

## Tolerance in Discourses and Practices in the Italian Political Sphere

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Migrant political participation and representation has not been seen as an important issue in Italy so far. Several immigration laws adopted since the 1990s have consistently ignored the question of migrant political participation. In Italy there are no voting or other political rights for third country nationals. Political rights at any level (local, regional or national) are closely linked to citizenship acquisition. It is only by naturalization that they can participate in Italian political life. Migrants can become Italian citizens after 10 years of legal residence (if they are third country nationals) and after four years (if they are EU citizens). EU citizens can vote in local elections.

**Interestingly a large percentage of Italy's economic migrants are actually EU citizens:** This is the case of Romanians, who represent 21.2% of all foreign residents in Italy (Caritas Migrantes 2011), Poles or Bulgarians (who are also present in the territory but at smaller numbers). Based on the rules of the European Union, EU nationals have the right to vote at local level, but this is not actually encouraged or promoted adequately in Italy.

**The interests of third country nationals in Italy are represented in the political debate by civil society actors,** such as Catholic organizations, trade unions, NGOs, non-profit and other voluntary associations. These Italian organizations exercise advocacy in favour of migrants and defend their rights. Trade unions are particularly committed and active in this respect. Immigrants are not only represented by trade unions but they are also actively involved in them. The number of foreigners (both EU nationals and third country nationals) who have joined trade unions has increased considerably: there were 223,632 in 2000, and 1,137,238 in 2010 (Caritas Migrantes 2002 and 2011). Migrants constitute 7.8% of all trade unions members.

*Migrants can become Italian citizens and vote (or be elected) after 10 years residence (third country nationals) or, if they are EU citizens, after 4 years of legal residence.*

*Immigrants are represented in the public space by civil society actors*

By contrast, **immigrant associations have a weak role in representing migrants at the political level and/or in supporting the political participation of their members.** Immigrant associations mostly satisfy cultural, social and religious needs, and promote the cultural identity of their members. They sometimes collaborate with trade unions, Catholic organizations (e.g. parish recreation centres) and sometimes with local administrations, but their participation in the public arena occurs through the intermediation of these organizations. **The Italian context is historically characterized by weakness on the part of migrants in autonomously representing their own interests.**

**How could the political representation and participation of migrants be encouraged?** The Municipal Consultative Bodies and the Additional Foreign Councillor have been built to let migrants politically participate at local level, but they have not succeeded. How could the constraining implications of the citizenship law be overcome?

Since migrants cannot directly participate in the Italian political life, **how could their presence and interests be accommodated and handled in local policies?** These questions are investigated in a case study presented in this Policy Brief. The **CASE STUDY** focuses on the “local policies of exclusion”, paying particular attention to the social and political actors involved in them.

## Evidence & Analysis (Key Findings)

### THE CASE STUDY: Local policies of exclusion

Local policies of exclusion can be defined as those measures, adopted by local authorities that aim to exclude migrants, to separate them from the native component of the population by establishing specific, albeit implicit, prohibitions against them, and which set up special screening procedures or limit their access to benefits and local social policy resources.

In the last few years many of them have been introduced under the pretext of guarantying urban safety. Their aim is apparently to protect general interests (e.g. quality of life in urban centres is to be 'protected' from the presence of 'annoying beggars'), and to suppress any behavior that is considered annoying, indecent or ill-mannered.

Nevertheless, many of these measures limit immigrants' rights either indirectly or directly and favour their exclusion. Examples include prohibitions against any type of gathering in public places (e.g. playing cricket in public parks, eating out in public gardens or parks), or the custom of praying in rooms which are not officially endorsed for this purpose (a common practice among Muslims who do not have formal and recognised places of worship).

The local policies of exclusion have provoked reactions from various civil society actors, who have opposed them not only with public protests but also with legal action. Opposition has come from above and below. From above, the UNAR (National Office against racial discrimination) intervenes in the most blatant cases of local measures which are discriminatory and exercises the right to carry out checks (even though it cannot directly impose sanctions). From below, the advocacy coalition of pro-immigrant social forces comes into play, giving rise to protest initiatives and legal battles, often producing positive results.

