

Local practices of integration and local networks.

The case of Fermignano

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1. Introduction

1.1 Historical development of immigration in Italy

Italy has long been a country with high emigration rates, with migration flows towards northern European countries and other continents. Since the 1970s, the net migration rate has become increasingly positive, with inflows exceeding outflows. However, at a political and policy level, Italy continued to self-represent itself as a “migrant-sending” country, with minimal regulation of incoming migration: a key issue in the experience of migrants to Italy, who are not rarely pushed into an irregular or precarious status that heavily affects their lives, precluding access to rights, services and benefits and exposing them to labour exploitation and other forms of socio-economic inequality (Ambrosini 2018; Gargiulo 2021).

Immigration to Italy is primarily a labour migration, especially up to the 2000s, this migration flow later diverted due to stop policies implemented in major European destinations and attracted by specific pull factors in the Italian labour market, with characteristics that place it within a “Mediterranean” model (King 2000): a high share of undocumented residents and employment in the unskilled, precarious and informal labour market, especially in agriculture and services, including family welfare. However, Italy is at a more advanced stage of the migration transition (Baldwin-Edwards 2012) than other southern European countries, as immigrants are also employed in small industrial enterprises, because of Italy's manufacturing orientation. Nevertheless, the economic crisis of 2007-2008 affected the employment of immigrants extensively, widening the gap between natives and immigrants, who ended up in poverty and material deprivation: as an army of backup workers immigrants were the first to be expelled from the labour market and standard jobs (Mezzadra, Neilson 2013; Barberis 2018).

Due to its geographical position in the centre of the Mediterranean as the “gateway to Europe”, Italy also constitutes a major landing and transit country for asylum seekers, who mainly arrive from the Libyan route, fleeing wars, political crises, environmental degradation and resource depletion (Hasselberg 2013; Ambrosini 2018). In general, the number of new permits issued every year has been decreasing in the long run: 2017-2018 apart, the decrease started in 2010 and peaked in 2019 when new immigrants amounted to some 250.000 – 25% less than in 2018¹ – despite an enduring public discourse on a permanent emergency (Bigo 2007). Border crossings plunged between 2018 and 2020, mostly due to government restrictions. New flows are now active after the limitations related to the pandemic travel bans and considering the ongoing Russian-Ukraine war (2022).

Today, Italy has one of the largest numbers of immigrant residents in Europe, and it is at the forefront of some of the most meaningful social and institutional challenges regarding immigrant-related diversity (Barberis 2018). These challenges include social reception and incorporation of super-diversity (Vertovec 2007), along with the layering of diversified immigrant groups in terms of length and reason of stay, origin and migration path, as well as transformation of national identities up to the recognition of new and future citizens from immigrant backgrounds (Ambrosini *et al.* 2020).

According to ISMU² (2022), on 1st January 2021, the foreign residents in Italy amounted to 5.756.000 (including some 500.000 undocumented persons) – some 9.6% of the total population. For a richer picture of migration-related diversity, we shall also add an estimated 1,6 million naturalised Italian citizens.

Focusing on the spatial distribution of foreign residents, they live much more in Central and Northern Italy; 38% live in the 14 largest metropolitan areas. Just under half of the non-EU citizens live in cities or densely populated areas, about 41% in small towns and suburbs and a little over a tenth in rural or sparsely populated areas: the spatial distribution depends on the housing and labour markets (ISTAT 2020). Currently, the foreign population in Italy is decidedly younger than the Italian one: the mean age is 35 compared to 46; resident foreign minors are some 1 million, i.e. 20% of foreign residents, compared to 15.1% of the Italian population.

The largest groups of foreign residents are citizens of Romania (21% of foreign residents), Albania and Morocco (some 8% each), China (6,4%) and Ukraine (4,5%). Migration to Italy is quite balanced regarding gender, as 51,2% are women (ISTAT 2020). Among the largest national groups, fe-

¹ Elaboration of Eurostat, *Immigration by age and sex 1990-2020*, indicator MIGR_IMM8.

² Independent scientific body analysing migration in Lombardy, Italy and Europe.

male migration is more prevalent among Central and Eastern Europeans (Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Poland), while older national groups, such as those from Albania, Morocco and China, are more gender-balanced, due to reunifications and family-driven migration. National groups with predominantly male migration are those from India, Bangladesh, Egypt, Pakistan, Nigeria and Senegal – which also include relevant shares of recent flows.

About 63% of all permits are long-term: this means that there is a high share of long-term residents, in fact the permit can be issued after 5 years of permanent stay only if the applicant passes an Italian language test and earns a sufficient income. The permit is not subject to renewal, so it is an important step toward a stable position in Italy. Other permits are issued mainly for family (48.6%) and work reasons (41.6%), while in recent years, the share of protection and asylum permits has clearly increased.

1.2 Local case: development of immigration in Fermignano

Fermignano is a small town with about 8243 inhabitants (2022), located in the province of Pesaro and Urbino in the Marche region in Central Italy. The Marche Region is characterised by a relevant presence of foreign population: as of the 1st of January 2022, foreign residents sum up to 127,606, representing 8,6% of the total population (in line with the national share of 8,8%).³

As for the municipality of Fermignano, according to official statistical data, it counts 833 foreign residents (2022), i.e. some 10% of the resident population. Although this share is higher than the regional and national one, it has decreased in recent years for two main reasons: the general shrinking of the local population and the naturalisation of long-term residents.

Ten years ago, in 2012, Fermignano had 8646 residents (a loss of 0.5% per year has been recorded), 1246 of which were foreigners (14%). In the period 2016-2020, almost 8% of foreign residents became Italian citizens, while some 6% left the town⁴.

Historically, the vibrant industrial activity in the area hosted relevant manufacturing sites – landmarking the townscape. Over the last decades, large (e.g. the home furniture firm IMAB and the cookware factory TVS) and smaller firms attracted workers both from other regions of Italy and from abroad, especially North Africa and Eastern Europe. However, following the economic crisis of 2008, several families, mainly from North Africa, left Fermignano to head to other European

³ See demo.istat.it.

⁴ Own calculations on data from demo.istat.it. Please note that, unlike national ISMU statistics mentioned in the introduction, Istat data do not include estimates on irregular immigrants.

countries. For example, the number of Moroccan residents decreased sharply from 470 in 2011 to 208 in 2021. On the other hand, this trend has been partially countered by the growing presence of sub-Saharan newcomers, particularly from West Africa, including asylum seekers and holders of humanitarian or international protection.

As of January 2021, the largest group of foreign residents is still from Morocco (24.3% of all foreigners), followed by Albania (22.6%), Romania (17.3%) and Nigeria (10%). Overall, there are 41 nationalities residing in the municipality.

Table 1. Demographic variables about the immigrant population at the national, regional, provincial and local levels.

