

Immigration policies: are they really restrictive? Italy, 1990-2013

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Two approaches can be followed to analyze immigration policies in the context of the EU. The first approach, known as the “policy failure”, highlights the limited success of immigration policies in regulating migration; the second, the “securitization” approach, sees immigration policies more effective in limiting migration since they have become stricter. Both approaches are essential to evaluate the effectiveness of immigration policies. Our study focuses on Italy over the period 1990-2013, as one of the EU member states with the largest immigration inflows. In particular, we empirically measure if Italian immigration policies are restrictive or not and how much Italian immigration policies, among other factors, such as economic and demographic factors, have an impact on migration inflows or net migration. We use a composite policy index. Our research hypothesis is that the restrictiveness of Italian immigration policies is in part ascribable to the increasing securitization of the EU immigration measures.

Preliminary theoretical considerations

As stressed by Boswell and Geddes (2011), two approaches can be followed to analyze immigration policies in the context of the European Union (EU). The first approach is the so-called “policy failure” and it highlights the limited success of immigration policies in regulating and controlling migration (e.g. Bhagwati, 2003; Castles, 2004a; 2004b; Cornelius, 2005). According to this approach, states are not able to perfectly define the migration outcomes and limit migration, for several reasons. First, immigration policies cannot have influence on structural factors, such as socio-economic inequalities, labour market shortages and political conflicts in origin countries (Czaika and de Haas, 2013). Second, migration is a long-term and “self-sustaining process” (Castles, 2004b: 222), while immigration policies are often short-term rules with limited and populist goals and clear-cut targets. Third, liberal states have moral obligations towards migration since they *have to* respect international laws and human rights, such as the right of family reunification and the right of asylum (Joppke, 1998; Weiner, 1996). Finally, governments often need to conciliate the natives’ sentiment of rejection towards migrants, declaring ‘zero immigration’, and economic interests (Freeman, 1995), such as the employment of low-skilled and low-wage workers. This can produce paradoxes (Geddes, 2008) and unintended consequences, such as irregular migration. From this perspective, immigration policies can be considered, to a certain extent, unintentionally permissive toward migrants. Failing in their objective of affecting migration inflows, they foster movements of people across borders.

The policy failure approach is largely contested by those migration researchers (e.g. Bonjour, 2011; Carling, 2002; Geddes, 2003) who state that immigration policies in the EU have become more effective in limiting migration since they have become stricter. In fact, border controls, visa requirements, draconian asylum procedures and administrative restrictions make more difficult for people to legally migrate and reside in the EU. These are the main arguments of the second approach, which is known as the “securitization” approach. Although the effectiveness of more restrictive immigration policies in keeping out unwanted migration can

be disagreed (Cornelius, 2001; Cornelius and Rosenblum, 2005; Cornelius and Salehyan, 2007; de Haas, 2007; 2011, Hanson et al. 2001; Wihtol de Wenden, 1999), it is unquestionable that a “securitization” has pervaded both immigration policies and public discourse, at both national and EU level. “Under control” (Bandel, 2007) has become the dominant logic of both the European agenda and rhetoric on immigration and asylum, especially after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In an effort of policy harmonization, this logic has affected the EU member states’ immigration policies as well. Political, social and economic reasons, which range from the preservation of the cultural identity to the consequences of the more recent international economic recession, have been advanced by the EU member states to deny admission to non-citizens and to implement more restrictive and punitive immigration policies. However, opting for one or the other approach would be not totally correct for an objective analysis of the immigration policies in the context of the EU, since both the approaches contain important and useful keys to interpret this topic. Therefore, we will bear in mind both “policy failure” and “securitization” approach in developing our study which aims to evaluate the effectiveness of immigration policies. Our study focuses on Italy over the period 1990-2013, as one of the EU member states with the largest immigration inflows. In particular, we intend to empirically measure if Italian immigration policies are restrictive or not and how much Italian immigration policies, among other factors, such as economic and demographic factors, have an impact on migration inflows or net migration.

