

The Effect of Migration Policies on Immigration Flows. The Cases of France, Germany, Hungary, and Italy

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Abstract

The aim of this essay is to investigate whether migration policies adopted by recipient countries have the power to limit or stop unwanted immigration flows – and, if so, to what extent.

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My hypothesis is that, while restrictive migration policies may be effective in limiting economic migration, they fail to produce the desired effect on humanitarian migration. This is due to two main factors: first, states cannot violate international standards aimed at protecting asylum seekers' and refugees' human rights; second, these categories of migrants are more motivated and harder to disincentivize than economic migrants.

In order to answer my research question, I will conduct a quantitative analysis based on the available data on international migration in the period between 2011 and 2018, particularly focusing on four case-studies within the EU, namely France, Germany, Hungary, and Italy.

The first chapter presents part of the existing literature on the subject and introduces the most relevant databases aimed at classifying immigration policies.

The second chapter assesses policy changes that occurred in France, Germany, Hungary, and Italy in the analyzed period.

The third and last chapter shows immigration trends between 2011 and 2018 and presents the quantitative analysis outcomes, which largely confirm my initial hypothesis.

Keywords: migration, policies, EU, border control, quantitative analysis.

Executive summary

La crisi migratoria europea, iniziata nel 2011 ed esplosa nel 2015, è ancora al centro del dibattito nazionale e internazionale contemporaneo. Ogni stato membro dell'Unione Europea, e in particolare quelli il cui territorio si trova alle frontiere d'Europa, considera i flussi migratori come un problema da gestire e tenere sotto controllo, affinché non abbia la possibilità di perturbare lo stile di vita, i "valori" e le istituzioni che contraddistinguono l'UE. Per questo motivo, le politiche migratorie adottate dall'Unione e da gran parte dei suoi Stati membri sono caratterizzate da un approccio basato sulla sicurezza, il cui obiettivo è quello di limitare il numero di arrivi via terra e via mare e di rimpatriare i migranti irregolari che, negli ultimi anni, hanno avuto accesso al territorio europeo.

Lo scopo di questo saggio è capire se i cambiamenti politici messi in atto da alcuni stati membri dell'UE, dal 2011 ad oggi, abbiano causato la diminuzione dei flussi migratori in entrata e, più in generale, se le politiche migratorie restrittive adottate dai paesi di arrivo abbiano realmente il potere di influenzare, limitare o, addirittura, arrestare le immigrazioni.

L'ipotesi alla base di questo elaborato è che le politiche migratorie di tipo restrittivo possano essere in grado di ridurre il numero di arrivi, soprattutto se sono attuate attraverso

un severo controllo delle frontiere e accordi bilaterali con paesi terzi, ma non possano sradicare completamente i flussi migratori e la “migrazione illegale” in quanto tale. Al contrario, politiche di questo tipo potrebbero causare l’aumento dell’utilizzo di mezzi di ingresso illegali, quali, ad esempio, il traffico e la tratta di esseri umani.

Si osserva infatti che, nonostante le politiche adottate dai paesi di destinazione, le persone che nei paesi di origine vivono in condizioni di estrema povertà o la cui vita è a rischio – per motivi politici, religiosi, etnici o culturali – cercano tuttora di migrare in luoghi sicuri, in cui abbiano la possibilità di trovare salvezza e migliorare le proprie condizioni di vita. Questa categoria di migranti e richiedenti asilo è infatti costituita da individui molto spesso disperati, pronti ad affrontare ogni tipo di difficoltà per sfuggire alla situazione cui sono sottoposti nei paesi di provenienza.

D’altra parte, le politiche migratorie restrittive potrebbero avere più successo nell’arrestare la cosiddetta “migrazione economica”, che coinvolge persone che desiderano aumentare il proprio reddito e cercare migliori opportunità di lavoro all’estero, ma la cui esistenza non risulterebbe irrimediabilmente danneggiata se fossero costrette a rimanere nel proprio paese di origine.

In ultima analisi, si ritiene che i flussi migratori siano influenzati principalmente da aspetti economici, personali e politici; ciò non implica che le politiche migratorie adottate dai paesi di destinazione non abbiano alcun effetto sui flussi in entrata; piuttosto suggerisce che tale effetto non ha la portata prevista o desiderata dai decisori politici. Infatti, uno strumento politico o legislativo teso a limitare o sradicare il fenomeno migratorio potrebbe passare in secondo piano rispetto ad altri fattori più rilevanti e, di conseguenza, non essere in grado di produrre i risultati per i quali è stato introdotto.

Per rispondere alla domanda di ricerca, si è scelto di condurre un’analisi quantitativa. Il primo capitolo è dedicato a un esame della letteratura internazionale riguardante l’efficacia delle politiche migratorie restrittive sulla limitazione dei flussi in entrata; descrive inoltre i più interessanti database che classificano le politiche migratorie.

Il secondo capitolo esamina i cambiamenti politici avvenuti in Francia, Germania, Ungheria e Italia nel periodo compreso tra il 2011 e il 2018, durante il quale si è verificata (e continua a verificarsi) la crisi migratoria europea. Sulla base di tali considerazioni, è stato attribuito un valore numerico ai cambiamenti politici, con l’obiettivo di elaborare l’indice necessario a condurre l’analisi quantitativa.

L’ultimo capitolo presenta l’analisi quantitativa basata sui dati disponibili in merito alle migrazioni internazionali. In particolare, per ogni paese analizzato, vengono considerati il numero di arrivi annuali (variabile dipendente), e gli indici delle politiche per i richiedenti asilo/rifugiati e per i migranti economici, nonché il numero

di rifugiati, il PIL pro capite nel paese di destinazione e la spesa sociale dei governi (variabili indipendenti).