	<i>Immigrant population</i>	<i>Immigration rate</i>	<i>Variation 2011-2021 (%)</i>	<i>U20 immigrants (%)</i>	<i>Female immigrants (%)</i>
Italy	5.193.669	8,8%	13,2%	21,9%	51,2%
Marche Region	127.606	8,6%	-10,9%	20,2%	53,6%
Province of Pesaro and Urbino	28.684	8,1%	-17,2%	20,2%	54,9%
Municipality of Fermignano	833	10,1%	-32,0%	23,1%	53,6%

Source: Own calculation from Istat data⁵

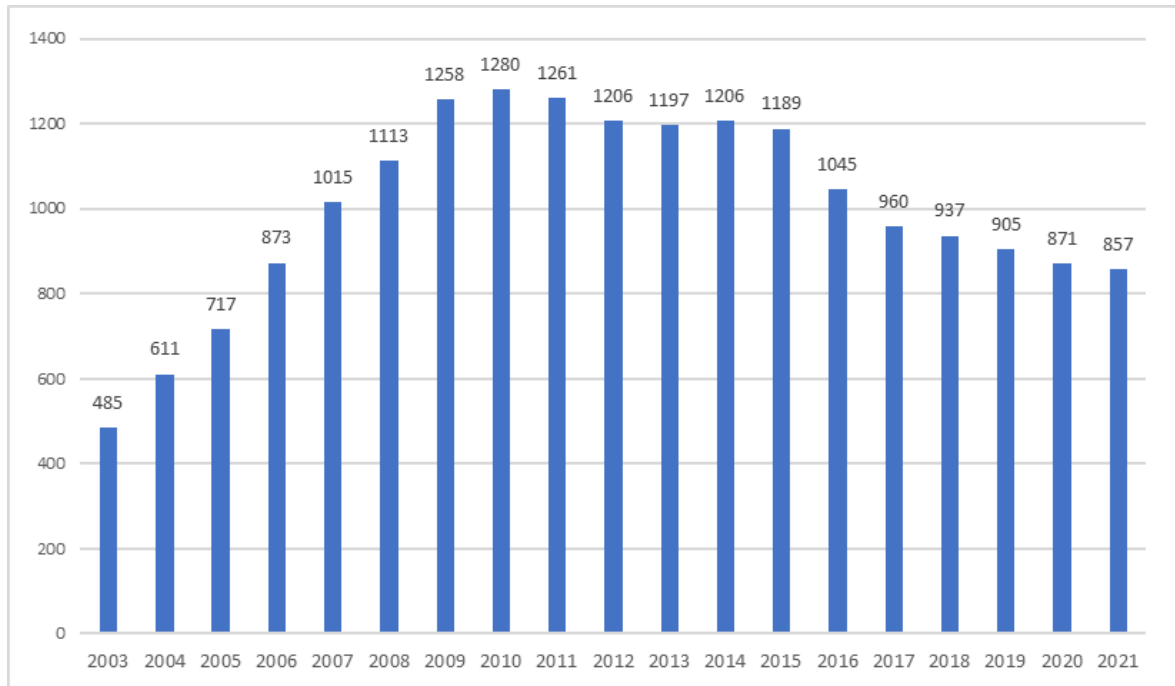
Table 2. Immigrant population by countries of origin at the national, regional, provincial and local levels.

	<i>1st national group</i>	<i>2nd national group</i>	<i>3rd national group</i>	<i>4th national group</i>	<i>Countries of origin (n)</i>
Italy	Romania (20,8%)	Albania (8,4%)	Morocco (8,3%)	Popular Republic of China (6,4%)	198
Marche Region	Romania (17,9%)	Albania (11,1%)	Morocco (7,7%)	Popular Republic of China (7,6%)	164
Province of Pesaro and Urbino	Romania (18,5%)	Albania (12,6%)	Morocco (10,8%)	Moldova (7,9%)	141
Municipality of Fermignano	Morocco (24,3%)	Albania (22,6%)	Romania (17,3%)	Nigeria (10,0%)	41

Source: Own calculation on Istat data

⁵ Data on immigrant population and immigration rate are referred to 2022, while the rest of the data presented in the two tables refer to 2021. Source: Elaboration on Istat data (<http://stra-dati.istat.it/>).

Figure 1. Municipality of Fermignano: number of foreign residents, 2003-2021



Source: Own calculation on Istat data

2. Migrant reception and integration in the Italian legal framework

The Italian Constitution defines the general principles on the right to asylum, equality and fundamental rights of non-citizens, leaving the task of regulating in detail migration topics to the legislator. However, migration has mainly been dealt with through “emergency decrees”, piling up highly politicised, confusing and often contrasting regulations (Campesi 2011; Marchetti 2014; Pizalis 2020).

The first organic law on immigration, also dictated by emergency reasons, was passed in 1990 (the so-called Martelli law, by the name of its first proponent) and it introduced basic welfare measures for immigrants and established an entry system based on the planning of maximum quotas to labour market needs (Colucci 2018).

However, the first general systematic law on immigration, supported and integrated by European and regional legislation (the so-called Turco-Napolitano, Law 40/98), was approved only in 1998.

This Law renovated the Italian legal system with the first “Consolidated Law on Immigration”, currently the primary Law on immigration. The Law regulated family reunification (even before it was legislated at the European level) and extended to foreigners a set of rights previously not included in the Italian regulatory system, such as the provision of entry for job search, the establishment of a residence card to stabilise long-term residents and the extension of basic health care also for irregular immigrants. In particular, Chapter IV of the Law includes provisions on social integration, discrimination and the establishment of the Fund for Migration Policies (articles 42 - 46). At the same time, the Law strengthened the control and expulsion policies, considered necessary and complementary to integration measures and national needs.

Since 1998, several amendments have followed, further regulating and stiffening the law’s original structure. In particular, the focus was on immigration policy, intending to restrain the inflows (mainly through the criminalisation of migration, e.g. with the introduction of prosecution of undocumented migration as a crime in 2008, or with the legalisation of administrative detention in dedicated facilities, and the criminalisation of migration-solidarity initiatives). Law 189/2002 (also known as “Law Bossi-Fini”) acted on the controls of residing migrants in Italy, progressively shortening the duration of residence permits, enhancing the role of the migrant reception centres, and facilitating and increasing expulsions by accompanying the migrants to the border, introducing fingerprinting for all foreigners, introducing the crime of illegal stay.

The legal framework was further tightened in 2018 and 2020 (through the so-called “Salvini Decrees”), introducing amendments to the core legal features of the right to asylum. Today, immigration quotas for non-European workers are defined each year by the Government through a specific *Decree* (the so-called “Decreto flussi”).

2.1 Integration policies

In terms of integration policies, Italy has its own peculiarities. Although it is quite hard to mention an Italian model of integration, we may recognise a “modality” consistent with Italy’s political culture and welfare state, defined as indirect, implicit and subordinate (Caponio, Graziano 2011) and developed more by chance than by design, with an accumulation of local practices often disconnected from each other, inconsistent national measures, accelerations due to European Union pressures and court rulings. However, a somewhat coherent policy puzzle has nonetheless been progressively created. This policy framework is evident in a widespread rejection of traditional European integration models, whether assimilationist or multicultural, in favour of an assumed intercultural model (Barberis 2018). This model implies both weak assimilation (e.g., lack of policies

to contrast inequality and support inclusion) and multiculturalism (lack of policies to recognise minorities) (Bertolani, Perocco 2013; Tarabusi 2014). In this sense, although Italy can no longer be considered a latecomer in migration policies, it is still lagging in establishing a clear policy for incorporating diversity.