Data and Methods

Immigration policy effectiveness can be assessed using two different methodologies: analyzing legal texts and using policy “outcome” measures. The advantage in using legal texts is their availability to the public and their potential comparability across countries (Mezger Kveder, 2012). In literature there are several examples of migration policy indexes based on legal texts: they could be categorized either as dummy indexes that indicate the year a change in the policy has occurred (ex. Karemera, Oguledo and Davis, 2000; Vogler and Rotte, 2000; Hatton, 2005) or as a composite migration policy index that measures differences in policy restrictiveness (ex. Hatton, 2004; Ortega and Peri, 2009; Mayda, 2010).

We used a composite policy index based on the migration policy index of Fondazione Rodolfo de Benedetti (FRdB)(2009). As a starting point we built a database of migration policies adopted in Italy from 1990 to 2013; then we completed the index series of FRdB for the years 2006-2013 using our migration policies dataset. In the construction of the FRdB migration policy index, migration policy is described along the following seven different dimensions: number of admission requirements; duration of first stay; staying requirements; years to obtain a permanent residence permit; number of administration involved; quotas; asylum index (calculated by Hatton 2004). Starting from these seven basic items, FRdB developed a cardinal summary indicator of the strictness of migration policy that allows to make comparisons across countries and between different years. The seven dimensions were initially expressed either in different units or in an ordinal scale specific to each item. To make those measures comparable, they were converted in cardinal scores and we normalized to a range from 0 to 6, with higher score representing stricter regulation. Finally,

as a last step, an overall summary indicator was computed for Italy, adding the values of the seven sub-indexes.

An overall policy index, calculated as described above, was analyzed simultaneously with migrants stock, migration inflows, net migration rate, percentage of the migrants over total population, GDP per capita, unemployment rate and ageing index for the period 1990-2013. We introduced a time lag (+ 1 year) in order to take into account the time delays that allows policy to entry into force. Then we looked for a linear correlation between the overall index and the above mentioned variables. Results are presented in Tables 1-7 and commented in the following section.

The next step of the analysis is to test the relationship between net migration rate, immigration policy and economic and demographic variables. A multiple linear regression is performed using sas v.9.2. Dependent variable is the net migration rate, independent variables are immigration policies and a dummy variable that represents whether or not a regularisation occurred each year of the analysis (immigration policies variables), the proportion of immigrants over total population and the ageing index i.e. the percentage between the old age population (over 65) and the young population (under 15) (demographic variables), the GDP per capita and the unemployment rate (economic variables).

Data stem from different online sources for legal texts, from Italian National Institute (ISTAT) for Census and Population Registers and from ISTAT and Italian Ministry of Interiors for Permits of Stay.

First results

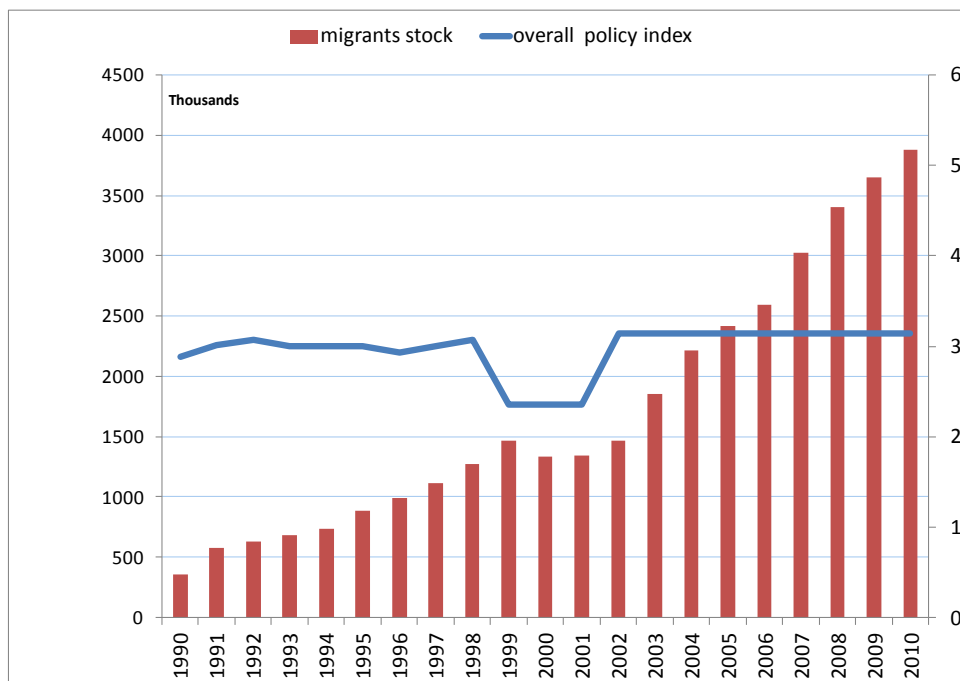
The overall summary indicator, constructed according to the methodology described in the previous section, presents the trend shown in Figure 1. We can observe that the indicator has a constant trend over time, with the exception of the period following the introduction of the Turco Napolitano law (1998), where the indicator shows a decreasing trend. This change is mainly due to the implementation of some facilities concerning residence permits. With the introduction of the Bossi-Fini law (2002), the summary indicator starts to increase again, since this law introduced stricter rules for the issue and the renewal of residence permits for migrants. However, it should be highlighted that the average value of the summary indicator is around 3 during all the period considered in our analysis, thus revealing that the Italian immigration policies are not very restrictive.

