

Fact sheet: Italy

Country report on Media and Migration

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About the project

“New Neighbours” aims to highlight the positive social, cultural and economic contributions made by migrants and refugees throughout communities across Europe. The objectives are to facilitate direct participation in public and community media production and to create new intercultural media spaces, in order to raise awareness and to promote understanding between locals and newcomers. This will be achieved through various activities implemented by the project partners, including a new series of TV documentaries produced 2019 by public service broadcasters in nine European countries, as well as social media-based campaigns, media skills trainings, research and focus group work, expert meetings and other events. In addition, New Neighbours will build stronger links between media and civil society organisations, which will improve the flow of information and can help to deliver the message to a wider and more diverse audience. The project is funded by the European Commission and coordinated by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). Partners of EBU are CMFE - Community Media Forum Europe, MDI - Media Diversity Institute, COSPE - Cooperation for the development of emerging countries and COMMIT - Community Media Institute for training, research and consulting. Project term is January 2019 to December 2020. Further information can be found on the [New Neighbours website](#).

About the authors

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On behalf of COMMIT, Piera Francesca Mastantuono and Sabika Shah Povia participate in the New Neighbours project as local researchers and focus group moderators for Italy.

Fact sheet: Media and Migration in Italy

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Migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities in Italy

In Italy, the percentage of arrivals by sea has decreased, according to the [Ministry of the Interior](#), from 17854 in 2018 to 3191 in 2019 (from the 1st of January 2019 to the 19th of July 2019, compared to the same period of 2018). This change, that must be read in an international perspective also on the basis of the agreements signed, continues to be narrated by the media with an emergency tone and a narrative often based on sensationalism.

The current government, continuing a policy initiated by the previous Ministry of the Interior, approved, between 2018 and 2019, two so-called "security" and "security bis" decrees. The first decree eliminates humanitarian protection. It provides new forms of permits that go beyond international protection. The humanitarian protection has filled the gap left by international protection, the fact that neither is longer in force has consequences on the increase in irregular immigrants, or migrants who are not put in legal condition to regularize themselves.

The function of the welcome system changes as well as its name: the Sprar (System for the protection of asylum seekers and refugees) becomes Siproimi (Protection system for holders of international protection and for unaccompanied foreign minors). Italian journalist, Annalisa Camilli on [Internazionale](#) writes on June 18, 2019 about the security bis decree, "in 18 articles, the first five concern rescue at sea, while the others are about reforming the penal code and in particular the management of demonstrations [...]".

The Article 1 of the decree points out that the internal minister "can limit or prohibit the entry or transit or parking of ships in the territorial sea", this way affecting rescue at sea operations. This article of the decree thus continues the targeting of non-governmental organisations and the criminalization of solidarity that began with the previous government. Criticizing the action of NGOs and defining them pull factors for irregular immigration, pushed Italy to establish a Senate inquiry committee, which eventually suspended all operations due to lack of evidence. However, the image of NGOs was damaged.

Also in 2017, a "Memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the fields of development, the fight against illegal immigration, human trafficking and fuel smuggling and on reinforcing the security of borders" between the State of Libya and the Italian Republic was signed by Italy and the Government of Libyan reconciliation. It created a suspect collaboration in the management

of migration flows, also and according to the situation in Libya itself ([Press release IOM and UNHCR, July 3, 2019](#)). Between challenges, there are attempts to create safe channels and humanitarian corridors for migrants and refugees in order to respect the Geneva Convention, that are being carried out by the Community of Sant'Egidio and the FCEI. It is also important to share good practices and legal alternatives in the media too and try to achieve a counter-definition by giving a voice to migrants not only in emergency, but also in normalized contexts since, as discussed in the following paragraphs, migration is always present in the media.

The data collected in the UNHCR annual report Global Trends shows the number of people fleeing war, persecution and conflict exceeded 70 million in 2018. Within the 70.8 million figure in the [Global Trends report](#) are three main groups. The first is *refugees*, meaning people forced to flee their country because of conflict, war or persecution. In 2018, the number of refugees reached 25.9 million worldwide, 500,000 more than in 2017. Included in this total are 5.5 million Palestine refugees who are under the care of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. The second group is *asylum seekers* - people outside their country of origin and receiving international protection but awaiting the outcome of their claim to refugee status. At the end of 2018 there were 3.5 million asylum seekers globally. The third and biggest group, at 41.3 million, is people displaced to other areas *within* their own country, a category commonly referred to as *Internally Displaced People* or IDPs. But, only 92,400 refugees were resettled in 2018, less than 7 per cent of those awaiting resettlement. Some 593,800 refugees were able to return home, while 62,600 became naturalized.