Few policies, however, have been implemented to define and realise the possible integration pathways. The most systematic tool concerning the integration of migrants is the so-called “Integration Agreement” (D.P.R. 179/2011⁶), constituting a prerequisite for obtaining the “Residence Permit by Points”, with a series of requirements considered key to integration. The agreement is a binding pact stipulated between the Italian State and a foreign non-EU citizen aged 16 or more who, entering Italy for the first time, applies for a residence permit of no less than one year.⁷ The Agreement lasts 2 years, during which the foreign citizen has to obtain the 30 credits necessary for fulfilling the Agreement conditions, designed to ensure integration through knowledge of the Italian language and fundamental civic principles. With the Agreement, the foreign citizen commits to acquiring an adequate level of knowledge of the Italian language (level A2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages); sufficient knowledge of the fundamental principles of the Constitution and the functioning of public institutions in Italy; sufficient knowledge of civil life in Italy (health, school, social services, work, tax obligations); and undertakes to guarantee the fulfilment of the education obligation for minors; adhere to and respect the principles of the “Charter of Citizenship” and Integration Values. On the other hand, the State commits to support the process of integration of the foreign citizen through various initiatives in agreement with the Regions and local bodies; these can avail themselves of the collaboration of the adult education and training centres, third sector organisations, employers’ associations and trade unions. In 2017, Italy also adopted the “National Integration Plan for Persons Entitled to International Protection”,⁸ as foreseen by decree 18/2014, which transposed the EU’s recast Qualification Directive (Directive 2011/95/EU). The Plan included interreligious and intercultural dialogue, language training, access to education, labour inclusion, and vocational training, and was enforced mainly by

⁶ See: <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/temi/immigrazione-e-asilo/modalita-dingresso/accordo-integrazione-straniero-richiede-permesso-soggiorno>.

⁷ Unaccompanied foreign minors under guardianship, disabled, and victims of trafficking, violence, or exploitation must not sign, as the Agreement is replaced by completing a 'social assistance and integration program'. The Agreement has a duration of 2 years, during which the foreign citizen has to obtain the 30 credits necessary for fulfilling the Agreement conditions.

⁸ The Plan included inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, language training, access to education, labour inclusion, and vocational training; whose main actors responsible for the implementation were local authorities and public services, supported by civil society organisations.

local authorities and public services, supported by civil society organisations. Currently, the “Multi-Year Integrated Programming in the Field of Work, Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)”⁹ constitutes the main policy document at the national level providing a concerted plan among ministries, local authorities, associations and third-sector organisations for the integration of migrants into the labour market and the Italian society. The seven priority actions of the plan include: improving the governance of integration with a view to vertical (central government, regions and local authorities) and horizontal (social partners, third sector, migrant associations, etc.) subsidiarity; preventing and combating undeclared work; socio-occupational integration of specific vulnerable groups of migrants (refugees and asylum seekers, unaccompanied foreign minors, women with minors, etc.) by promoting social and labour inclusion of migrant women; enhancement of skills and actions to prevent school dropout and the link between education, training and the labour market; actions to prevent all forms of discrimination, and finally the promotion of legal channels for legal entry. An “Agreement for the programming and development of a system of interventions aimed at favouring social integration and labour inclusion of migrants regularly present in Italy”¹⁰ was also stipulated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies (Directory General for Immigration and Integration Policies) and the Regions, regulating the coordination between the national and the Regional Level.

It might be assumed that “integration” should be considered in a “flexible” way, adaptable to a variety of Regional-local paths, and guided by the underlying need to establish and maintain “social peace,” avoid disorder and conflicts, to be achieved through actions that ensure “incorporation” to the autochthonous social texture, and through the creation of economically productive-proactive relationships with the newcomers. Nevertheless, the lack of a national policy framework on integration generates several problems of coordination between authorities and stakeholders on funding opportunities, and possible politicisation (regionalisation) of the migration issue and development of local policies aimed at excluding migrants from various types of benefits and rights (Ambrosini 2013). Such a situation led to a high territorialisation of integration policies at the local level, with many local authorities adopting exclusionary policies through local ordinances (Gargiulo 2011). However, opposite situations also emerge, especially in small towns engaged in reception, where more welcoming and often innovative measures have been developed (Gretter *et al.* 2017; Driel 2020; Patuzzi *et al.* 2020).

⁹ See <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/Documents/Programmazione-integrata-gennaio-2022.pdf>.

¹⁰ See: shorturl.at/fnrZ5.

The above-mentioned coordination problems also emerge in the overlapping of different actors involved in the multi-level governance of immigration, both vertically (state, regions, and other local authorities) and horizontally (private and public actors). This assumption is confirmed by research (Campomori, Caponio 2017), which showed that in migration policymaking regions have challenged the national government's attempts to override them; on the other hand, the national government has begun to challenge the constitutionality of regional immigration laws. The lack of a transparent "Italian model" of integration is therefore also a consequence of – and at the same time finds expression in – an unbalanced organisation of migration governance, which focuses mainly on control and security concerns rather than on integration policies.

Overall, as numerous scholars have pointed out (Barberis *et al.* 2017; Colombo 2017), Italy's national political debates and agendas have usually framed discourses about migration and diversity (and planned policies and allocated resources) in connection with the construction of supposed "emergencies" (from Roma camps, to refugees and neighbourhood crime). Therefore, Italy's immigration policy wavered between security concerns, humanitarian claims (expressed by third-sector organisations, the Catholic Church and trade unions) and functionalist perspectives (carried on by social and political pro-business actors). As a result, a late, confused and unplanned immigrant policy emerged with a deficient legal framework. This also means that the local level plays a relevant role in making up the actual national policy line (Campomori, Caponio 2013), as it is the arena where most of the policies and practices take place, although with a poorly coordinated but effective multi-level governance. However, this comes more *de facto* than according to a precise strategy (Angelucci *et al.* 2019).

Table 3. Competences and potential overlapping of different levels of governance in the Italian context.

	Competences	Potential overlapping and conflicts
<i>EU level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General framework on immigration statuses and rights; - Allocation of funds (e.g., AMIF). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clashes between EU and national laws.
<i>National level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - National immigration policies and law (regulation of admission, legal statuses and the limit of political participation for non-citizens); - Allocation of funds (e.g., central reception system, FAMI). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clashes between EU and national laws; - Clashes between national and regional competencies (immigration and welfare policies); - Differences between national policies and street-level implementation.
<i>Regional level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Definition of welfare policies; - Definition of instrument for non-citizens' political participation; - Allocation of funds for welfare policies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clashes between national and regional competencies (immigration and welfare policies).

	Competences	Potential overlapping and conflicts
<i>Provincial and local state institutions (e.g., Prefectures)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation of national immigration laws; - Management of emergency reception programmes (CAS). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflict against municipalities over emergency reception; - Conflict against third sector organisations over the street-level implementation of national measures.
<i>Intermunicipal institutions (e.g., ATS)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Territorial planning of social policies; - Management of some reception programmes; - Language teaching in CPIA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Overlapping of competencies with municipalities or third-sector actors (e.g., language teaching).
<i>Municipal level</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation of social policies; - Adoption of local integration policies; - Implementation of measures for non-citizens' participation; - Management of voluntary reception. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clashes between national policies and local integration measures; - Clashes between local policies and third-sector actors over local measures.
<i>Civil society and third sector actors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actual street-level implementation of local integration policies and reception as contractors; - Compensation of gaps in public planning through volunteering. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflict against state institutions over the street-level implementation of national measures; - Clashes between local policies and third-sector actors over local measures.

