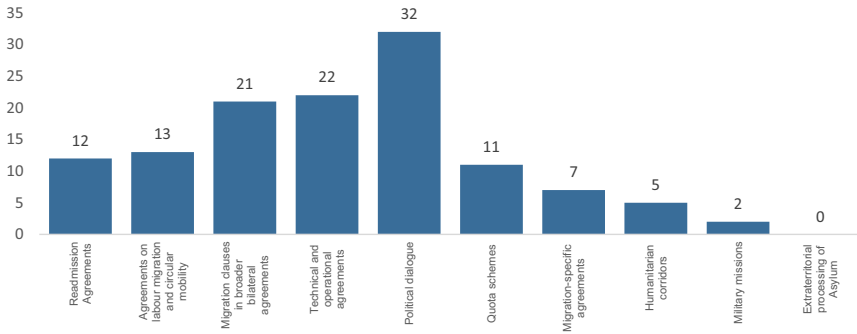
Figure 3. Number of tools by type, 1990–2022. Source: Authors' elaboration

security threats', including irregular migration).[20] Finally, instruments fore-seeing the off-shoring of asylum processing were introduced for the first time in 2023, through the Italy-Albania Protocol. While this is not captured in our dataset (which ends in 2022), the Protocol represents a crucial policy innovation, being the first of its type in Italy and the EU.

5.1.2. ... from conditionality ...

As above-mentioned, the late 1990s and early 2000s represent the first period in Italy's external migration policy. These were years of intense activity for the development and diversification of the country's EXMIPO, with the introduction of instruments including technical and operational agreements, political dialogue, entry quotas, labour migration agreements, and return agreements.

Return and readmission agreements (RAs) were indeed among the first elements of Italy's EXMIPO. First introduced by the Turco-Napolitano Law in

Table 2. Italy's readmission agreements and quota schemes.

Country	Readmission agreement	Entry quotas
Afghanistan	/	/
Albania	1998	1998
Algeria	2000	2007
Bangladesh	/	2003
Ivory coast	2020	2016
Egypt	2007	2002
Iran	/	/
Iraq	/	/
Lebanon	/	/
Libya	/	/
Morocco	1998	1998
Moldova	2002, 2007	2002
Niger	/	2010
Nigeria	2000	2002
Pakistan	2000	2004
Tunisia	1998, 2009, 2011, 2020	1998
Turkey	/	/

Source: Authors' elaboration.

1998, a first round of RAs was signed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with a second wave soon following in the mid-2000s (Table 2).

Importantly, the RAs signed in the late 1990s and early 2000s were often accompanied by agreements on annual quotas, through an issue-linkage strategy. On one hand, quotas were used as *positive* conditionalities: as incentives or rewards, to encourage cooperation on return and readmission. Several 'Decreto Flussi' (e.g., 2003) explicitly linked quotas to progress in return cooperation. As an example, in 1998, up to 1,500 entry permits were reserved for Moroccan and Tunisian citizens, '*taking into account* the previously established bilateral agreements' (emphasis added). The timeline of quotas and return agreements also reveals significant parallelisms (Table 2). Notably, for Albania, Morocco, Tunisia and Moldova, the introduction of annual entry quotas took place in the very same year an RA was signed. To Nigeria and Pakistan, Italy offered quotas as a *delayed reward*, typically two to four years after signing a return agreement,[21] while to Egypt and the Ivory Coast, entry quotas were provided first, potentially as *incentives* to facilitate dialogue and secure cooperation.

On the other hand, quotas were used as a form of *negative* conditionality, with Italy withdrawing reserved entries in cases of insufficient cooperation. This is exemplified by the situation with Bangladesh. Despite bilateral negotiations for a migration agreement dating back to 1994 (Cassarino, 2005, p. 17), no formal agreement was ever established. Diplomatic and consular cooperation to ease return procedures (outside of a formal agreement) was initiated in the early 2000s,[22] and from 2003 to 2012 Bangladesh was reserved entry quotas for seasonal and employed work. However, starting in 2013, the country was no longer included in the preferential lists for entry quotas. This exclusion was likely due to the prolonged inability to finalize a RA and establish 'a program of returns with the country'.[23] Interestingly, Bangladesh was reinstated in 2020, three years after the signature of informal Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for return with the EU.