Results of the linear correlation shown in tables 1-7 reveal a weak positive correlation between migration policies and migration inflows, stocks and quota of migrants over total population. Italian immigration policies are not as restrictive as they appear on paper and on public discourse, since quota and regularizations remain the best channels for immigration in Italy. As far as economic variables, their correlation with migration policies is positively weak for GDP and negatively weak for unemployment rate. Ageing index has not correlation with the migration policy index. From this preliminary analysis the effect of economic and demographic variables on migration policies seems quite limited. Therefore, these results demonstrate that immigration policies can hardly have influence on structural factors and that migration is a long-term process, while immigration policies are short-term measures. Moreover, they confirm the idea that the EU

represents a key factor in the implementation of immigration policies in Italy (Freeman, 1995), which has inspired many of the measures concerning the entry and the residence of migrants (Colombo and Sciortino, 2004b). In particular, Italy has always tried to demonstrate to the EU and its member states to be able to reject the label of Europe’s “soft underbelly” (Einaudi, 2007; Pastore et al., 2006). Nevertheless, this has led the Italian governments to produce a political discourse on immigration which is more hostile to migration than their politics.

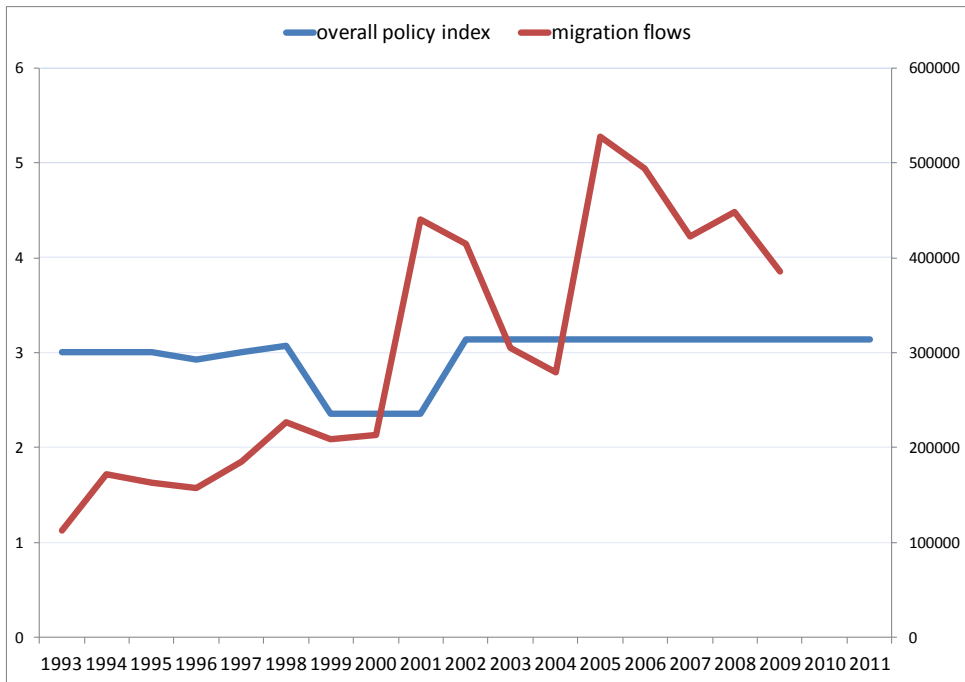
Results of the regression analysis are still ongoing: they will shed light on the determinants of immigration in Italy. More precisely they will explore the role played by economic and demographic variables on net migration and the importance of immigration policies on shaping migration outcomes.