Sources: Own elaboration

2.2. Competences and responsibilities of institutions at the national level

In addition to the “Committee for the Coordination and Monitoring of Immigration Provisions”, chaired by the President or Vice-President of the Council of Ministers, as established by the “Consolidated Law on Immigration”, legislation on immigration is governed by different ministries at the national level and the division of responsibilities and competences is as follows:

The Ministry of the Interior, through the Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration and the Department of Public Security, operates within the scope of the ministry's functions in protecting civil rights, which are immigration, asylum, and citizenship. Prefectures, that is, the offices – usually one per Province – representing the national government at the local level, are responsible for work permits for foreigners, family reunification and conversion of residence permits. They are also required by law to have their own advisory bodies on migration issues, called Territorial Councils for Immigration. These Councils may involve local administrations, advocacy bodies and trade unions and are called upon very variably in time and space, according to the prioritisation given to migration issues by Prefects and their staff.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policies is responsible for overseeing the monitoring and evaluating the migrants' socio-economic integration and publishing annual reports on migrants' integration in the labour market and their access to pension schemes. Despite the National Council of Economy and Labour developed a set of indicators on migrant integration (including occupational integration and the "degree of attractiveness" of Italy's different provinces, regions, and macro-areas), a systematised evaluation of the integration of migrants at the national, regional, and local levels is still not traceable.

The 1999 Consolidation Act on Immigration launched the "Register of associations, organisations and other private bodies carrying out activities in favour of foreigners" at the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies.

In this context it is worth mentioning an initiative promoted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy - Directorate General of Immigration and Integration Policies and co-funded by the European Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals: the mapping of migrant associations¹¹ at the national level, that was carried out for the first time in 2014 by the IDOS Study and Research Centre. The website allows associations to be tracked by denomination or community of reference. Currently, 1150 migrant-based associations are registered in the database.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, instead, is competent in issuing entry visas to foreigners.

On the side of the education system, the guidelines of the Ministry of Education, University, and Research recommend that schools organise Italian language labs for foreign students, lasting a total of 8-10 hours per week (about 2 hours per day), for a duration of 3-4 months.¹² Recommendations also mention a balanced and heterogeneous composition of classes, with foreign students not exceeding 30% of the total.

2.3. Migrant participation and representation at the national level

Considering all the policy instruments presented above, however, there is still an incomplete description of the broader pattern of "integration-inclusion", or a systematised strategy, methodology and/or methods of evaluation (milestones, expected results) of what should be considered as achieved/concluded or even ideally "successful" integration through unimpeded access to the lo-

¹¹ <https://integrazionemigranti.gov.it/it-it/Ricerca-Associazioni>. For the organisations of associations representing second generations and their dialogue with public institutions see: <http://conngi.it/>.

¹² See "Linee guida per l'accoglienza e l'integrazione degli alunni stranieri": <http://www.centrocome.it/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/4-Linee-Guida.pdf>.

cal welfare system and participation, which is articulated in different levels both as a policy instrument and political disposition (Cognetti 2022).

In this context, MIPEX 2020 scores Italy 58/100, higher than the average MIPEX country (50) and slightly above average among EU and Western European (EU15)/OECD countries. Foreign citizens in Italy can benefit from access to basic rights and halfway favourable policies on equal opportunities, but they do not enjoy the long-term security to settle permanently, invest in integration and participate as full citizens. Major obstacles tend to emerge in political participation and access to citizenship, as immigrants face slightly unfavourable policies. In fact, Italy is one of the few European countries not granting any right to vote to non-EU residents (not even at the local level).

While the various legislative initiatives taken in the direction of extending the right to vote or to facilitate access to citizenship (e.g. *ius scholae*) have not, in fact, had any concrete development, several alternative means of migrant participation have been tried out over the past decades, such as dedicated Councils, whose composition should reflect the presence of different stakeholders in migrant integration policies, including immigrant associations. The first national association is “the Council for the problems of non-EU workers and their families”, which was established by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security by Law 943/86¹³ (art. 2), and also provided for the establishment of regional Councils, similar to the National Council in composition and purpose (art. 2 c.7). Although the National Council is currently not operational, the Regional ones operate in some regions with varying degrees of attention to migration issues.

Regions are also competent for measures regarding the political participation of immigrants at the local level, following a troubled legislative process started with the enactment of the 1992 Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level through Art.8, c.5 of the Law Decree 267/2000 and culminated in the Sentence 379/2004 of the Constitutional Court (Menegus 2019). At a general level, these measures usually provide the possibility for local authorities to establish advisory bodies and they have paved the way for some experiments for the representation of immigrants’ needs and voices at the local level. In particular, the instruments that have been more frequently introduced are (1) the Advisory Boards and Immigrant Councils, which are composed of representatives of the different nationalities present in the territory, directly elected by resident foreign citizens or appointed by migrants’ associations and communities; (2) the figure

¹³ The Consolidation Act on Immigration (Legislative Decree 286/98, art. 42, c. 4) provided for the establishment, at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, of the Council for Immigrant Workers and their Families (with tasks and composition similar to the previous one), regulated, as far as constitution and functioning modalities are concerned, by article 55 of the Implementation Regulation (Presidential Decree no. 394/99 and subsequent amendments). The last decree established by the Consulta is the Prime Ministerial Decree of 9.11.2007.

of Deputy Councillor, who is allowed to participate in the municipal council and present petitions concerning resident immigrants, even if he does not have the right to vote.

Although these bodies have stimulated the establishment of immigrant associations willing to be represented, their impact seems to be very limited due to (1) the inability to represent the heterogeneity of migrant groups and different instances and (2) the weak capacity to affect decision-making processes, thus evidencing their predominantly symbolic character (Caponio 2006; Recchi 2006; Colloca 2008).

3. Migration policymaking at the regional and local level: the case of Marche Region and Municipality of Fermignano

3.1 Regional Level: Competences and responsibilities of regions in migration management

Regions have an active role in the implementation of the migration policy: following the constitutional principle of subsidiarity, implementation of policies must be done by regions and other local authorities through agreements stipulated with associations of migrants and associations regularly registered in the official registers. Reception and anti-discrimination policies, assistance, social protection, and integration initiatives are included in these agreements by independently managing state resources as well as their own funds. Furthermore, regions exercise the functions of verifying the implementation of services at the subregional level and regulating the integration of measures, particularly regarding health and social assistance. Since the regions enjoy full autonomy in planning and implementing policies, in practice management and coordination of services are highly diversified from region to region.

More specifically, the measures that the Regions and Local Authorities are called upon to deal with range from the teaching of the Italian language to the enhancement of the culture of origin, to cultural mediation in services, to training courses, to access to housing. In other words, whatever is included in the field of welfare policy is largely within regional responsibility. On the one hand, the regions have exclusive competence over welfare policies, even though after the reform of Article V of the Italian Constitution immigration is a matter of exclusive state competence; on the other hand, welfare policies include many measures that are also crucial in the field of immigration and, particularly, socio-economic incorporation (e.g. labour policies, housing, etc.).

3.1.1 The case of Marche Region

The first Regional Law regulating migration in Region Marche was issued in 1998 – actually, four days before the National Law. Consistently with the policy context of centre-left governments, integration is praised in terms of reciprocity between third-country nationals and the native population.