Le conclusioni basate sull'analisi quantitativa confermano in larga parte l'ipotesi iniziale. Tuttavia, è importante sottolineare che i dati disponibili non sono sufficienti per ottenere risposte totalmente affidabili. Ad ogni modo, i risultati ottenuti potrebbero costituire un buon punto di partenza per modelli più sofisticati, che dovrebbero includere variabili quali, ad esempio, il PIL dei paesi di origine, i conflitti, le catastrofi naturali, la vicinanza geografica e la presenza di concittadini nel paese di destinazione.

Introduction

The European migration crisis, which started in 2011 and exploded in 2015, is still at the center of the contemporary international debate. The EU member states, and particularly those on the European borders, considers the flow of immigration as a problem to be kept under control, in order for it not to disrupt the European way of life, 'values', and institutions. For this reason, the migratory policies adopted by the EU and the majority of its member states are characterized by a security-based approach, whose aim is to limit the number of arrivals by land and sea and to repatriate the irregular migrants who have entered the EU territory throughout the past few years.

The aim of this essay is to understand whether policy changes occurred in the recent years influenced the decrease in arrivals and, more generally, whether restrictive migration policies adopted by receiving countries truly have the power to affect, limit or even stop immigration flows.

My hypothesis is that restrictive migration policies may be capable of reducing the number of arrivals but cannot completely eradicate incoming flows and 'illegal migration' as such. On the contrary, this kind of policy may cause an increase in the use of illegal means of entrance (trafficking, smuggling, etc.).

As a matter of fact, in spite of the policies adopted by receiving countries, extremely poor migrants and asylum seekers still try to enter countries where they could be safe and find better living conditions. Indeed, people belonging to these categories of migrants are very often desperate and ready to face any difficulty in order to escape from the situation they are experiencing in their countries of origin.

On the other hand, the same policies may be more successful in stopping the so-called 'economic migration', which involves people hoping to increase their income by finding better job opportunities abroad, but who would survive even if they had to remain in their home-countries. Overall, I expect migration flows to be mostly shaped by economic,

personal and political aspects; this does not entail that immigration policies have no effect on the arrivals, but that this effect may not be as strong as expected or desired by policy makers. Indeed, it may be overcome by other, more relevant factors and may not be able to produce all the desired outcomes.

In order to answer my research question, in the first chapter I will present the international literature concerning the effectiveness of restrictive migration policies, and I will examine the most important databases that classify migratory policies.

In the second chapter, I will consider policy changes that occurred in France, Germany, Hungary, and Italy in the period 2011-2018. On the basis of these considerations, I will attribute a numerical value to policy changes in order to build an index to be used in the quantitative analysis.

In the last chapter, I will perform a quantitative analysis based on the available data on international migration.

1. Immigration policies analysis: definition, limits, and methodology

The question of how migration policies affect migration has been addressed in various scientific, academic and political debates all over the world. The correlation between policies and flows assumes that migration does not depend exclusively on economic differentials between two or more countries but also on the immigration policies adopted and the border controls exercised by the countries of destination.

1.1. Can governments control unwanted immigration?

The results of the research on this subject have not always been unanimous. In fact, on the one hand, various studies show that the states' power in controlling migration is limited for two reasons. First that the main drivers for migration are structural factors (Cornelius, Salehyan, 2007) such as market functioning and wage imbalances, which continue to exist independently from the policies adopted by receiving countries and, therefore, exercise their push (or pull)¹ towards movement (Mayda, 2010²; Thielemann, 2004)³. Moreover, such movement can also take place through illegal means, and for this reason

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1. The 'push-pull model' assumes that there are factors in the country of origin that push a person to move elsewhere, and factors in the country of destination that pull a person towards moving to that place rather than another.
 2. The author adopts slightly different perspectives in her works of 2006 and 2010, depending on the focus of the analysis.
 3. The models set out by Mayda and Thielemann, even if aimed at demonstrating different theories, are

it is not automatically undermined by restrictive policies and border control (Cornelius, Salehyan, 2007).

The second reason is that states have little power in enforcing restrictive measures, both because of their duty to protect human rights, prescribed by international law and treaties (Mayda, 2010)⁴, and because of the absence of efficient means of eradicating immigration flows at source.

Nevertheless, this view is not unanimously embraced by scholars; in fact, some experts argue that migration policies are proficient in limiting and controlling immigration flows (Mayda, Patel, 2006)⁵, also thanks to the levels of sophistication in border control strategies achieved in recent years.

The fact that the conclusions drawn by the researchers have often been contradictory has raised some doubts about the consistency of these studies. The first problem lies in the need to find a unanimous definition of immigration policies. Mathias Czaika and Hein De Haas analyze this concept with the aim of understanding whether the results obtained by previous researchers were actually contradictory or rather potentially complementary (Czaika, De Haas, 2013).

In their view, even though migration policies are broadly defined as “*policies [...] established in order to affect behavior of a target population (i.e., potential migrants) in an intended direction*” (ibid, 489), many policies that are not strictly related to migration have considerable effect on incoming flows (in terms of labor market, welfare, AIDS, macroeconomics, etc.). For this reason, the authors argue, it is not always possible to disentangle the outcomes generated on immigration by policies explicitly aimed at affecting the arrivals and those generated by policies meant to affect other aspects of a country’s administration.

Starting from this assumption, Czaika and De Haas define international migration policies as “*rules (i.e., laws, regulations, and measures) that national states define and implement with the (often only implicitly stated) objective of affecting the volume, origin, direction, and internal composition of immigration flows*” (ibid). Among these measures those designed to encourage high-

not mutually exclusive, but seem to be roughly aligned in arguing that migration policies can produce some non-negligible effects, which, however, are outweighed by those produced by economic, personal and cultural factors.