Table 1-Overall policy index and migrants stock: Italy 1990-2011 (overall policy index in the right axes)



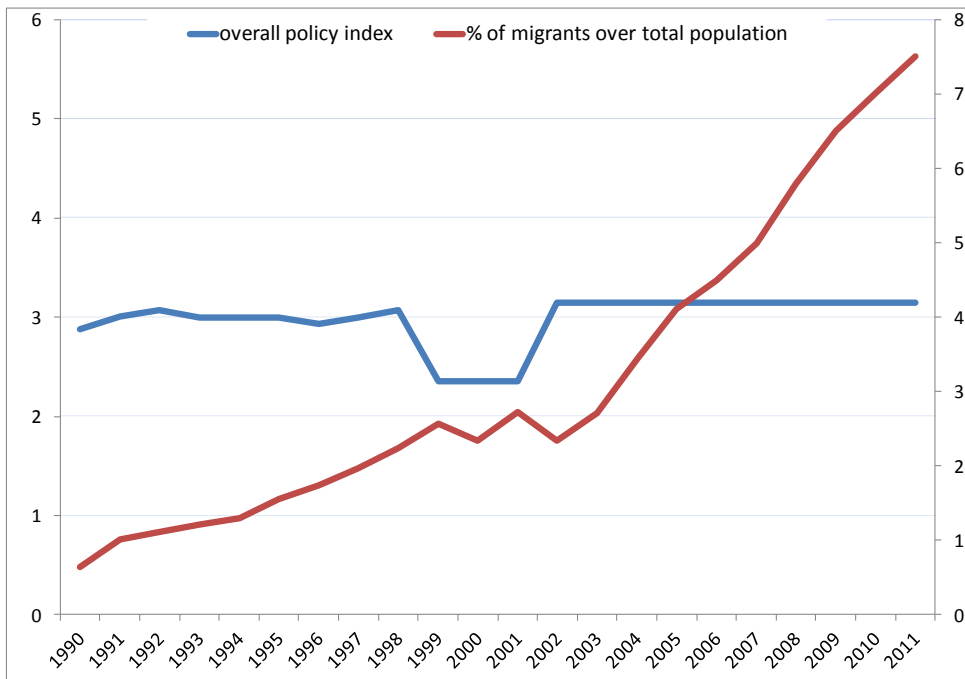
Source: Authors elaborations on Istat and FRdB

Table 2-Overall policy index and migration inflows: Italy 1993-2011 (overall policy index in the left axes)



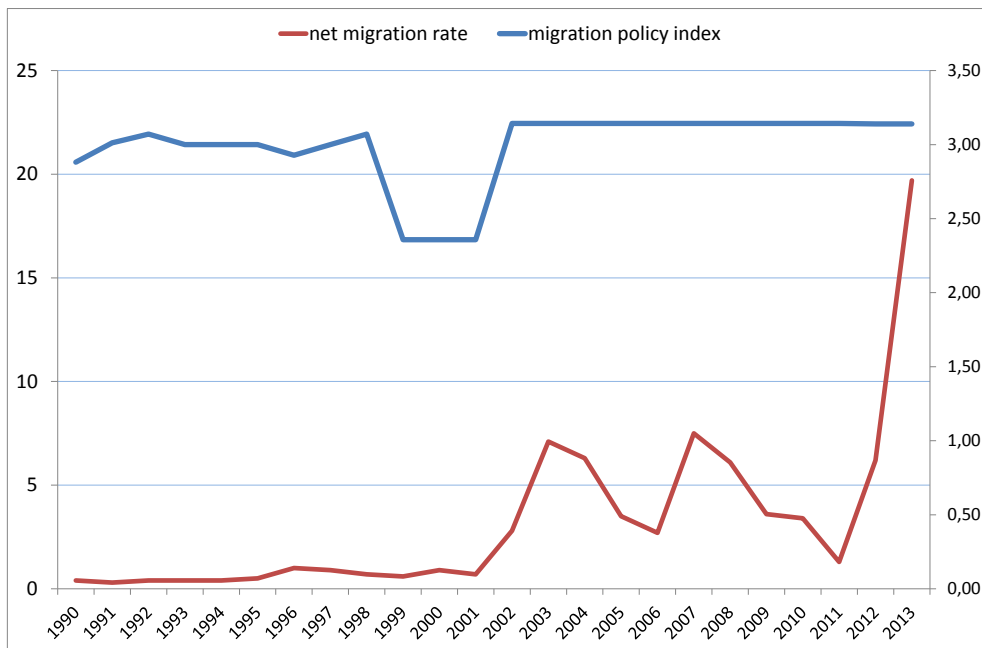
Source: Authors elaborations on Istat and FRdB