Currently, integration issues are regulated by Regional Law 13/2009 with “Provisions in support of the rights and integration of immigrant foreign citizens” which regulated the creation of “training, retraining and professional updating” paths with interventions provided for by current legislation extended to foreigners as well as interventions specifically aimed at facilitating the “integration of immigrants in the labour market; school staff and operators of local authorities who are in daily contact with immigrants through the coordination of projects on intercultural education” (Art. 11); the design of “courses for the training and updating of intercultural mediators, enhancing this profession” (Art. 15) and the guarantee of the right to housing, promoting “actions aimed at guaranteeing equal conditions for migrants in the search for housing solutions” (Art. 16).

In terms of intercultural education, EU-funded projects (AMIF/FAMI) are important sources to contribute to language education in partnership with a few schools (those with a limited ripple effect on the school institutions at the regional level as a whole). These funds are also employed for promoting social and labour inclusion and counteracting labour exploitation by financing projects with specific activities involving different actors in the social arena.

In short, despite the existence of a specific and long-standing regional legislation - which not only guarantees equal opportunities for migrants in different aspects (health, legal, education, employment, housing, interculturality, and the like) but also expresses an idea of inclusion based on a mutual effort for respect, reciprocity and knowledge - the specific provisions of this legislation are still poorly implemented by local public policies in the context under review. In fact, among the above-mentioned regulations, only a few were applied, for example the professional profile of the intercultural mediator was defined twice, and the training courses were implemented. Yet this professional was not clearly included as necessary in most migration-related services and projects.

3.1.2. Migrant participation and representation at the regional level

The aforementioned Law established the “Regional Council of Immigrants” with the task of expressing its opinion on “regional initiatives and interventions on immigration, within the framework of the plans and programs on social and health matters, professional orientation, vocatio-

nal training, right to study, lifelong education, public housing”, the Council is to be activated in a separate but collaborative form by the Region and the local authorities, with a three-year regional program. An innovative element concerns the inclusion, among the Council's tasks (art. 5) of "cooperation with the Regional Observatory for Social Policies [...] to constantly monitor the migration phenomenon in the region in order to use the data to support regional planning".

In theory, this Council included several representatives of local and national institutions, third-sector bodies, and the voluntary sector; it provided for the participation of “one representative for each ethnic association listed in the register”, acting as a consulting body and representative of different levels of governance and social groups. On the contrary the Council has hardly convened for years, and the regulation of the Regional register also proved to be a barrier for several active associations and groups. What’s more the Council does not really represent the whole foreign population as it is counterbalanced by a substantial presence of components of Italian citizenship (Menegus 2019). Probably this happens because representatives of migration-related minorities have to pass through a double filter: first, that of the registration of their association in the regional register, then that of the designation of the representative at the Council by the association itself. The double filter actually excludes from the consultations a large part of the immigrant population, starting with those who are not members of any of the (few) associations registered. To this, we shall add the limited representativity of these associations themselves (compared to the variety of foreign residents in the Region) and the absence of effective tools to check internal democracy processes. In the end, such a body - beyond the intentions of the regional legislator and any initiatives taken - appears unsuitable for guaranteeing greater participation by individual foreigners and, consequently, their participation in regional political life.

It is worth mentioning that the Marche Region recognises the right to petition to the residents. However Art. 41 of the “Statute of Marche” does not expressly include the non-EU migrants in the concept of residents, and the legal interpretation of the article leaves little room for the extension of the right to vote to the migrants (e.g. for consultative referendums on general issues) reserving such right to Italian citizens only.

3.2 Local level: Municipal jurisdiction and role in migration management

Municipalities belong to one of the bottom levels of public administration (followed by Districts or Neighbourhoods) and are the closest to the local community, thus playing a significant role in managing migration (Marchetti 2020).

The tasks of the Municipalities also include the administrative functions concerning social actions under the “integrated System of interventions and social services” (Law 328/2000) carried out at the local level while contributing to regional planning. Under this perspective Municipalities are expected to plan, design, and implement the local system of social network services and indicate priorities and innovation sectors through the consultation of local human and financial resources, with the involvement of civil society representatives and associations. Municipalities are responsible for providing services and assistance activities, but they also hold responsibility for authorising, accrediting and supervising social services and publicly managed residential and semi-residential structures dedicated to the hosting of vulnerable individuals/families (Marchetti 2014).

At the same time Municipalities should facilitate and promote, within the local system of social network services, resources of local communities through innovative forms of collaboration for the development of self-help interventions and reciprocity between citizens in the context of community life. Finally, Municipalities are also assigned monitoring and evaluation tasks through the adoption of tools for administrative simplification and management control on efficiency, effectiveness and performance results, ensuring the right to participation of citizens in the service quality control following the procedures established by the municipal statutes.

While in terms of reception, Municipalities are assigned - through close collaboration with Prefectures - the task of absolving the so-called “emergency reception”; however, to date, the extraordinary facilities actually operate as if they were ordinary reception structures. Furthermore, Municipalities are called upon to handle the so called “second reception” (SAI, System of Reception and Integration),¹⁴ which is coordinated by the SAI Central Service, whose management is assigned to the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI)¹⁵ by the Ministry of the Interior.

The Social Territorial Area (ATS) is an inter-municipal aggregation with the task of planning and programming the social services of the Municipalities following the provisions of Law 328/2000, the “Framework Law for the realisation of the integrated system of interventions and social servi-

¹⁴ The “System of Reception and Integration” (SAI) is developed on two levels of services: the first is reserved for asylum seekers and is based on material, legal, health and linguistic assistance. Second-level services are reserved for protection holders and also have integration and career guidance functions. In this context, the projects are assigned to local authorities which voluntarily activate and implement reception and integration services with particular regard to language training, career guidance, essential knowledge of public services, and of the fundamental rights and duties enshrined in the constitution (Sorgoni 2011; Altin *et al.* 2017; Ambrosini, Campomori 2020).

¹⁵ The “National Association of Italian Municipalities” (ANCI) represents municipalities with Parliament, Government, Regions, Public Administrations, Community bodies, the Committee of Regions and any other institutions exercising public functions of local interest. Following the principles of virtuous collaboration between central State and territories, ANCI has promoted immigration initiatives such as the SAI.

ces". The above-mentioned Law establishes the implementation of an integrated system of interventions and social services aimed at helping all categories of vulnerable people.

The universal character of the integrated system of interventions and social services guarantees the inclusion of foreigners, asylum seekers, and refugees among the beneficiaries of such measures. Service providers must facilitate the access and accessibility of such services by informing the recipients of the services available, on the requirements for access and the most appropriate choices. The "Community Social Plan" is the social policy programming tool and allows the relevant community to respond to the needs of the population in the best possible way, involving all the relevant actors coming both from the institutional sector and the civil society in the planning (local authorities, third sector actors, volunteering, associations, etc.). Municipalities associated with an ATS also have a crucial role in adopting this plan, which allows the complementarity of services among territories, the selection of services to be supplied at the local level and how funds coming from different sources are allocated. At the same time, such measures have also been seen as part of rescaling strategies and passive subsidiarisation processes, whereas local authorities are increasingly receiving more competences, but few new resources to actually manage them (Kazepov, Barberis 2017). This is also true in the case of integration policies, whose controversial character probably acts as a further incentive to rescaling (Barberis, Angelucci 2022).