4. “Even countries with binding official immigration quotas often accept unwanted (legal) immigration. [...] Family reunification and asylum-seekers policies can explain continuing migration inflows to Western Europe” (Mayda, 2010, 1251).
5. In their work of 2006, Mayda and Patel assume that the hosting countries’ migration policies played an important role in shaping international migration flows in the last decades of the 20th century; indeed, the number of registered migrants was quite low compared to the number of people wanting to move.

ly-skilled migration and discourage low-skilled or unproductive migration are particularly important.

1.2. How to assess migration policies: efficacy, discursive and implementation gap

Another important definition is that of ‘policy effectiveness’; Czaika and De Haas make a distinction between the terms ‘effectiveness’ and ‘effect’ and state that “*the former is linked to a desired effect and the latter to the actual effect. [...] In other words, a policy may have an effect, but this effect may be judged too small to meet the stated political objective or may even be in the opposite direction to the intended effect*” (ibid, 491); this discrepancy is defined as an efficacy gap.

Moreover, we cannot assume that political rhetoric and political objectives perfectly coincide. The gap between spoken and unspoken goals and practices is named *discursive gap*.

Furthermore, “*the extent to which written policies are implemented varies widely [...]. Although politicians often pay lip service to restrictive aims and introduce robust measures against irregular immigration, governments do not always provide the resources to implement these policies fully*” (ibid, 494); this discrepancy is called implementation gap.

Overall, Czaika and De Haas conclude that, “*although policies significantly affect migration outcomes, these effects seem to be limited compared to other migration determinants. Nevertheless, [...] the fact that migration is also influenced by other factors is not a reason to label the policy a failure*” (ibid, 504). In other words, even though the most important drivers for migration are mainly personal, political, and economic, it does not follow that a country’s policies have no role in shaping inflows and outflows.

1.3. Migration policy indexes

The absence of a homogeneous definition and classification of immigration policies causes problems to both qualitative and quantitative research. This is why, in the last ten to fifteen years, researchers have developed different types of indexes whose aim is to provide a common framework of analysis.

A study conducted by the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre (Scipioni, Urso, 2018) presents the existing indexes and databases and highlights their different characteristics and potentialities. In this essay, I will focus only on the DEMIG and IMPALA databases, which are characterized by a comprehensive approach and are mostly concerned with immigration rather than integration policies.

DEMIG analyzes policy changes in 45 countries in the period between 1945 and 2014. It was created with the goal to “*generate an improved understanding of the evolution of migration*

policies and to evaluate the effect of these policies on international migration” (De Haas et al, 2016, 5), but its scope is limited to written laws and policies, and it therefore disregards political rhetoric and implementation.

The database analyzes policy changes related to migration and assesses their degree of stringency; in particular, for each policy change, the authors “*assigned a code indicating whether the measure introduces a change in a more or less restrictive direction, compared to the preexisting policy framework*” (ibid, 7).

The policy measures are also analyzed using four main variables, that are 1) policy area (‘border and land control’, ‘legal entry and stay’, ‘integration and post-entry rights’, or ‘exit regulation’, ibid, 8); 2) policy tool (27 tools which allow “the instrument used to implement the measure” to be recoded, ibid); 3) migrant category; 4) geographic origin.

Overall, the trend in migration policies is highly differentiated depending on migrant categories and countries of origin and destination. According to the authors, specific restrictions on border control and irregular migrants “*seem to have limited effects on the number of migrants*”, but “*they have made these groups often more vulnerable*” (ibid, 29). Moreover, selection criteria have been introduced in order to incentivize specific targets and to discourage ‘less productive migrants’: “*more and more, migration policies aim at affecting the selection – rather than the volumes – of migrations*” (ibid, 30).

Moving on to the International Migration Law and Policy Analysis (IMPALA) database, its aim is “to classify and measure immigration policy by mapping ‘tracks of entry’ associated with economic migration, family reunification, asylum and humanitarian migration, and student migration, as well as acquisition of citizenship” (Beine, 2016, 828-829).

This system allows a comparison of migration policies and laws by country and year, and an assessment of the degree of restrictiveness with regard to “*particular aspects of migration and migration law*” (ibid, 829). The database aims to reduce the existing discrepancies and to unify the classification of policies. To do so, the system employs ‘entry tracks’, which “*are distinguished on the basis of the purpose of migration as well as on various characteristics of the applicant. In particular, tracks get identified for any situation where possible applicants receive distinct treatment in the law, based on any given characteristic of that applicant’s profile evoked in the wording of the law or regulation*” (ibid, 834).

According to the authors, the study “*has revealed substantial and politically important variation across countries, time, and tracks of admission*” (ibid, 857). Nevertheless, it is clear that there is a common pattern that translates into huge differences in the treatment of different socioeconomic groups, in particular between that of high-skilled and low-skilled workers.

2. Policy analysis: France, Italy, Hungary, and Germany

In order to understand the effectiveness of policies adopted by France, Italy, Hungary and Germany, I will analyze the changes each of these countries has made to its immigration policy. These countries were selected for their geo-political relevance. France and Germany have a long-standing tradition as recipient countries and are among the most common destinations for migrants, while Hungary and Italy are two of the frontline countries on the access routes to Europe and, therefore, have faced high numbers of arrivals in recent years.

I will use a common framework – based on DEMIG’s and IMPALA’s approaches – to assess the stringency of each country’s regulations, with the goal of building a meaningful quantitative (and comparative) analysis. The range of the index I will use goes from 1 (open migration policy) to 7 (restrictive migration policy).

2.1. The case of France

The French political approach towards migration has changed significantly in recent years, and likewise the ‘*Code de l’entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d’asile*’ has changed. Indeed, while France has always been a welcoming country for whoever is willing to adapt to French language and culture, it is now becoming less open to foreigners.