Thus, the analysis reveals that conditionalities were a key aspect in Italy's EXMIPO in the late 1990s and early 2000s, not only in legislative objectives (through the Turco-Napolitano and Bossi-Fini laws discussed in section 4.2) but in practice too. Quotas were used as an incentive for the conclusion of RAs with third countries, and as part of an issue-linkage strategy to secure stronger migration cooperation. Notably, since 2010, Italy has established very few new quota schemes, and reduced the number of permits available under the existing ones.[24] This may be behind the country's inability to secure further RAs, by failing to provide opportunities for legal migration. In this context, it is interesting that, as seen above, Meloni's cabinet has more recently returned to the idea of employing quotas as conditionalities – this time, for information campaigns.

5.1.3. . . . to informality

The tools employed by Italy drastically changed in the mid-2010s. Since then, we see a decline in return agreements and quota schemes, and an increase in political dialogue and in technical and operational agreements to promote capacity-building, training, and police cooperation. The trend underscores the growing *informalisation* of Italy's EXMIPO, with two thirds (66 per cent) of tools adopted since 2010 being either TOAs or political dialogue, and hence 'informal'.

The slowdown in formal agreements might seem surprising, considering the rising migration flows to Italy and Europe. Several factors however contributed to the decrease in new, formal instruments.

First, Italy established its EXMIPO during the late 1990s and early 2000s, leading to the intense development and most tool diversification occurring until the early 2010s. After this period of rapid expansion, the rate of creating new RAs and other formal agreements naturally tapered off.

Second, the development of the EU's own EXMIPO since the 2000s might have contributed to limiting the need for MS' actions. This is exemplified by the EU's conclusion of readmission agreements with 18 partner countries,[25] which made the ratification of similar agreements at the MS level redundant. Yet, research shows that MS' EXMIPO is still active, 'alongside and despite EU initiatives', and that the EU and its MS engage in a variety of ways on their EXMIPO, often complementing one another (Fontana & Rosina 2024). As above-mentioned, in the case of return agreements with Bangladesh, an interplay emerged between EU efforts to secure such agreement, and Italy's decision to grant reserved quotas to the country. Thus, while the development of EU-EXMIPO may have lowered the need for MS' actions, it did not erase it completely.

Third, while the urgency to collaborate on migration issues increased after the Arab Spring, the lack of stable counterparts in countries like post-2011 Libya and the political unrest in Tunisia immediately after President Ben Ali's fall restricted immediate opportunities for cooperation. In an atmosphere of political uncertainty and pressing need to manage immediate migration flows, political dialogue was intensified to reinvigorate bilateral relations with countries where new political actors were emerging (e.g., Tunisia, Libya, Egypt) and to ensure migration remained a priority in diplomatic discussions.

Finally, informal tools such as political dialogue and technical and operational agreements enabled governments to respond more rapidly to migratory flows, often bypassing parliamentary scrutiny in the process. The 2017 Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding is a case in point of a tool that, being adopted in the form of a memorandum (rather than an international treaty) sidestepped the full legislative process and parliamentary ratification, raising concerns about accountability and transparency (see ASGI, 2018).

Overall, the above supports the literature's finding of a growing informalisation of Europe's EXMIPO (Slagter, 2019; Cardwell & Dickson, 2023, Fontana & Rosina 2024). It proves that this did not only materialize at the EU level but at the national level too, to overcome difficulties in securing formal agreements and bypass parliamentary scrutiny.

5.2. Italy's EXMIPO across space: Floating through migration routes

After tracing the evolution of Italy's EXMIPO tools over time, our focus now shifts to the analysis of the partner countries that received priority. Our dataset reveals that Italy's external migration policy was highly reactive to the shifting geographies of migratory flows, with a prioritization of the immediate neighbourhood and of the countries along direct migratory routes to Italy.