The integrated system of interventions and social services also pursues the promotion of social solidarity, with the enhancement of the initiatives coming from people, families, forms of self-help and reciprocity and organised solidarity. Costs for activating social interventions and services in favour of the individual and the community are borne by municipalities, individuals and associates.

3.2.1 Migrant participation and representation at the local level in the Marche region

In 2019 in the Marche region there were at least ten operational advisory bodies for foreigners. Putting together the various experiences of the last twenty years, including inactive bodies and ceased experiences, there have been more than twenty participatory institutions promoted by the local authorities (Menegus 2019). These are significant numbers, even higher than those of a region like Emilia-Romagna, traditionally at the forefront for promoting the political participation of foreigners.

At the local level, reference can be made to advisory bodies of both elective¹⁶ and nonelective nature. The case of the municipalities in the Marche Region is characterised by a marked prevalence of the elected figure of the Deputy Councillor as opposed to the collegial Councils. In practice, thirteen municipalities and two provinces have had one or more Deputy Councillors, while the municipalities of Tolentino (non-elective but with a deputy councillor elected by the council), San Benedetto del Tronto (non-elective), Grottammare (elective), Senigallia, and Fabriano have operated with a collegial body (council)¹⁷.

The research (ibid. 2019) shows, however, certain recurring problems, which can be grouped around four main themes: representativeness (the monochromatic nature of the body that makes it less suitable to represent the complexity of the demands emerging from the foreign residents, the composition of the councils and related election mechanisms that may lead to overrepresentation of some communities and, conversely, penalise others); functions (the merely consultative nature of these bodies and low impact on local authority activity); support (poor technical/administrative support to both the bodies and their members to be able to influence the orientation of local authorities' political choices); and instability (lack of an effective replacement mechanism of Councillors who have acquired Italian citizenship or moved elsewhere in the country or abroad, scarce participation of representatives causing the paralysis of the activity or the interruption of dialogue with administrations, etc.).

3.2.2 The case of Fermignano

The Municipality of Fermignano is part of the ATS IV that includes nine Municipalities, whose mayors are members of the directive political body: the Committee of Mayors. At a technical level, the ATS IV is led by the Area Coordinator, assisted by staff at the Municipality of Urbino, the lead Municipality. In the case of ATS IV, the lead municipality is meant to provide a long thematic list of areas of intervention without specific reference to migrants, foreigners or integration procedures, except for a generic annotation under "Social Policies," where reference is made to services and assistance to "vulnerable" people. The "Immigrants Service Centre" through its desk office in Fermignano, is the only migrants dedicated service, offering free-of-charge assistance on bu-

¹⁶ In the case of an elective Body (Deputy and Elective Councils) there is a direct involvement aimed at the entire foreign immigrant population since the individual foreign resident is granted both the right to vote for the election of the members of the advisory body and the right to run for office and be elected (Menegus 2019).

¹⁷ <https://www.integrazionemigranti.gov.it/AnteprimaPDF.aspx?id=1324>.

reaucratic practices (residence permit, family reunification, citizenship, etc.); consultancy on housing, work, legal protection, language, IT and professional courses.

As a municipality Fermignano provides a range of general services (such as Social Services and Education Policies), they are generally directed to the population as a whole and a few are specific for the immigrant population, along with some interventions and projects funded by the AMIF/FAMI.

Nevertheless, the municipality supplies information and administrative documents in the languages of the main foreign communities; it promotes Italian language courses and afterschool support for “vulnerable children”, which explicitly includes migrants’ children (“Small Group Aggregation and After School Service”); it also promotes Arabic and Albanian language courses, making public spaces and some teaching materials available to the respective communities.

Since 2017, Fermignano has been sponsoring the intercultural event *Popoli in Festa* [Peoples’ festival] to foster migrants’ civic participation and cultural exchange between foreign communities and the local population. The festival is organised thanks to the joint efforts of the municipality and migrant communities, which suggest and carry out the event activities in the main public square.

On the side of migrants’ social inclusion of migrants, in 2019, the Municipalities of Fermignano and Gradara promoted the “Charter of Mayors on social inclusion in the Euro-Mediterranean area”, engaging with other 24 municipalities mainly (but not only) located in the Marche Region. The Charter identified the following priority actions: i) providing administrative assistance in granting the documentation required for legal residence in the national territory; ii) promoting and organising courses for learning the Italian language; iii) providing the Italian translation of the main administrative acts in the native language for the communities living in the territory; iv) promoting and identifying cultural mediators; v) guaranteeing the worship right for religious minorities; vi) preventing ghettoisation phenomena. The Charter also set up a Council of Mayors aimed at drafting and collecting good practices and promoting actions of general interest to facilitate social inclusion by providing essential services.

With particular reference to the art. V of the Charter on worship right for religious minorities, Fermignano hosts one of the few non-Christian cemeteries and a mosque recognised officially as such (the first one at the provincial and the fifth at the national level).

3.2.3 Migrant participation and representation at the local level

Art. 14 of the Municipal bylaws Statute on “Popular consultations and Permanent Councils” highlights that the Municipality of Fermignano may request consulting of either a part or some aggregated form of the local population to acquire information, opinions and proposals regarding the administrative activity. In any case, the mayor calls a public assembly at least once a year, however, the procedure makes no clear reference to the locally residing migrants.

According to c. 4 The Municipality of Fermignano may also establish:

- a) observatories to support the administrative activity on issues of particular importance;
- b) a forum for the discussion of problems of particular social and cultural interest.

The “District Councils” (or neighbourhood councils) are recognised bodies of citizens elected by the neighbourhood assembly of all over 16-year-old citizens residing therein, carrying the task to forward discussions on the local problems, detect critical issues and draw up proposals to be submitted to the municipal administration. However, it is far from clear whether resident migrants may participate or not (and why) in any of the 9 existing Districts. Not even the Regulation of the District Councils gives any specific information on the topic.

Reference to “foreigners” is explicitly made in c.3: “[...] a permanent thematic council dedicated to the analysis of all sort of problems and the promotion of proposals for the development of the integration of both European or non-European foreign citizens, but still legally residing in the municipal territory”. This Council’s statute also provides for a representative of foreign residents. However, a former Mayor (1990-2000) pointed out that “when the Council was established, it was not possible to appoint such representative because the various foreign groups did not agree on a candidate, so that rule remained ineffective, in short, inefficient” (Interview, 26.05.22).

Finally, although there have been no experiences or cases of Immigrant Council or Special representative of migrants (Adjunct/Deputy Councilor) for immigration in Fermignano, it is worth mentioning the election of a city councillor of Moroccan origin in 2016 and 2021, along with a left-wing-oriented civic coalition, after ten years of government (2006-2016) run by a right-wing coalition and a mayor from the “Lega Nord” party. The Councillor is currently responsible for social inclusion and European policies, and its election seems to have improved the representation of migrants’ voices, as we shall see in the next section on data analysis.

4. Data analysis: actors, roles and efficiency of the local network for social inclusion and migrant participation in Fermignano

4.1 Introduction

Despite the lack of an organic and specific corpus of public policies, in Fermignano there are different actors providing services and promoting activities in the field of social inclusion and participation of migrants.

In this section, we analyse the roles and relationships of different actors involved in policies and services targeting immigrants in Fermignano and nearby towns (see Annex 1). In particular, a focus group was formed and a total of 27 interviews were conducted with associations of and for immigrants, as well as the representatives of public authorities and service providers.