The [Global Migration Data Analysis Centre](#) of the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#)) released the [Fatal Journeys 4](#) report, which analyses data on migrant deaths worldwide. Here is some data presented by the report:

- The deaths and disappearances of more than 32,000 migrants have been documented between 2014 to 2018.
- The escalating conflict in Yemen led to an increase in the number of recorded migrant deaths: at least 125 people lost their lives in the Gulf of Aden between the Horn of Africa and Yemen in 2018, compared with just 53 in 2017.
- Nearly 2,200 deaths were recorded during migration in South-East Asia between 2014 and 2018, at least 1,723 of whom were Rohingya.
- In the Middle East, 421 deaths were recorded over this period, with the largest number (145) occurring in 2018.

Here is the full report [Fatal Journeys Volume 4](#) as PDF.

Media landscape and media coverage of migrants and refugees

According to the last annual report of the Rome Charter Association "Notizie di chiusura", the media reported on migration, on paper and on television, according to the data below.

Newspapers and periodicals:

- In 2018 there was a decrease, compared to the previous year, of the number of news about immigration on the front pages of the five analysed newspapers: only 834, compared to the 1006 of the same period in 2017, 1389 in 2016 and 1336 in 2015. This means a 17% decrease of the number of news with respect to 2017 and 38% with respect to 2015.
- The agenda, with respect to the themes of immigration, highlights a progressive decrease of coverage related to the reception of immigrants, that goes from the 54% in 2015 to the 17% of 2018, with a simultaneous increase of the coverage of migration flows, which raises from the 23% of 2015 to the 47% of 2018. Society and culture (18% in 2018) has been mostly stable in the past 3 years, while crime and security (11% in 2018) is in a slight decrease with respect to the previous year (15% in 2017). Terrorism only accounted of 5% of the news reports in 2018, about the same of the previous year. Economy and labour are residual, only accounting for 2% in 2018, decreasing with respect to the previous analyses.
- A "permanent state of emergency" has been described by the media in the last 6 years analysed. The language used depicts an image of "infinite crisis", that remains even when migration fluxes decrease of over 80% (2018) and politics in Italy, Europe, and the Mediterranean change. In 2013, "Lampedusa" was the symbolic word when it came to immigration-related news, and it framed a humanitarian crisis. The word representing the following year, 2014, was "Mare nostrum", the crisis grows and takes the form of an unstoppable one. In 2015 the symbol word was "Europe", framing of a political crisis. In 2016 the symbol word was "walls", both real and symbolic ones built in the heart of Europe: the frame grew to a systemic crisis of the EU, mining its founding principles. The symbol word for 2017 was "NGO", with the origins of the mistrust towards humanitarian operators, the frame becomes a rejection crisis. In 2018 the symbol word was "Salvini", protagonist of 865 news titles. The frame changes to a crisis of values, due to the escalation of the European political debate and the disintegration of the shared community values.

TV stations:

- In 2018 the phenomenon remained highly visible, accounting for 4068 news in 10 months, 300 more compared to the same period in 2017; overall, 10% of all the television reports talk about it (in 2016 it was just 5%). There is no direct relationship between the increased exposure of migration-related news and the rise of fear of immigrants: a high

exposure - as in 2015 - did not trigger an increase in insecurity. In fact, in June 2018, there was a slight decrease of the fear of migrants. About 41% of the citizens (2 percentage points less than 2017) believe that immigrants and migrants are a threat to security and public order due to the hardships of social inclusion and to the state of poverty and discomfort that people who arrive in Italy have to live in.

- About 43% of the news have an explicit reference to a statement or a political action. In some months, for example July and August, such percentage rises to 53%. Similar figures are found in the discussion of economic affairs or when presenting the budget law (for which politics has a pivotal role in 57% of the reports). By looking at the overall agenda, the presence of politics drops to an average of 21%.
- The most-discussed topic in the immigration agenda are the migration flows (38%), followed by crime and security (32%), two issues that, on their own, account for 70% of the overall reporting agenda. This is followed by the topics of reception of migrants, society and culture.
- In 2018, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers got to weigh-in in 16% of the reports related to immigration. A data point that counters the trend of the previous years (7% in 2017). They are protagonists only in two contexts: racist aggressions and attacks and the news related to the exploitation of workers and illegal work.
- The interviewed migrants are mostly men (78%). Women are protagonists mainly when being evicted from slums (for example, in Rome) or when they are victims of violence, human trafficking and racial slurs.