The most significant reforms adopted in the period analyzed are the following:

- December 31st, 2012, Law on detention for investigation of residence permit;
- July 29th, 2015, Reform on the asylum requests procedure, which shortens the processing time of the applications, therefore making repatriation procedures easier and faster;
- March 7th, 2016, Law on foreigners’ rights in France, aimed at easing integration for those who want to reside permanently in France;
- 2016, a ‘*passport talent*’ was introduced “with the aim of attracting skilled and highly qualified workers” (OECD, 2018);
- April 2018, Law on controlled immigration, aimed at easing the expulsion procedure and at disincentivizing illegal entry and streamlining asylum applications (definitively passed in August).

The latest turn of the screw in immigration control reflects the government’s desire to reduce unwanted immigration and stop illegal entries to the country, which may be

explained as a consequence of the high number of asylum applications – more than 100,000 – received in 2017, with an increase of 17% compared to 2016.

The law adopted in August reduces the processing time for asylum applications (also shortening the deadline for presenting the application after arrival in the country) and repatriation or expulsion. It also extends the reclusion period for migrants who are not granted refugee status. Moreover, it introduces a one-year imprisonment for people who enter French territory illegally. These measures are meant to discourage asylum applications and prevent migrants from entering the country illegally.

Based on the above consideration, I have classified the government's decisions by attributing numerical values to policy changes:

Tab. 1 Policy Index – France.

Year	Policy for asylum seekers	Policy for economic migrants
2011	4	2
2012	4	2
2013	5	3
2014	5	3
2015	5	4
2016	5	4
2017	5	4

2.2. The case of Italy

Italy was particularly affected by the migration crisis, being almost surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea, which connects the EU and the African borders. The increase in the number of arrivals has brought some changes to Italian immigration policy:

- 2013, the government introduced operation 'Mare nostrum', based on Search and Rescue (SAR) missions on the high seas, replaced one year later by the EU operation 'Triton', whose scope was limited to border control and management. 'Triton' – replaced by 'Themis' in February 2018 – was accompanied by operation 'Sophia', established in 2015, whose "*mandate ranges from analyzing smuggling routes to destroying smugglers' boats and training Libyan coastguards*" (Hermanin, 2017, 7);
- 2015, introduction of the hotspot system, aimed at identifying migrants and asylum seekers on their arrival, in order to stop them escaping to other EU member states before being registered in the place of first entry;
- February 2017, the Italian Minister of the Interior, Minniti, opened a dialogue with

Libya to prevent migrants from leaving the African coast. The dialogue eventually resulted in an official agreement with the government in Tripoli;

- August 2017, the Minniti-Orlando decree abolished one judicial level, thus making it harder for asylum seekers to appeal in case of denial;
- 2018, the newly-elected Italian government closed Italian ports to NGOs and, at the end of August, even to the Italian coastguard's boat 'Diciotti', in order to prevent the disembarkation of asylum seekers and migrants.

The policy changes described above show that Italy is pursuing the precise goal of reducing the number of arrivals, at least until the EU shows it has the concrete capacity to build a truly European system for immigration and asylum.

The following table shows the values I have attributed to the policy changes that occurred in Italy between 2011 and 2017:

Tab. 2 Policy Index – Italy.

Year	Policy for asylum seekers	Policy for economic migrants
2011	5	3
2012	5	3
2013	3	2
2014	4	3
2015	5	4
2016	5	4
2017	5	5

2.3. The case of Hungary

Hungary, under Orbán's presidency, was and still is the EU member state that has adopted the strictest approach towards immigration as well as being one of the countries refusing to comply with the burden-sharing logic that the European Union is attempting to apply.

The real restrictive turn of the screw on migration arrived during Orbán's third mandate⁶, starting in 2014. The most important changes occurred from 2015 on, when:

- In September, a 175 km-long wall was erected on the border between Hungary and Serbia in order to prevent migrants and asylum seekers from entering the country. In the same period, Serbia was declared a safe country by the Hungarian government;

6. He had already twice been Prime Minister, between 1998 and 2002 and between 2010 and 2014.

- On the 15th of September 2015, an amendment to the asylum package entered into force, establishing a non-state area between Hungary and Serbia. With this reform, asylum seekers had to submit their application to the Hungarian authorities in the transit zones;
- On the 22nd of September the Parliament passed a bill allowing the army to stay on the border alongside the police and to use non-deadly weapons;
- In October, the construction of the fence on the Hungarian-Croatian frontier was completed;
- In February 2017, a reform made it possible for the Hungarian police to deport immigrants found all over the country, not only the ones found in the transit zones;
- In June 2018, the Hungarian government passed the ‘Stop Soros’ law, which criminalizes any help provided by individuals or groups to illegal immigrants who claim asylum.

All of these measures had an effect on incoming flows, even though the Hungarian government was condemned by the European Court of Justice and is being investigated under an infringement procedure initiated by the European Commission.

However, Hungary is trying to attract skilled migrants; in fact, emigration has increased and there is need for qualified workers, even if the stringent border control makes it harder for people who still have to find a job to enter the country.

The following table shows the values I have attributed to the policy changes that occurred in Hungary between 2011 and 2017:

Tab. 3 Policy Index – Hungary.

Year	Policy for asylum seekers	Policy for economic migrants
2011	4	3
2012	4	3
2013	4	3
2014	4	3
2015	6	5
2016	7	6
2017	7	6

2.4. The case of Germany

Germany constitutes an exception compared to the other case-studies. Indeed, German legislation on migration and asylum cannot as a whole be considered stringent or restrictive, but it is rather characterized by selective measures, meant to attract certain categories of immigrants. The most meaningful changes are the following:

- 2012, Act to Implement the Highly Qualified Professional Directive of the EU;
- 2015, decision to suspend the Dublin III Regulation Provisions and to take in 1 million Syrian refugees;
- 2016, Integration Act, which sets out measures meant to ease the process of integration for those refugees who show they are willing to integrate into the German system and thus better able to settle in the country;
- August 17th, 2018, Reform proposal by the Minister of Interior Horst Seehofer aimed at attracting qualified workers and disincentivizing immigration that may weigh on the welfare system.