During the 1990s, as migration from Albania increased, Italy directed its cooperation efforts towards Eastern Europe, and Tirana in particular (Figure 5; Appendix 1). This period witnessed substantial migration from Albania to Italy, catalysed by the collapse of the communist regime and the 'Pyramid crisis'. In 1999, almost 50,000 Albanians were recorded as landing in Italy (Chalof, 2008, p. 37). In response, Rome and Tirana forged cooperation agreements encompassing police exchanges, repatriations, legal migration channels, joint patrols and search and rescue operations. Overall, in 1990–2022, 16 EXMIPO instruments were established between the two countries, with two-thirds of these having been launched during the peak migration period of 1997–2002 (Figure 4; Appendix 1).

Since the early 2000s, as migration from North Africa gradually increased, the region has emerged as a pivotal partner for Italy's EXMIPO (Figure 5). Notably, five out of the top six countries in terms of the number of EXMIPO agreements are situated in North Africa (Figure 4). Over the period of 1990–2022, Italy developed 60 instruments with countries in the region, including 18 with Libya and 15 with
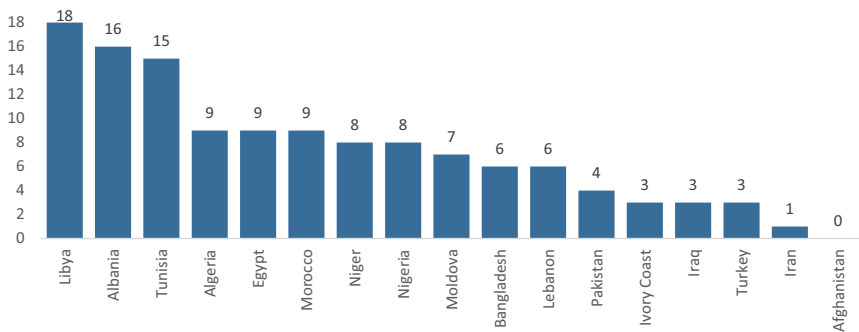

Figure 4. Number of agreements by country, 1990–2022. Source: Authors'elaboration.
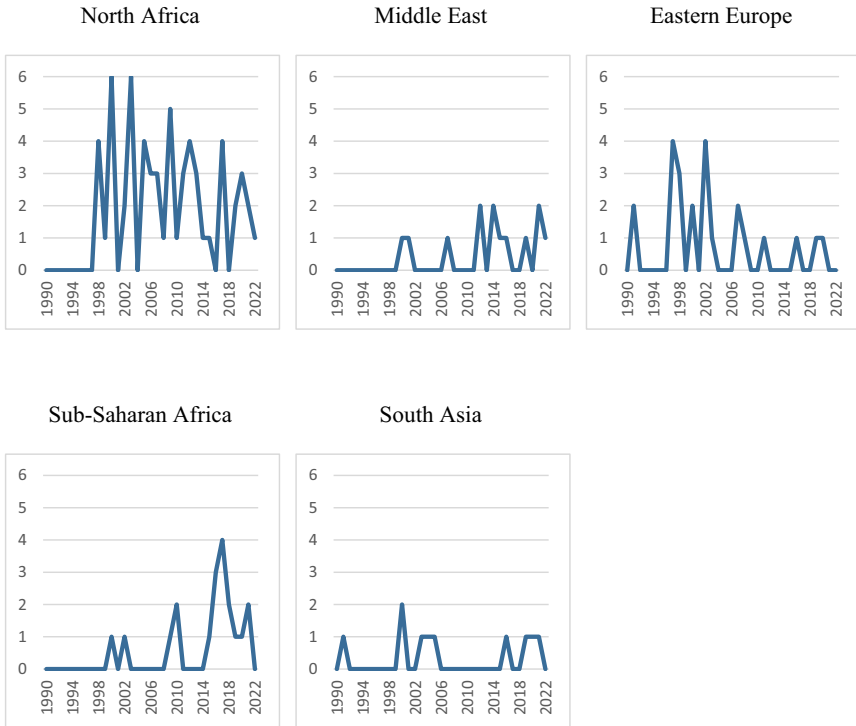
Figure 5. EXMIPO instruments by region and year, 1990–2022. Source: Authors' elaboration.

Tunisia. Significantly, Italy's cooperation with Libya and Tunisia has persisted throughout the pre- and post-Arab Spring periods, underscoring the enduring importance of these partnership regardless of regime changes (and human rights' record).