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*A clear example of mobilization from below occurred in Tradate. It is a town of about 17.000 inhabitants situated in the Lombardy region, which was governed by mayors of the North League Party for many years. The mayor in office from 2007 to May 2012 introduced the "bonus for babies regulation" to pay out an amount of money for new babies born to Italian parents who had been resident in the town for 5 years.*

*The ordinance provoked opposition from many civil society actors, such as local associations and NGOs. But the main opposition came from some Tradate's citizens, who decided to collect signatures to petition against the regulation. They went door to door asking people to sign the petition and used their personal networks to obtain consensus. They managed to collect some signatures and met the mayor to ask him to discuss the issue within the City Council.*

*Since the mayor never considered their request, they decided to involve the Associazione Avvocati per Niente (transl.: Association of Pro Bono Lawyers), an association which defends the rights of the weak free of charge. After the judgment (which condemned the regulation as discriminatory), this group of active citizens organized a public meeting to talk about the regulation and communicate their victory.*

**There are three reasons why certain groups (mayors, local governments, some political actors) promote and defend the local policies of exclusion.**

Firstly, the local policies of exclusion are considered to be necessary to guarantee **urban security**, protect urban decency and preserve hygiene in the cities. To do this, the concentration of immigrants in the neighborhood should be avoided, places of worship should be controlled, the construction of mosques should be banned, the conditions of houses should be checked, criteria to let immigrants register with the Registry office should be established.

*"The ban on the construction of mosques is an assumption of responsibility by those who govern the community in order to reassure the public. The issue of mosques is one of both urban planning and public security. The rules of the plans are not respected and the centres become centres of active proselytism and of fanatic religious-political propaganda over which no control is possible because the language spoken is unknown to most people including the police" (Municipal Councillor of Culture, Trezano, Giornale di Brescia,*

Secondly, these policies are justified by those who initiate them because "they guarantee Italians' rights and interests before those of immigrants", setting aside **economic and social resources only for Italian citizens**, and not for people who are considered to be guests.

*"A minimum wage has to be required to register with the Registry Office to regulate correctly and coherently each flow and every request for residence, in order to ensure the effective availability of municipal services to those who actually have the right to them" (Regional Councilor, Bresciaoggi local newspaper, 4 April 2011).*

*"These policies are useful in order to really protect the historical centres of the cities from the monopolising presence of ethnic activities which are not at all consistent with the history of our city" (Local politician, Bresciaoggi, local newspaper, 10 March 2010).*

Finally, these local policies are supposed to be defending and **preserving Italian identity**, history, culture, language and religion.

By contrast, civil society actors who oppose local policies of exclusion claim that these measures are discriminatory and damage rights which are guaranteed by law and by

*"These policies are cases of shameful discrimination which produce tension, fights among the poor, unacceptable social exclusion in the territory. We are in a situation of systematic discrimination, in which inalienable rights are violated. We cannot tolerate this shame anymore" (member of Trade Unions, l'Unità, 29th April 2010).*

international treaties. They violate the **inalienable rights of people**, such as the freedom of religion or personal freedom, the right to education, the right to move, etc. Interestingly, they are considered a symptom of something bigger, i.e. a general growth in discrimination which materializes in many aspects of social life and in everyday social relations.

## Key Messages for Policy Makers

The local policies of exclusion are **institutionalized forms of intolerance**: they are drawn up and enforced by legitimate bodies (i.e. the Municipalities), which are elected democratically and which influence social life within the local communities. They are institutional obstacles to several rights of minorities (civil, social) and to their freedom of expressing their cultural and religious identity.

To fight against these discriminatory measures:

→ **at national level**, the role of UNAR should be reinforced making it an independent body. UNAR is actually founded within the Presidency of the Council of Ministries, consequently it should check the activities of those who nominate its members and finance their activities. This anomaly should be resolved by making it a separate body. Secondly, it can currently only give opinions but cannot engage in legal action in defence of people who have been discriminated against. It should have the power to intervene legally or to apply sanctions directly.