What emerges from the adopted policies is quite clear: Germany does not want to stop immigration but wants to decide on the types of migrants to take in. In order to favor highly-skilled immigration, the country continues to take measures which limit low-skilled migration.

The following table shows the values I have attributed to the policy changes that occurred in Germany between 2011 and 2017:

Tab. 4 Policy Index – Germany.

Year	Policy for asylum seekers	Policy for economic migrants
2011	4	2
2012	4	2
2013	4	2
2014	4	2
2015	2	1
2016	4	2
2017	4	2

3. Quantitative analysis

In this last chapter I will present a quantitative analysis, which will be useful in understanding the effect of policy changes on the shape and size of migration arrivals (the *efficacy gap*). The analysis will also enable me to identify other factors – such as economic indicators, wars, famine, droughts and natural disasters – which may have been equally or more important in altering immigration trends. I will also analyze whether the causal relationship between policy changes and arrivals can be inverted, that is, whether restrictive modifications in policies can be explained as the result of a peak in incoming flows.

3.1. Methodology

The quantitative analysis is based on data provided by Eurostat, UNHCR operational portal, IOM migration data portal, OECD Statistics and OECD International Migration Statistics, as well as by the official websites of each country's Ministry of the Interior. Some information, such as social spending in 2017 and total arrivals in France in the same year, were not available and have therefore been estimated.

Most of the data on migration between 2011 and 2018 are on an annual basis, with the exception of the period between 2015 and 2018, for which data on monthly arrivals in Germany, Hungary and Italy are available. Moving on from the data, I will investigate whether there was a change in the number of arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers in the areas concerned and whether this change can be explained in the light of policy modifications.

In order to understand if a relation between policies and arrivals exists, and if it is statistically significant, I have assessed the changes that occurred in each country within two main sets of policies – namely those on asylum seekers/refugees and those on economic migrants – by employing a scale from 1 (open migratory policy) to 7 (restrictive migratory policy)⁷. The index is an ordinal one and it is characterized by a certain degree of discretion; both these elements may undermine the outcomes of the quantitative analysis. However, no better solution to assess migratory policies has been found.

3.2. Immigration trends in the EU between 2011 and 2018

In the period between 2011 and 2018 – particularly from 2015 on – the EU was destabilized by the so-called migration crisis. This phenomenon, mainly caused by the Arab Spring, the explosion of the Syrian civil war, and the lack of a unified government in Libya after Gaddafi's death, mostly affected the countries on the EU border and those

7. See Chapter 2, above.

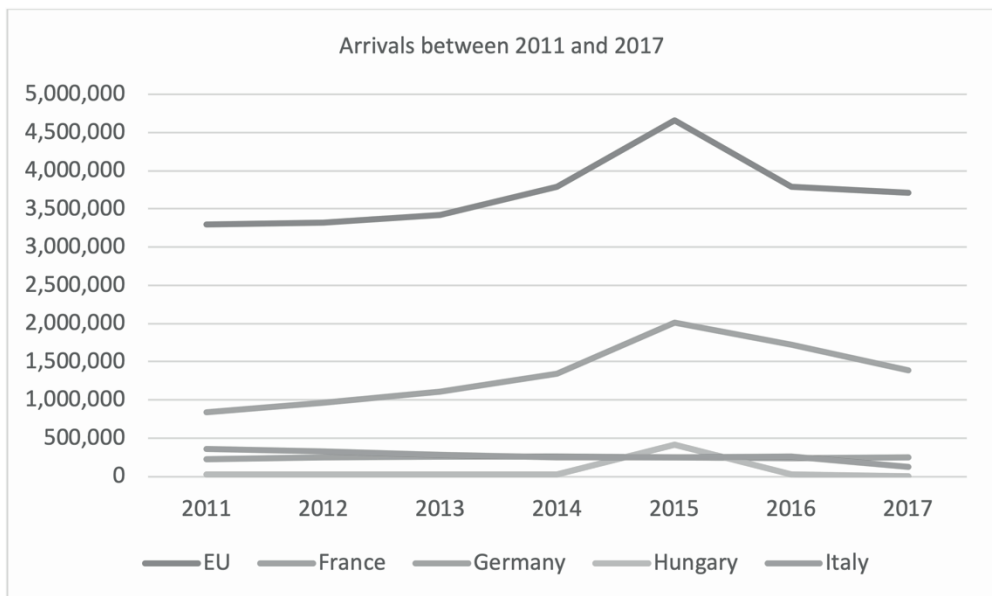
with a tradition as recipient states.

The total arrivals in the EU gradually increased between 2011 and 2014, but they peaked in 2015 when, according to IOM figures, a total number of 1,046,599 people arrived in Europe, of whom 1,011,712 came by sea and 34,887 by land. The biggest surge in incoming migration per month occurred in October of the same year, with 222,454 (UNHCR, 2018a) registered arrivals by sea.

In the following years, the EU experienced a decline in arrivals, which, however, did not correspond to a severe decline in deaths during their journeys. In fact, people missing at sea in 2015 were 3,770, compared to 5,143 in 2016 and 3,116 in 2017 (IOM, 2018a). Furthermore, if we consider the number of deportation orders issued by EU countries in each year – 286,730 in 2015; 305,460 in 2016; 279,220 in 2017 (Statista, 2018a) – and the number of migrants deported – 175,170 in 2015; 175,380 in 2016; 151,400 in 2017 (Statista, 2018b) – it is clear that the EU and its member states lack enforcement capacity.