In the mid-to-late 2010s, the focus of Italy's EXMPO shifted again, moving further South to include sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel region, with a particular emphasis on Niger as a key transit country (Figure 5; Appendix 1). If in 1990–2009, Italy established no EXMIPO tool with Niger, in 2010–2021 it introduced 8 new instruments, ranging from a technical agreement on migration, border controls and returns, to the MISIN military mission. The trend is evident when examining development cooperation too, with migration-related projects passing from representing 1 per cent of overall funds allocated by Italy to Niger in 2000–2010, to 60 per cent in 2011–2023 (authors' calculation based on AICS, 2024 and Italian Senate, 2001-2019). Beyond Niger, Italy established EXMIPO tools with other sub-Saharan African countries, including Nigeria, which was the first country of origin for arrivals in 2016,[26] and with whom a new agreement to manage returns was signed in 2017.

On the flipside, migration collaboration with countries in the Middle East and South Asia has been relatively limited (Figure 5). Excluding instances of political dialogue, Italy only adopted 1 agreement with Iran (to evacuate Afghan refugees), 2 with Lebanon (on humanitarian corridors and legal mobility), 3 with Bangladesh and Turkey (respectively on inter-university cooperation and quotas, and on visa, police cooperation and irregular migration), reflecting the lower salience of migration in their bilateral relationship. No migration-related agreements were signed with Iraq and Afghanistan during the studied period. Italy's engagement with Iraq mainly focused on political dialogue, particularly concerning refugee matters.

Overall, Italy's EXMIPO has been largely re-active to the changing dynamics and geographies of migratory flows. If in the 1990s, it prioritized Albania as a key country of origin, the focus then shifted towards North Africa. With the emergence of sub-Saharan Africa as a key area of origin and transit for many of the migrants reaching Italy, the country started devoting more attention to the region, suggesting that the Sahel does increasingly constitute a 'third and a half' circle (Cristiani, 2021) in Italy's foreign policy today.

5.3. Italy's EXMIPO across policy areas: The predominance of irregular migration concerns

Turning now to the analysis of the specific areas covered by Italy's EXMIPO tools, we divided them into two macro-groups: irregular and regular migration. Under 'irregular migration' we included the fight against smuggling and trafficking (which was the main focus area in 10 per cent of instruments), border control (10 per cent), the prevention of irregular migration (16 per cent), returns (12 per cent), SAR (2 per cent), training or equipment
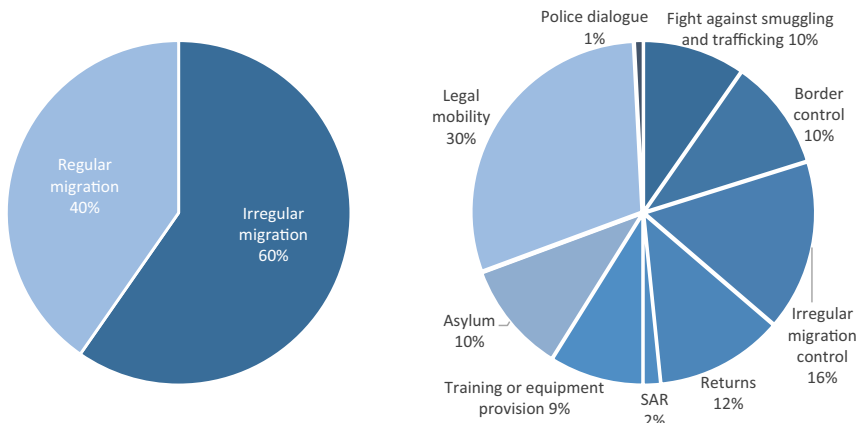
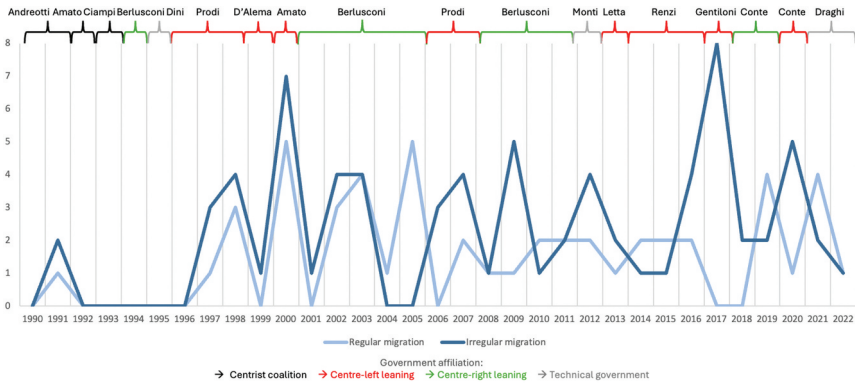**Figure 6.** EXMIPO tools by focus area, 1990–2022. Source: Authors' elaboration.