Table 3-Overall policy index and % of migrants over total population: Italy 1990-2011(overall policy index in the left axes)



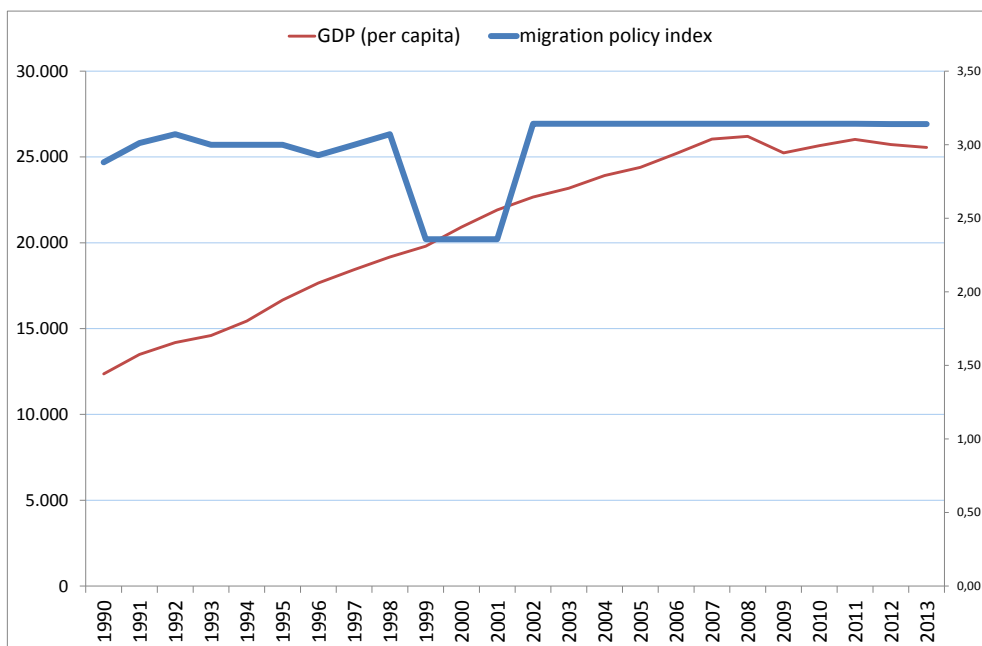
Source: Authors elaborations on Istat and FRdB

Table 4-Overall policy index and net migration rate: Italy 1990-2013 (overall policy index in the right axes)



