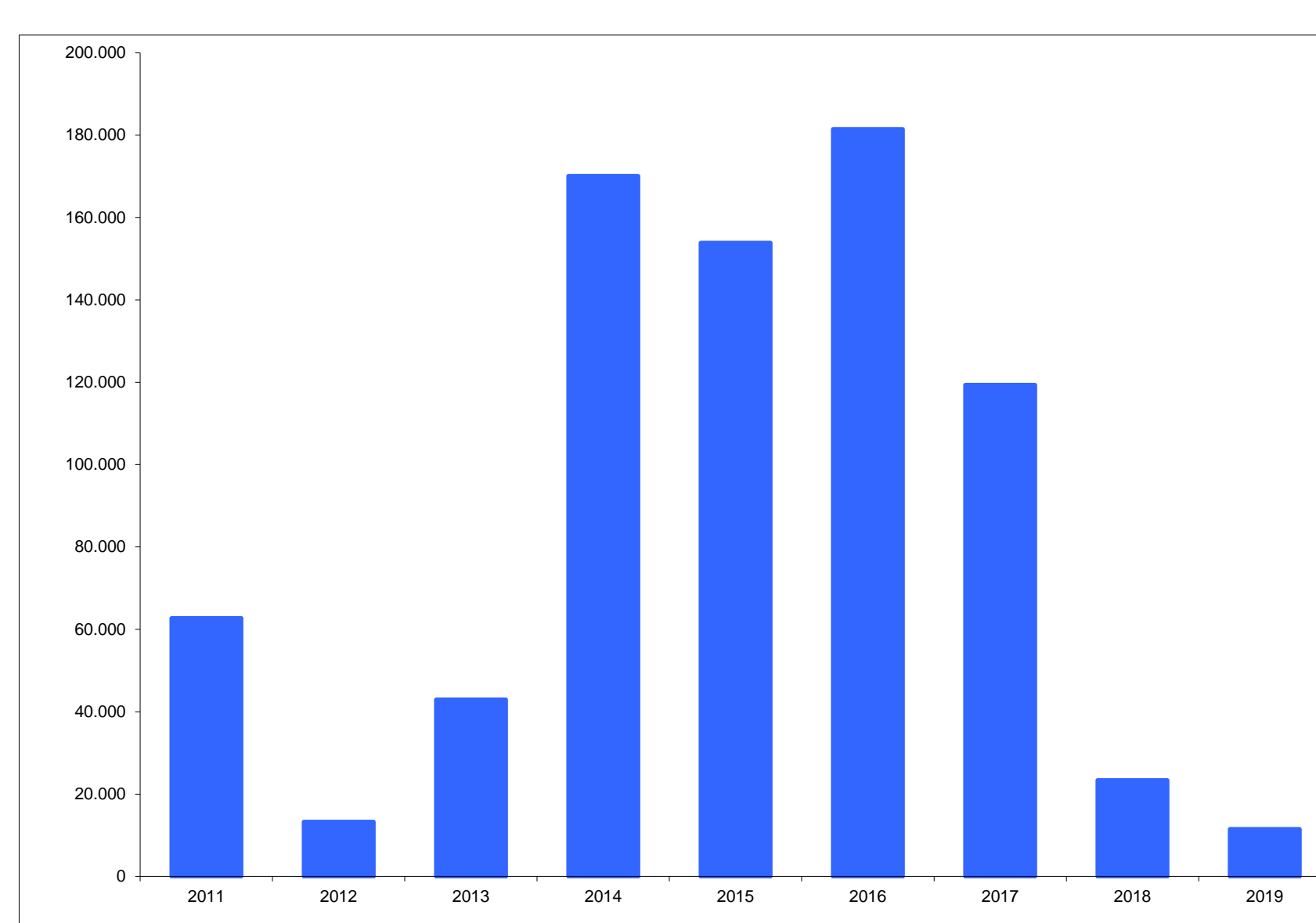




Italy & migration: is there still a place for solidarity?

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Sea Arrivals on Italian Shores 2011-2019 (source: UNIFI elaborations from data of the Ministry of Interior)

Abstract

For its geographical position, in the last decade Italy has become one of the primary European entry points, and also a destination country itself. The massive flows of migrants have challenged Italy's border management, reception, protection and integration system. Against this background European solidarity has fallen short both in relation to Italy's demand on burden sharing and migrants' expectations of protection and of a better life.

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Introduction

2014 has been a real watershed in terms of migration flows into Italy. Since then, Italy has received the highest number of non-EU citizens looking for economic opportunities and for international protection in its history. Applications for international protection peaked in 2016-17 (123.600 & 130.120). The main countries of origins were Pakistan, Nigeria and Bangladesh.

Main Results

After decades of emigration, Italy has become the gateway to the European Union and a destination country itself. Under the pressure of unprecedented arrivals on the one hand, and the growing populist "security-demands" on the other, a regressive approach has dominated the recent legal and policy interventions. This reflects a broader European trend, where the emphasis on "border management" and "security-focused approaches" has resulted in a "race to the bottom" which generated persistent gaps in terms of harmonization and fair burden sharing.