Figure 7. EXMIPO tools by focus area, government, and year, 1990–2022. Source: Authors' elaboration (governments' affiliation based on Abbondanza, 2024)

to the police and border guards (9 per cent), and promoting dialogue between police actors (1 per cent) (Figure 6). The 'regular migration' category encompassed asylum (10 per cent) and legal mobility (30 per cent).

Overall, throughout the studied period, almost two-thirds (60 per cent) of Italy's EXMIPO tools were centred on fighting irregular migration (Figure 6). By contrast, 40 per cent focused on legal migration opportunities.

More specifically, the focus on *irregular* migration intensified since the early 2000s: If, in 1990–2005, roughly half (53 per cent) of EXMIPO tools centred on irregular migration, the proportion rose to over two thirds (64 per cent) in 2006–2022 (Figure 7). Indeed, in the 1990s and early 2000s, Italy's EXMIPO tools were characterized by a parallelism in regular and irregular migration instruments, primarily driven by the simultaneous use of quotas and return agreements discussed above. Since the early 2000s however, the new EXMIPO instruments have mainly centred on irregular migration.

While the emphasis on irregular migration is not surprising, the above findings provide a stark indication of the extent to which concerns about irregular migration prevailed, over those on regular mobility. They also supply important evidence in support of the literature's suggestion that migration has been increasingly presented and addressed as a security issue (the 'securitisation' thesis – see Huysmans 2000), not only on the internal dimension but on the external one too.

Against this backdrop, it is interesting to note, once again, that governments of all political orientations have prioritized *irregular* migration. As Figure 7 reveals, tools targeting irregular migration have consistently outnumbered those focusing on regular mobility, with only a few exceptions between 1990 and 2022. This corroborates previous analyses, underscoring a significant convergence in Italian parties' approaches to EXMIPO. Notably,

the most active years for the introduction of new EXMIPO tools (2000 and 2017) coincided with periods of centre-left governance (under Amato and Gentiloni, respectively).

What is more, Figure 7 illustrates a pattern where Italy's EXMIPO initiatives were instigated by centre-left administrations in the late 1990s, continued by centre-right governments in the 2000s, and ramped up by the centre-left following the 'migration crisis' of 2015. Hence, the Italian case challenges the notion that the external dimension of migration policy is an exclusive domain of the centre-right, highlighting instead the pivotal role played by the centre-left in its inception and evolution.

6. Conclusion

The EU and its Member States exhibit growing interest in effectively managing migration, both within and beyond their borders. Yet, our understanding of the specific policy tools employed by the MS remains surprisingly limited, particularly when it comes to the external dimension of migration policies. This is even more relevant when we consider the strategic importance of the wider Mediterranean region. This article has aimed to contribute to fill such a gap, by focusing on the case of Italy, as a country at the forefront of Europe's external migration governance. To that end, it has provided the first comprehensive and systematic analysis of the external dimension of Italy's migration policy in the broader Mediterranean, over the past three decades.

The study reveals that Italy's EXMIPO in the Mediterranean has developed quantitatively and qualitatively, across time and space. It has engaged a growing number of countries well beyond its immediate periphery, and extended to the wider Mediterranean region. Far from being centred on return agreements alone, the country's approach has relied on a wide range of instruments – from return agreements to quota schemes, from technical agreements to humanitarian corridors, from political dialogue to military missions – to advance its interests in migration matters. Italy's EXMIPO evolved through time: If initially it leveraged quotas to facilitate the ratification of return agreements, since the 2010s it has favoured more informal tools, first of which political dialogue and technical agreements. Throughout, irregular (rather than regular) migration was prioritized.