As Figure 1 shows, after the 2015 peak there was a general decrease in the number of arrivals, with the exception of in Italy and France.

Fig. 1 Immigration trends in the EU in 2011-2017.



In terms of absolute numbers of arrivals per year (Table 5), the EU saw a huge increase in incoming flows in 2015, as did Hungary and Germany. It is not the same for France and Italy. In 2017, the total arrivals decreased in every considered area, France excluded.

Table 5. Arrivals in the EU, France, Germany, Hungary and Italy in 2011-2017.

Year/Place	EU	France	Germany	Hungary	Italy
2011	3,292,461	228,100	841,695	22,500	354,300
2012	3,319,296	247,000	965,908	20,300	321,300
2013	3,416,826	256,500	1,108,068	21,300	279,000
2014	3,787,809	255,700	1,342,529	26,000	248,400
2015	4,659,324	252,600	2,016,241	411,515	250,500
2016	3,787,809	240,900	1,719,075	19,221	262,900
2017	3,710,588	246,800	1,381,439	1,626	119,247

Anyway, if we consider the arrivals in relative terms (Table 6), we notice that Hungary was particularly affected by the 2015 peak: in that year, it registered an increase in incoming flows of 1482.75%, followed by Germany (+50.18%), the EU in its entirety (+23.01%), and Italy (+0.85%).

Tab. 6 Arrival trends (percentage) in the EU, France, Germany, Hungary and Italy.

Year/Place	EU	France	Germany	Hungary	Italy
2011	-	-	-	-	-
2012	+0.82%	+8.29%	+14.76%	-9.78%	-9.31%
2013	+2.94%	+3.85%	+14.72%	+4.93%	-13.17%
2014	+10.86%	-0.31%	+21.16%	+22.07%	-10.97%
2015	+23.01%	-1.21%	+50.18%	+1482.75%	+0.85%
2016	-18.70%	-4.63%	-14.74%	-95.33%	+4.95%
2017	-2.04%	+2.45%	-19.64%	-91.54%	-54.64%

On the other hand, Italy experienced particularly high numbers in terms of arrivals by sea, which decreased significantly only in 2018.

Tab. 7 Arrivals by sea in Italy between 2014 and 2018.

Year	Arrivals in Italy
2014	170,100
2015	153,842
2016	181,436
2017	119,247
2018 (up to August)	20,001

3.3. Analysis of the general model

Based on the data presented above, Figure 2 shows minimum values, maximum values, median, first and third quartiles, and outliers for each meaningful variable, while Figure 3 presents density and distribution for arrivals. The outliers can be explained as a fluctuation in a real phenomenon, caused by contingent modifications during a seven-year period.

Fig. 2 Model description.

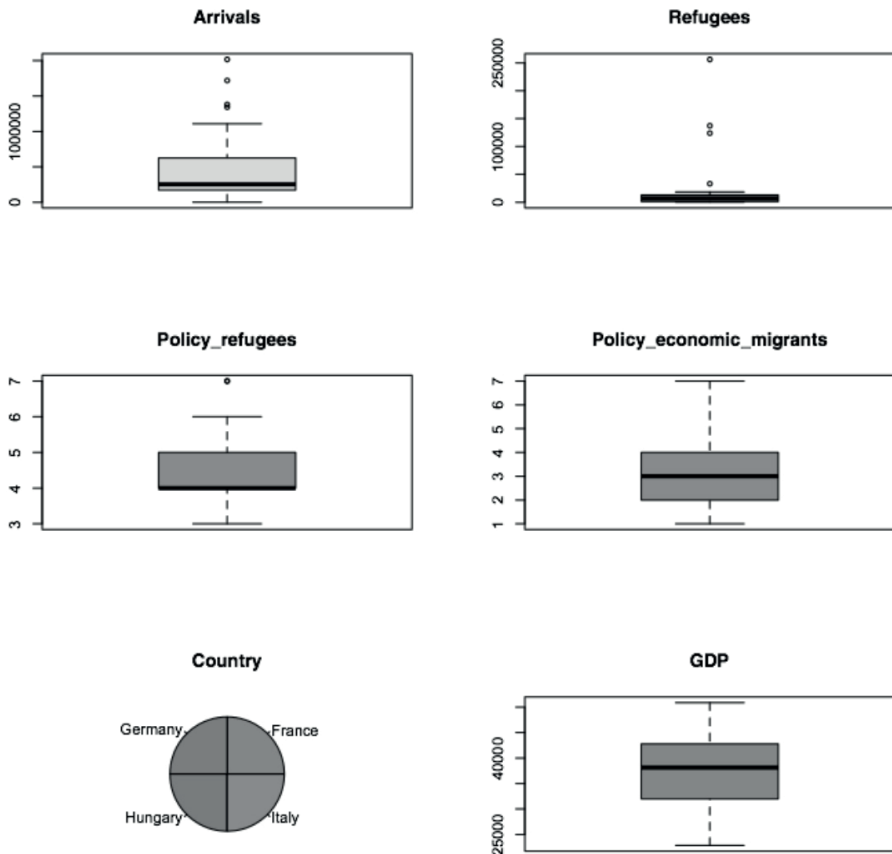


Fig. 3 Model description.