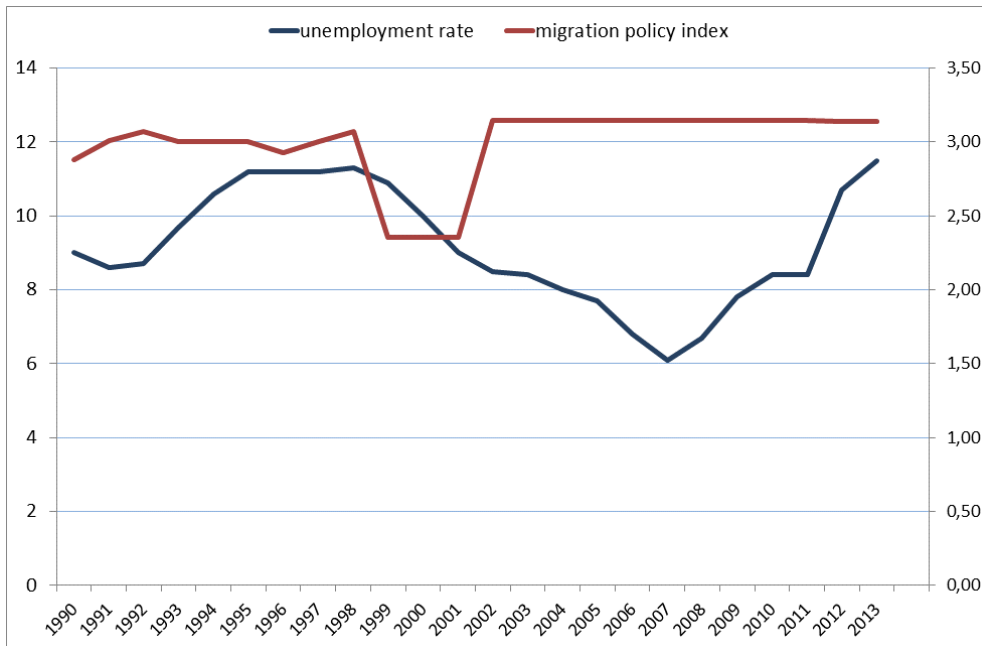
Source: Authors elaborations on Istat and FRdB

Table 5-Overall policy index and GDP per capita: Italy 1990-2013 (overall policy index in the right axes)



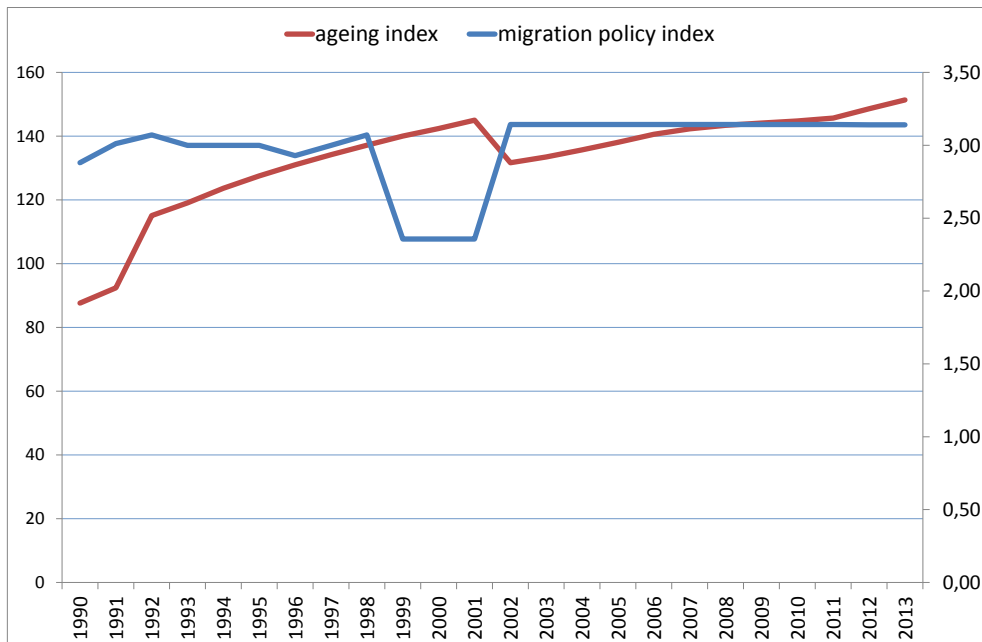
Source: Authors elaborations on Istat and FRdB

Table 6-Overall policy index and unemployment rate: Italy 1990-2013 (overall policy index in the right axes)



Source: Authors elaborations on Istat and FRdB

Table 7-Overall policy index and ageing index: Italy 1990-2013 (overall policy index in the right axes)



Source: Authors elaborations on Istat and FRdB

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