The Italian case dispels the notion that the external dimension of migration policy is exclusively the domain of the centre-right, underscoring instead the pivotal involvement of the centre-left in its inception and evolution. While political ideology did not emerge as the primary driver of EXMIPO decisions, these choices were predominantly influenced by two key factors: the shifting geographies of migratory flows, and governments' pursuit of flexible tools to address increasing migration numbers. On one hand, the evolution of

migratory routes prompted Italy to progressively extend its EXMIPO beyond its traditional spheres in North Africa and Eastern Europe, to include sub-Saharan Africa too. On the other hand, the pursuit of agile responses led governments of all ideological stances to prioritize informal tools.

Overall, the analysis underscores the growing relevance of the wider Mediterranean for the management of migratory flows. Many questions remain. How is Italy's EXMIPO perceived by partner countries? How do states on the Southern shore of the Mediterranean conduct their external migration policies? What role do post-colonial relations play in such dynamics? A 'policy tool' approach offers a promising avenue to gain deeper understanding on such questions, and on the external dimension of migration policy.

Notes

1. See https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/46559/spain-and-morocco-mend-ties-with-migration-agreements
2. https://www.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Accordo-Italia-Albania_compressed.pdf
3. The dataset was developed in the context of the Project 'DEPMI: Dimensione Esterna Politica di Migrazione Italiana' (2021-2022) led by The Siracusa International Institute for Criminal Justice and Human Rights and funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project takes inspiration from, and expands, previous research on the mapping of the external dimension of migration policies in the case of the EU, in the framework of the H2020 project 'PROTECT: The Right to International Protection'.
4. The dataset is also available in the form of an interactive map at https://bit.ly/3vsO0iR.
5. This element is not originally included in Fontana and Rosina (2024)'s framework, as it was adopted for the first time in late 2023. It is however a new emerging tool, deserving more attention when studying MS' EXMIPO.
6. The Italy-Libya Memorandum of Understanding (2017), the Spain–Mali Framework of Cooperation on Migration Issue (2008), and the France–Burkina Faso Agreement on Concerted Management of Migratory Flows and Joint-Development (2009) are all examples of this kind of tool.
7. Made up of this paper's authors, and Dr Sahizer Samuk Carignani in the context of the already mentioned DEPMI Project.
8. See note 4.
9. Calculations based on EUROSTAT.
10. Calculations based on UNHCR data.
11. While the number of people from Ukraine arriving to Italy via sea was extremely low, in the time between the outbreak of the war and the implementation of the EU Temporary Protection Initiative the number of asylum applications from Ukrainian citizens has increased dramatically.
12. The 'decreto flussi' is a measure through which the Italian Government establishes annually the quotas for non-EU foreign citizens who can enter Italy for reasons of subordinate, independent, and seasonal work.
13. https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/temi_globali/diritti_umani/i-corridoi-umanitari/

14. https://www.governo.it/sites/governo.it/files/immigrazione_0.pdf
15. Speech by former Interior Minister, Angelino Alfano, 17/10/2017 (https://www.esteri.it/it/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/interventi/2017/10/discorso-dell-on-ministro-all-evento_9/).
16. The fund was originally allocated €2 million, and eventually it received another €51 million between 2019 and 2021 (The Big Wall, https://www.thebigwall.org/fondo-premialita-per-le-politiche-di-rimpatrio/funzionamento/).
17. For a critical analysis of the Agreement see https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/07/eu-tunisia-agreement-on-migration-makes-eu-complicit-in-abuses-against-asylum-seekers-refugees-and-migrants/
18. For a critical review of the Agreement, see https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/EUR3075872024ENGLISH.pdf
19. While our analysis in this article concludes in 2022, Italy's 2023 agreement with Albania on the extraterritorial processing of asylum claims indicates that Italy's external migration policy (EXMIPO) now encompasses all elements of our framework.
20. https://www.difesa.it/OperazioniMilitari/op_intern_corso/Niger_missione_bilaterale_supporto/Pagine/default.aspx
21. While the return agreement with Algeria was signed in 2000, entry quotas were only provided seven years later – when the RA finally came into force.
22. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaArticolo?art.versione=1&art.idGruppo=0&art.flagTipoArticolo=1&art.codiceRedazionale=05A07156&art.idArticolo=1&art.idSottoArticolo=1&art.idSottoArticolo1=10&art.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2005-07-22&art.progressivo=1
23. http://www.interno.gov.it/it/notizie/cambio-strategia-nello-scenario-migratorio-attuale-e-incrementi-organico-polizia-e-vigili-fuoco
24. See https://osservatoriocpi.unicatt.it/ocpi-pubblicazioni-l-immigrazione-regolare-in-italia
25. See https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/irregular-migration-and-return/humane-and-effective-return-and-readmission-policy_en
26. Based on Eurostat.