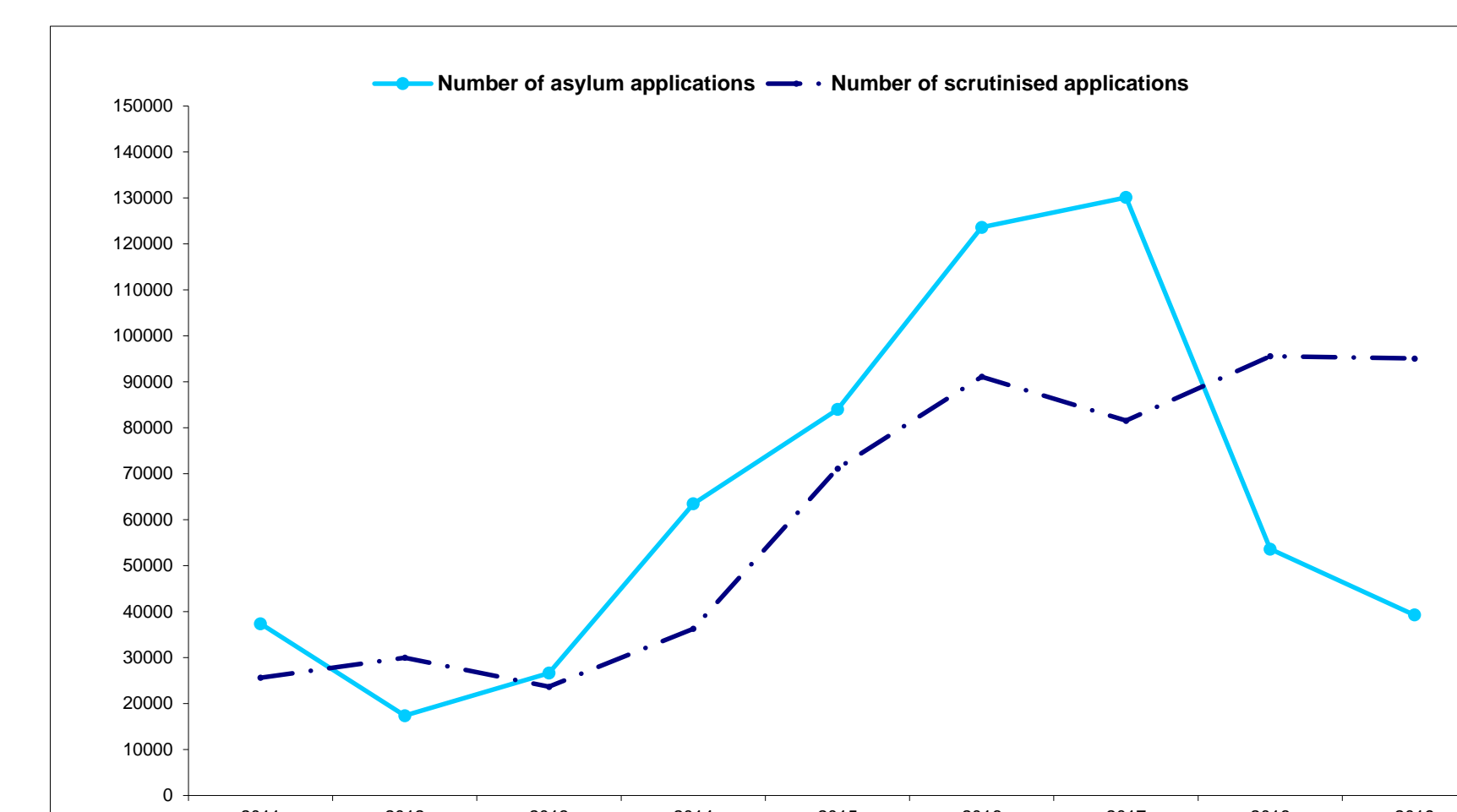
The absence of solid and structured pathways to systematically manage migration has been a constant theme of migration governance in Italy. It hinders the effective exercise of the right to asylum and the implementation of asylum and protection, that are jeopardised by arbitrary distinctions between 'irregular migrants' and 'asylum/international protection seekers' at border crossings.

Standards of care and assistance for asylum seekers and refugees vary a lot between different accommodation centres and in some cases basic rights are severely compromised.

The gap of governance at the central level has been filled by different actors, such as local municipalities (especially in the context of reception), the third sector and the judiciary. This has encouraged progressive legislation at the local level and the mobilization of civil society in support of foreigners' integration.

Methods and Material

- Multi-level analysis: macro, and micro level.
- Triangulation of different data sources.
- 15 expert interviews with legal experts, activists, migration experts from universities and research institutes, NGO office managers, social workers, officials and decision-makers; Snowball sampling.
- 29 semi-structured interviews with asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants who came to Italy through the Central Mediterranean route.



Source: UNIFI elaborations from data of the Ministry of Interior

Lessons Learned

The System of Protection for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (SPRAR), managed by local authorities in cooperation with the third sector, used to offer asylum seekers & beneficiaries of international protection a wide range of services from "day one", such as cultural mediation, Italian language courses, vocational training, internship & job placement programmes. It was considered a good practice, and it consisted in small facilities, usually well accepted by local communities, with an high integration potential. In 2018, this well-functioning model was reviewed, and asylum seekers and beneficiaries of humanitarian protection have been excluded from the renamed SIPROIMI (System of Protection for Beneficiaries of Protection and Unaccompanied Minors) with dramatic consequences for people's lives and the integration process. Dismantling best practices is never a good idea.