The first part of this section analyses institutional services. Subsequently, we look at the non-institutional network. The third section is on immigrant associations followed by a special focus on participation. Finally, conclusions illustrate obstacles and challenges.

4.2. Institutional network

The local public institutional network analysed here includes the Prefecture, Municipality and ATS IV in light of their immigration-related services.

Reportedly, matters under the jurisdiction of the Prefecture of Pesaro, the representative body of the Ministry of the Interior at the local level, are divided into two macro-areas: (1) admissions through the issue of authorisation for work entries and family reunification as well as the recognition of international or subsidiary protection to asylum seekers¹⁸, (2) coordination among different stakeholders operating with/for immigrants. In terms of migrant participation, the Territorial Council of Immigration is the instrument through which initiatives are discussed, evaluated and proposed, and which includes the participation of representatives of some local governments and associations of and for immigrants. In addition, AMIF-funded projects aim to strengthen the network through the creation of specific committees involving those who are not part of the Territorial Council, as well as to foster the exchange of information and proposals among the parties in-

¹⁸ Residence permits are released by the *Questura*, the provincial police office, which is also competent for renewals and for the recognition of the special protection for asylum seekers (usually following the recommendation of the Prefecture).

volved. However, low participation of migrants has been recorded not only in the implementation of projects/services but also in the regular meetings between network members. The fact that the meetings were conducted online during the Covid-19 period is reported as an impediment to the participation of immigrant representatives due to their limited digital skills.

Interventions targeting immigrant families' integration mainly concern employment and housing. However, it is worth mentioning that there are no policy guidelines shared by all members of the Territorial Council and, therefore, each actor pursues their own ways to achieve integration goals. Individualisation and fragmentation of how integration policies are implemented and services offered to immigrants are also mentioned by ATS. Reportedly, in the absence of general guidelines, there is only guidance regarding individual areas (e.g., registration with the job centre; health registration with the temporary tax code) in response to immigrants' specific needs.

Regarding labour-related activities of the Prefecture, a recurring theme is either the discomfort related to forms of labour exploitation or labour shortages in certain areas. The fight against *caporalato* (illegal labour recruitment and intermediation, that leads to exploitation), in cooperation with the territorial labour inspectorate, is one of the most mentioned activities. Cooperation with the territorial labour inspectorate is also based on checking the workplaces for compliance with the compliance with regulations related to labour security. As well as labour security and the fight against *caporalato*, within the FAMI/AMIF framework, projects are expected also to create pathways aimed at vocational training to gain a qualification and obtain access to most of income-producing job opportunities.

The other critical issue is access to affordable housing, and therefore, interventions focus on this area. The main housing problems experienced by migrants in the province of Pesaro-Urbino, according to the majority of respondents, concern several aspects.

First of all, housing offered by social services (public housing) has limited space for large families, at the same time, there is a shortage of private housing of any size to meet the needs of these families.

Secondly, owners require very high deposits and substantial bank guarantees, especially near the coast, which exceed the economic capacity of these people, as pointed out by an institutional actor:

Many foreign nationals, despite having found employment opportunities near the coast but not finding housing options compatible with their work, are forced to find homes in fairly inland areas of the province, if not even outside the province [...]the problem of housing very often forces migrants

to migrate again, because the available housing is too far from the place of work (Interview, 08.09.22).

Moreover, there is a general discriminatory attitude on the part of real estate agencies and landlords toward foreigners emerges, especially those from North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, as pointed out during an interview by the secretary of a local migrants' association:

Finding a house for us [migrants] is very difficult because there is a lot of discrimination. Let me share with you an experience I had a few days ago. I called a [real estate] agency to ask about renting because I want to live alone. I was given an appointment and when I showed up the guy from the agency asked me: 'Was I talking to you on the phone?' and I said: 'Yes, of course!' and he said: 'We do not rent houses to foreigners, I did not realise you were not Italian' (Interview, 08.06.22).

Such a situation highlights a xenophobic and prejudicial attitude towards foreigners in the housing market, which is linked to a mix of different preconceptions, regarding not only the origin but also the (more or less assumed) precarity of legal statuses and working conditions that many immigrants have to face and the stereotyped assumption that foreigners are incapable of stable employment.

The housing problem affects both long-standing families in the area and new refugee flows:

They (Afghan refugee families) are large families with many children and there has been difficulty in finding the appropriate housing for their needs. As international protection is recognised, we are trying to place them in SAIs but also (in that context) there are difficulties because they are really large families which we are definitely not used to anymore (Institutional actor, interview, 08.09.22).

The general shortage of housing opportunities has led many people to accept accommodation conditions bordering on indecency, especially due to mould and lack of heating. At the provincial level this has created situations of "housing segregation", as in the case of the urban settlement of Ponte Armellina, a suburb of the city of Urbino called 'Urbino 2', where families, almost all with migration backgrounds, live in very precarious housing conditions and a state of socio-cultural confinement (Cancellieri, Barberis 2012).

As part of the Prefecture-related activities, another challenge is the difficult access to citizenship due to the lack of language proficiency of the applicants¹⁹. Although the territory is well manned by CPIAs (Provincial Centre for Adult Education) and other associations that offer Italian language

¹⁹ Since the Law-Decree No. 113 of 4 October 2018 (so-called "Security Decree"), a B1 level in Italian language is required in order to obtain Italian citizenship.

courses, the language problem persists especially in the older age groups: these are parents, but especially mothers who have followed their children in migration. On the other hand, as far as recently arrived (maximum two years) young foreigners in the territory are concerned, insofar as provided for by R.L. 13/2009, there are no language support services to support them in the school or extracurricular context in the first phase of contact with the host society. Although in recent months, with the arrival of Ukrainians in the area, some municipalities have provided language mediators (mostly lacking specific skills) to facilitate school integration of Ukrainian children. However this service, of a merely emergency nature, has not been structured and guaranteed to all young migrants from other countries.

According to what is reported by ATS, which is responsible for coordinating social service interventions and other integrated services, the difficulties encountered primarily affect migrant women residing in small localities, where transportation and services are not always close at hand.

Besides the network formed by institutional bodies and the reported difficulties in service provision, the data collected highlighted how immigrants' relationship with the Municipality of Fermignano is established. The Municipality of Fermignano, after 10 years of office by a right-wing majority (the former Mayor was a member of Lega, a populist party characterised by a strong anti-migration discourse), is now governed by a political formation backed by the Democratic Party, Italy's main centre-left party. The change in local government also represented a transformation in attitudes and openness toward immigrant communities, which is evident, for example, in the official recognition of the Mosque (the first at the provincial level and fifth nationwide) as such and the establishment of a non-Christian cemetery through cooperation with the Islamic community. This also highlights a willingness to listen to the needs of local immigrant communities, which can be discerned in the following quote:

When we took office, we consulted associations and community representatives to listen to their needs. We continue to do so, albeit mainly through informal channels. I think the municipal administration in recent years has been inclusive towards immigrant communities. There is no doubt that having a person of foreign origin in the council helps. You can see the change because nowadays if there is a problem, they call you [...] they turn to me or directly to the mayor [...] this can already be considered a form of interest and participation that until a few years ago did not exist (Local policy-maker, interview, 20.06.22).