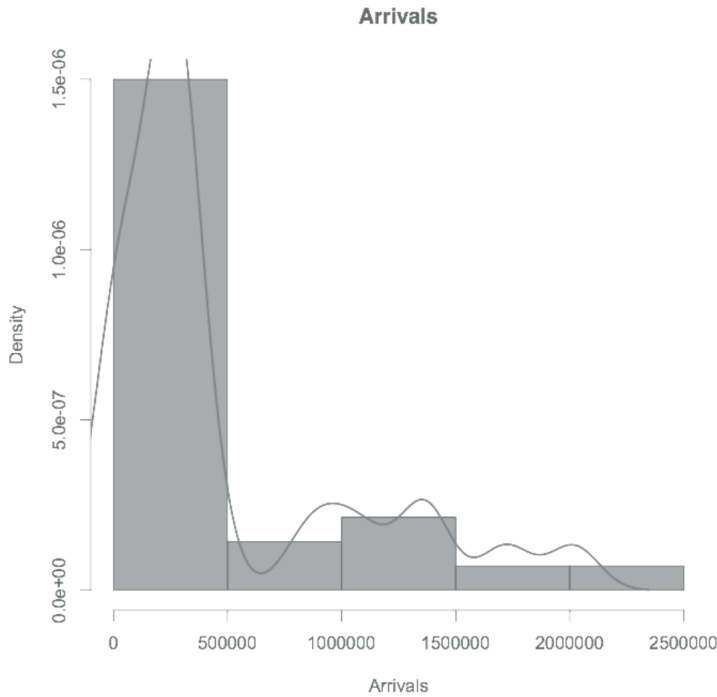


Table 8 shows a regression including the dependent variable arrivals and the basic independent variables policy for asylum seekers/refugees and policy for economic migrants. In this model, the goodness of fit (R^2) is quite low, but the resulting effects are significant:

Tab. 8 Basic model. N: 28. R2: 0.4902, Adjusted R2: 0.4494

Independent variables	Coefficient
Intercept	-39237
Policy for asylum seekers/refugees	477382*
Policy for economic migrants	-528348***

p-value < 0.001 '***'; 0.01 '**'; 0.05 '*'; 0.1 '.'

There is a significant and positive relation between policy for asylum seekers/refugees and arrivals, and a significant and negative relation between policy for economic migrants and arrivals.

This positive relation seems to suggest that the higher the restrictiveness in policies for refugees and asylum seekers, the higher the immigration rate. However, in this case, the causal relation is inverted: the migratory crisis was followed by policy changes aimed at reducing incoming flows. For this reason, when the immigration rate grows, policies for asylum seekers and refugees (highly represented during the recent migration crisis) become more stringent in an attempt to stop or reduce the number of arrivals.

This trend is also confirmed by the OECD International Migration Outlook 2018, which states that the latest revisions adopted by many EU member states can be considered as “*a delayed response to the 2015-2016 migration crisis*” (OECD, 2018, 56). Three main fields of intervention can be highlighted: “*efforts to speed up decision making through more streamlined procedures; to reinforce existing systems by exercising greater control on entry and stay; and to adjust conditions for claimants according to the status they have received and ensure protection while maintaining system integrity*” (ibid).

This relation could also be explained as an unintended consequence of stringent immigration policies: as the adopted policies become more restrictive, migrants manage to find other entry tracks – often illegal – and, therefore, flows do not register a meaningful decrease.

Overall, this relation confirms my initial hypothesis: policy changes are not able to stop or considerably reduce the number of asylum seekers entering a recipient country, also because international law sets the standards for this form of migration. It also confirms that countries tend to adopt more restrictive policies when the number of arrivals increases, despite the fact that – in most cases – these policies are not capable of producing the desired effect.

On the other hand, the negative relation between policy for economic migrants and arrivals indicates that the higher the stringency of policies for this category of migrants, the lower the total number of arrivals. My initial hypothesis is also confirmed by this outcome: adopted policies can be effective in limiting the number of economic migrants. In particular, such policies allow host countries to select the categories of economic immigrants they prefer (usually highly skilled workers are more valued than low-skilled workers).

However, even if the relations are significant and confirm my initial hypothesis, this model only partially explains the phenomenon. In order to obtain more accurate results, it is necessary to introduce some control variables to the model.

3.4. Adding control variables to the basic regression model

The two models which better explain the relation between policies and flows, based on R^2 and Akaike criterion's values, are those that consider:

1. Arrivals (dependent variable) – Countries, year, policy for asylum seekers/refugees, policy for economic migrants, GDP per capita, governments' social spending (independent variables);
2. Arrivals (dependent variable) – Refugees, policy for asylum seekers/refugees, policy for economic migrants, GDP per capita, governments' social spending (independent variables).

The following tables present the outcomes of the regressions:

Tab. 9 Model 2. N: 28. R^2 : 0.9553, Adjusted R^2 : 0.9364

Independent variables	Coefficient
Intercept	-5.029e+07
Countries – Germany	6.943e+05*
Countries – Italy	5.514e+05*
Countries – Hungary	1.691e+06 .
Year	2.323e+04
Policy for economic migrants	-3.230e+05**
Policy for asylum seekers/refugees	2.736e+05**
GDP per capita	4.558e+01
Governments' social spending	1.341e+02

p-value < 0.001 '***'; 0.01 '**'; 0.05 '*'; 0.1 '.'

Tab. 10 Model 3. N: 28. R^2 : 0.9368, Adjusted R^2 : 0.9225

Independent variables	Arrivals
Intercept	-1.049e+06***
Refugees	2.628e+00**
Policy for economic migrants	-2.487e+05***
Policy for asylum seekers/refugees	2.131e+05**
GDP per capita	7.674e+01***
Governments' social spending	-1.600e+02***

p-value < 0.001 '***'; 0.01 '**'; 0.05 '*'; 0.1 '.'

Table 9 shows that there is a positive relation between policy for asylum seekers/refugees and arrivals, and that there is a negative relation between policy for economic migrants and arrivals. The same outcome, already obtained in the first regression, is also confirmed by the model shown in Table 10.