→ **at local level**, the regional offices of UNAR should be reinforced in the same way as at national level, in order to intervene more directly and quickly in local contexts, and to interact with local administrations.

→ **at local level**, actions of civil society actors should be supported and financed. Funding for associations and organizations which defend immigrants' rights should be provided; the role of the Ombudsman should be reinforced and training should be provided to intervene in discriminatory issues; migrants should be informed about the organizations that could help them to defend themselves against discrimination; urban and social interventions aimed at improving the living conditions of both Italians and migrants should be implemented and shared among local administrations (e.g. the urban renewal of neighbourhoods, improvements to the teaching of foreign students, etc.).

To promote the political representation and participation of migrants:

- ➔ **at local level**, while waiting for a legislative reform that will favour naturalization and voting rights, migrants should be considered as real citizens through the development and promotion of civic practices in which they could be actively involved (interaction in the neighbourhoods, relations with Italian schools, etc.) or through their involvement in other civic practices (involvement in civil defence, in voluntary organizations, in blood donations, etc.). The participation in civic practices could benefit them, e.g. allowing them to obtain a long resident permit more quickly. A sort of “citizenship from below” should be promoted, based on the consideration that citizenship is not only something which is granted from above but which should also be actively constructed from below, through the actions and participation of people within the public domain. Their civic responsibility as citizens should be promoted through their involvement in these local activities.
- ➔ Their participation within immigrant associations should also be promoted. These associations should be recognised institutionally and should interact directly with Italian institutions, becoming a way for immigrants to take part in the governance of immigration issues, above all at local level. The democratically elected leaders of these associations should become key-interlocutors with Italian institutions.

## Methodology

An analysis was made of secondary sources (newspaper articles, official documents, parliamentary documents, texts of local policies of exclusion, declarations of mayors, judgments of the courts) and of data collected during the fieldwork.

The fieldwork consists of:

- **interviews** (n = 15).

They were conducted between October 2011 and January 2012 in the metropolitan areas of Milan and Brescia (two provinces in the Lombardy region).

Interviews were conducted with 4 lawyers, 4 members of trade unions, 4 members of no-profit associations, a member of the opposition within a municipality, a Regional Councillor of the Northern League Party in Lombardy and finally a City Councillor of the previous administration in Milan (centre-right).

## Project Identity

<b>Acronym:</b>	ACCEPT PLURALISM
<b>Title:</b>	Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe
<b>Short Description:</b>	<p>ACCEPT PLURALISM questions how much cultural diversity can be accommodated within liberal and secular democracies in Europe. The notions of tolerance, acceptance, respect and recognition are central to the project. ACCEPT PLURALISM looks at both native and immigrant minority groups.</p> <p>Through comparative, theoretical and empirical analysis the project studies individuals, groups or practices for whom tolerance is sought but which we should not tolerate; of which we disapprove but which should be tolerated; and for which we ask to go beyond toleration and achieve respect and recognition.</p> <p>In particular, we investigate when, what and who is being not tolerated / tolerated / respected in 15 European countries; why this is happening in each case; the reasons that different social actors put forward for not tolerating / tolerating / respecting specific minority groups/individuals and specific practices.</p> <p>The project analyses practices, policies and institutions, and produces key messages for policy makers with a view to making European societies more respectful towards diversity.</p>
<b>Website:</b>	<a href="http://www.accept-pluralism.eu">www.accept-pluralism.eu</a>
<b>Duration:</b>	March 2010-May 2013 (39 months)
<b>Funding Scheme:</b>	Small and medium-scale collaborative project
<b>EU contribution:</b>	2,600,230 Euro
<b>Consortium:</b>	17 partners (15 countries)
<b>Coordinator:</b>	European University Institute (Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies)
<b>Person Responsible:</b>	Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou
<b>EC officer:</b>	Ms Louisa Anastopoulou, Project Officer