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Data availability statement

The dataset underpinning this publication can be accessed at https://umap.open streetmap.fr/en/map/depmi-dimensione-esterna-politica-migratoria-itali_711517#4/ 37.34/11.34

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Appendix 1

Italy's EXMIPO instruments, 1990–2022
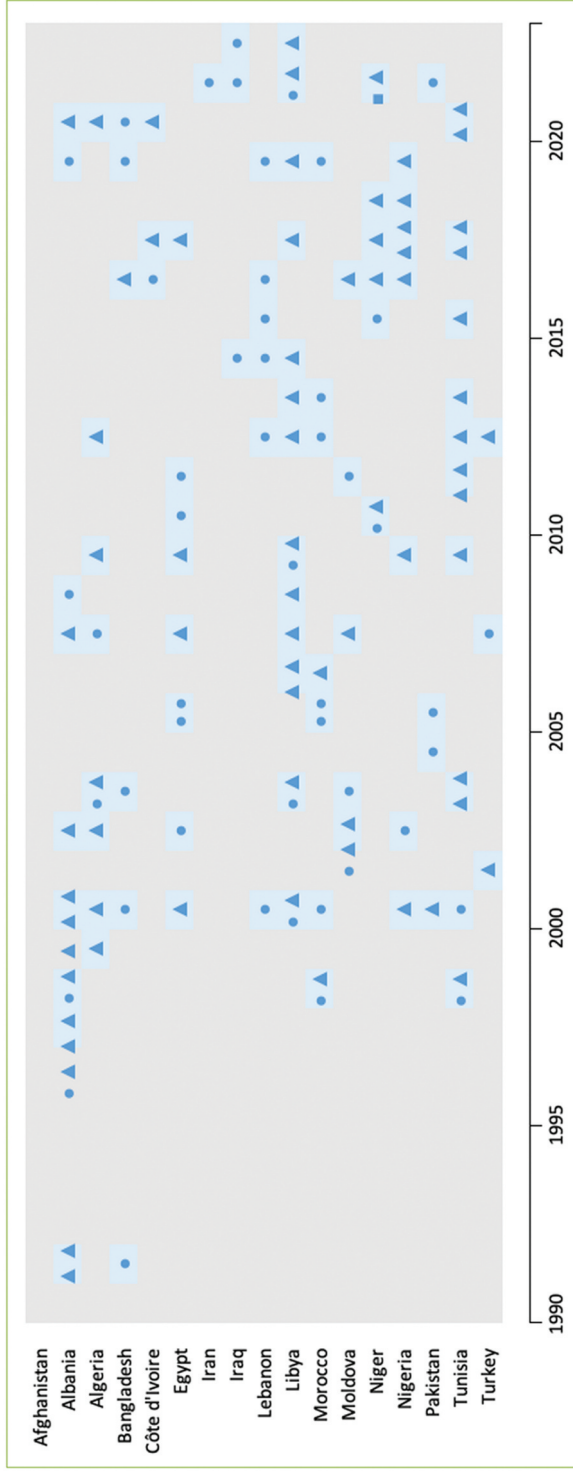
Source: Author elaboration. Grey background: no tool in given year. Blue background: new tool adopted. Symbols Respect tools main focus areas (as defined in the text): ● = regular migration; ▲ = irregular migration; ■ = other.