In addition, Table 10 suggests that the higher the number of refugees accepted into a country, the higher the overall arrivals : accepted applications correspond to a higher number of people legally residing in the territory of a country and to a lower rejection rate.

Moreover, between arrivals and GDP per capita there is a positive relation: migrants are attracted by countries where they have the chance to earn more and to find better job opportunities.

Lastly, governments' social spending and arrivals are negatively related, which means that the higher the social spending, the lower the number of arrivals. This outcome may be interpreted as a spurious relation: there might be a third variable not considered in the model that better explains the phenomenon, such as geographic proximity. For example, Italy and Hungary have lower social spending per capita than France and Germany, but are border countries, therefore easier to reach for extra-European immigrants.

Overall, the regressions confirm the initial hypothesis: policies have a limited role in affecting humanitarian flows, but they have a major impact on economic immigration.

3.5. Migration flows over time: monthly arrivals in Italy, Hungary and Germany

In this section I will display a graph showing migration flows over time, on the basis of the monthly data available on arrivals into Italy, Hungary and Germany in the period between January 2015 and August 2018.

This analysis does not provide any information on the effects of policy changes on arrivals, but it may be useful in understanding the general tendency. Indeed, as the graph below shows (Figure 4, where 1 on the x-axis stands for Jan-2015), migratory flows tend to be more numerous during spring and summer (when the weather is good), but they generally decline during late autumn and winter. This is particularly true for Italy, where migrants arrive by sea and, therefore, face fewer risks when travelling during the summer.

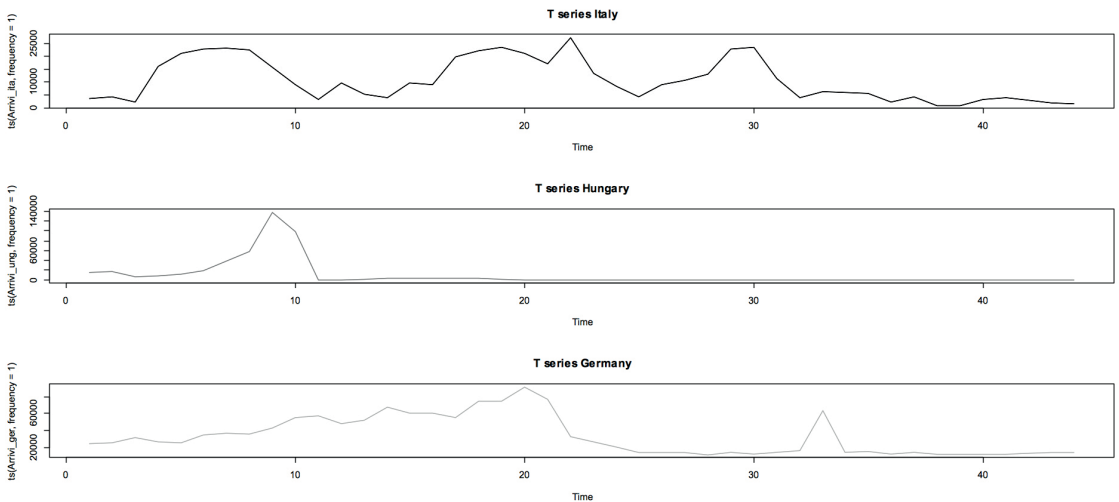
The decrease in arrivals in 2018 may be considered a consequence of external circumstances – particularly the role of the Libyan coastguard in managing the Mediterranean route and the abandonment of the Mediterranean Sea by some NGOs because of the

legal and political conflicts they had with national governments.

Furthermore, the peak arrivals registered in September 2015 in Hungary and the continuous rise in applications received by Germany in 2015 and 2016 may be explained by political instability in migrants' countries of origin (in particular for people from Syria).

The general trend shows that external factors often have a fundamental role in shaping migration: the whole phenomenon cannot be explained merely as the result of migratory policies adopted by receiving countries.

Fig. 4 Migratory flows over time. Italy, Hungary and Germany (2015-2018).



Conclusion

The aim of this work was to consider the European migration crisis and to address the question of whether restrictive migratory policies are effective in limiting or stopping immigration flows (*efficacy gap*).

My hypothesis was that migration policies have wider effects in limiting economic flows than in reducing humanitarian immigration. This is mainly due to two reasons: first, humanitarian migration is regulated by international law, which sets standards that can hardly be violated without legal consequences; second, humanitarian migrants are more motivated to find a way to enter a third country compared to economic migrants and, therefore, are more likely to find alternative solutions.

In the first chapter I presented different perspectives on the issue (Anna Maria Mayda and Krishna Patel, 2006; Anna Maria Mayda, 2010; Eiko Thielemann, 2004; Wayne Cornelius and Idean Salehyan, 2007). I then defined what migration policies are (Mathias Czaika and Hein De Haas, 2013) and I introduced the most important existing databases (DEMIG and IMPALA).

In the second chapter I explained the policy changes that occurred in France, Italy, Hungary and Germany between 2011 and 2018. Based on this description, I attributed a value ranging from 1 to 7 to each country for each given period. In doing so, I used data from the OECD International Migration Outlook 2018.

Finally, in the last chapter I displayed the most relevant available data on migration in the EU and in the four analyzed countries between 2011 and 2018, and then I showed the quantitative analysis, whose outcomes largely confirmed my initial hypothesis: national policies are more effective in affecting economic rather than humanitarian immigration. Furthermore, policies meant to reduce the presence of asylum seekers in a particular country became more restrictive as the number of arrivals increased, without producing the intended results.

However, the available data were not enough and not sufficiently homogeneous to obtain totally reliable outcomes. Nevertheless, this analysis could be a good place to start for more sophisticated models, which should include such variables as countries of origin's GDP, conflicts, natural disasters, geographic proximity and the presence of common nationals in the country of destination.

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