Here are the [Guidelines for the Application of the Rome Charter](#) as PDF (Italian edition, 2018).

Migration trends, political dynamics, media debate and public discourse

Italy is a country where politics have always influenced public debate. The past year has been interesting because of the national elections that took place in March 2018 and the European elections that took place in May 2019. In both cases, the campaigns of most right-populist and nationalist movements were mostly constructed around fighting immigration.

Political propaganda entered mainstream media's language to such an extent that it produced contradictory articles that forged people's perception of reality based on political bias.

Expressions such as "irregular immigrants are living the life", referring to dinghy boats as "cruises", talking about "invasion" even with arrivals being at their lowest in the past six years, is all political propaganda which was bounced on all the newspapers and on all the newscasts, without being contradicted. We saw television broadcasts in which politicians spoke about billions of Africans ready to departure, when billions of Africans don't even exist. All this happened in TV studios in which those words, those numbers so far from reality, were not clarified or framed correctly. In 43% of news pieces there was an explicit reference to a political exponent.

In the political and media debate, the theme of immigration and the figure of the migrant are associated with political divisions. Not so much left / right. Today the policy is personalized. Thus, the theme of the migrant is directly connected to the leader of our time, Matteo Salvini. "Salvini" was the most common word in the news about immigration in the media last year. It was his agenda everyone followed. Migrants have therefore become the center of a confrontation, a political one based on values, which pushes on the lever of emotions, which TV delivers better than print (also, in Italy 87% of people still take in news from TV).

Luca Traini's racist raid in Macerata a month before national elections, on March 4, 2018, was the most significant news regarding immigration last year and it strongly influenced the course of the elections. The issue of migration policies entered the new government's agenda in the first days of its establishment and consequently changed the media's agenda too.

Issues related to migration, asylum and integration relevant to media coverage in 2019 – central topics and missing narratives

Today, with the new government making changes on immigration-related laws and sea rescue operations, the debate around immigration continues. Mostly, media has picked up on the criminalization of solidarity and often uses the same language as the politicians to discuss it, reinforcing a strong anti-immigration and anti-NGOs prejudice in readers/viewers. With NGO boats being denied entry in Italian ports, NGO operators being referred to as human traffickers, and Libya's documented human rights' violations and incapability of bringing fluxes to a complete halt, immigration is often on the front pages of newspapers. NGO operations are definitely the most-discussed topic.

There are many things missing in this narration of immigration: migrants and refugees are rarely given a voice; no one really talks about the countries of origin, so people find it hard to understand why migrants leave, especially when they are climate refugees or so-called economic migrants; very rarely we read or see reports about well-integrated migrant communities and, when they are reported on, they are always portrayed as an exception.

Media reports on the neighbourhood of immigrants and locals

Neighbourhoods with people of different ethnic backgrounds are only spoken about when a crime is committed and often referred to as *ghettos* or *slums*. Positive examples are very rare, but not completely inexistent. TV reportages about these areas don't only limit themselves to portray them as problematic, but often also add music that creates tension and images which make the immigrants look dangerous and dirty.

Good practices: Italian media and journalists in the field of migration

Print media:

[La Repubblica](#)

[L'Espresso](#) - especially articles by [Francesca Mannocchi](#)

[Internazionale](#) - especially articles by [Annalisa Camilli](#)

[Il Sole 24 Ore](#) - for articles on numbers and data

[Il Foglio](#) - especially articles by [Claudio Cerasa](#), but not only

[Left](#) - many issues were entirely dedicated to this theme and there are always a few articles about it

[Avvenire](#) - editorials and articles by [Nello Scavo](#)

[La Stampa](#) - especially articles by [Francesca Paci](#)

Online media:

[Redattore Sociale](#) - especially articles by Eleonora Camilli

[Articolo Ventuno](#) - pays attention to migration-related issues in general

[Cronache di ordinario razzismo](#)

[Riforma.it](#)

TV:

[Propaganda Live](#)

[L'Approdo](#)

[L'aria che tira](#)

[Agorà](#)

[TG3](#) - reportages by Valerio Cataldi

[TG3 Mondo](#)

[Rai News24](#)

[Preso Diretta](#) ([Riccardo Iacona](#))

[TG1 TV7](#)

Radio:

[Fahrenheit](#) on Radio Tre (Marino Sinibaldi)

[Radio Popolare](#) ([Danilo Di Biasio](#))

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