The data showed that people with immigrant backgrounds who hold key positions such as city councillor, immigration desk operator, etc. seem essential for immigrant participation at the local level and for improving the accessibility of services for the immigrant population.

Thanks to the city councillor (a young man of Moroccan origin), I have a preferential channel that allows me to get deeper into the needs of migrant communities than maybe other people (Local policy-maker, interview, 30.09.22).

Such a boundary-spanning agency (Ahmed 2020) helps to build and maintain networks between institutions and migrant community members; yet these highly-personalised relationships may also become counterproductive as the relationship between the parties can turn into a certain person dependency, characterised by subordination to person-specific linkages.

As pointed out by a municipal decision-maker, in this current policy line, frequentation of public places such as the central city square, parks, and all other places shared with local people is an important indicator of integration:

When you go to the square, which is the main meeting place, you do not see those little separated groups anymore, but people talking freely among themselves so that there are no more divisions (Interview, 30.09.22).

Initiatives such as the recognition of the Mosque and the establishment of the non-Christian cemetery, as well as the Municipality support to migrant associations in promoting culture and language learning of origin countries by providing space and materials, are conceived as a form of diversity acknowledgment and indicate an approach of openness of the institutional apparatus toward all residents. Another element cited by the institutions, in terms of openness toward diversity, is the abovementioned *Popoli in Festa*, which was launched by the Municipality and represents one of the few moments of formal exchange and the relation between migrant associations and the local administration.

4.3. Third sector, civil society organisations and service providers

In the local area, third sector organisations and trade unions actors also provide (occasionally overlapping) some services and carry out activities for migrants responding to their most urgent needs and requirements, such as access to employment, housing and documents concerning residence permits, family reunification, and citizenship.

In the municipality of Fermignano, there is an office of the largest Italian social-democratic trade union, the *CGIL*²⁰. Their services concern the local population transversally but they also supply si-

²⁰ Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (Italian General Confederation of Labour).

gnificant support services for migrants. In particular, there is INCA (National Union Institute for Assistance), a body dealing with the social security protection, social and welfare rights of workers, retired citizens and immigrants in Italy and abroad, and a Tax Assistance Centre for domestic helpers and caregivers.

There is also a local branch of *ANOLF - Associazione Nazionale Oltre le Frontiere*²¹ (National Association Beyond Borders), which offers information and support services on issues related to the renewal of residence permits and citizenship applications. *ANOLF* is a spin-off of the Catholic-inspired trade-union CISL, and the responsible for *ANOLF* in Fermignano is a trade unionist of Moroccan origin with Italian citizenship. The services are mainly addressed to all persons residing in the territory of the municipality of Fermignano.

Finally, Fermignano hosts some voluntary associations. Among the most relevant associations in our field, there is *Il Vascello* (The Vessel), established in November 2006. This association comprises some 30 members, four of which have migration backgrounds. It aims at promoting a community founded on values such as solidarity, social justice, respect for every person, peace and attention to vulnerable groups in the local society. To pursue these objectives, *Il Vascello* carries out several activities, the most important of which is the 'social and health care service', a free service addressed in particular to people who have financial difficulties in accessing specialist health care. Other relevant non-institutional actors, in addition to the other territorial branches of the two above-mentioned trade unions, operate at the provincial level and are based in nearby towns.

Caritas Italiana is a national organisation of Catholic inspiration with several territorial branches in the case area (Pesaro, Fano, Urbino, Fermignano), which provides primary assistance to people with economic, social and psychological difficulties, including migrants. In addition, the Pesaro headquarters coordinate the work of strengthening and implementing the local network on migration issues. One of Caritas' most significant activities concerning migration issues concerns the experience of the 'House of Peace' in Pesaro. Established at the end of the 1990s, it is a meeting space for several organisations in the province of Pesaro-Urbino that are involved in various ways in the theme of inclusion/integration, strengthening feelings of community and coexistence between natives and the foreign population, and creating "a laboratory of cohabitation where the theme of encounter can be implemented" (Third-sector operator, interview, 01.06.22).

Arcigay Agorà is a voluntary association committed to the promotion of LGBT+ rights. Specifically for migrants, the support provided is divided into three main activities. The first activity consists in offering ongoing training to members of the Territorial Commissions for the recognition of inter-

²¹ Promoted by CISL - Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori - the second largest Italian trade union.

national protection to strengthen and increase decision-makers skills concerning the living conditions of LGBT+ people and gender-based discrimination. There is also a collaborative relationship with the Territorial Commissions consisting in providing advice by Arcigay activists for assessing the LGBT+ asylum seeker's history. The third activity consists of a free legal aid service for LGBT+ migrants in the area.

Labirinto, the area's leading social cooperative, has been dedicated to people's needs since 1979 by following and designing social-educational, social-health and training services and social research. It runs several reception centres, including a shelter for unaccompanied minors close to the municipality of Fermignano, and implements services and projects for social and labour inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees financed by FAMI.

L'Africa Chiama is an NGO based in Fano that has worked since 2001 in some African countries (Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia) and Italy with projects to prevent and mitigate educational poverty. Since 2019, it has collaborated in some FAMI projects with the objectives of capacity building of immigration professionals and administrative employees, promoting socio-cultural inclusion of migrants and fighting against labour exploitation.

Refugee Welcome Pesaro-Urbino is a territorial branch of *Refugees Welcome Italia*, a voluntary organisation that promotes the reception of young refugees who have been left out from the reception system for no more than 18 months.

4.3.1 Migrants' self-organisation and associations

Concerning migrant self-organisation in the territory of the municipality of Fermignano and its surroundings, there are a few associations promoted and made up of immigrants or Italian citizens with a migratory background (see annex 1 and Table 4). Alongside community associations (i.e. the Senegalese associations) and religious associations (the Islamic cultural association) that have accompanied the presence of migrants in the territory since early 2000, other associations appeared more recently, such as those composed of second generations or newcomers in specific vulnerable conditions (e.g. asylum seekers and refugees). These associations carry out various religious, cultural and social activities and try to meet the needs of old and new migrants through different means according to the resources available and the specific area/target of intervention.

Within the Municipality of Fermignano the *Islamic cultural association* has brought together the Islamic community for about two decades. Its privately owned cultural centre/mosque today represents a place of worship and socialisation for about 100 people living in and out of Fermigna-

no. The association also carries out social and charity activities, in particular during the month of Ramadan, and provides free Arabic classes for minors.

We are a religious association founded about 20 years ago and are now largely composed of long-term migrants (many of whom are now Italian citizens). We no longer have the needs that our fathers and mothers had... We want to be a place of prayer and meeting, but also make our religion known to second generations, to young people, to teach Arabic...In recent years we have managed to have our own mosque, recognised by the institutions, and we are very proud of it (Interview, 04.06.22).

The Albanian association *Albani* is primarily engaged in maintaining cultural identity by promoting the Albanian language and culture. In this case, some members of the “well-integrated” Albanian community of Fermignano felt the need to start a “disintegration” process among co-nationals, especially for second generations. The association was founded in 2018, it counts seven volunteers, and currently provides Albanian language classes mainly to second-generation Albanians and children of Albanian immigrants.

Our community is now well-integrated in Fermignano. We no longer have the problems of those who arrive and have to find a job, a house, etc. We have been here for many years, we have obtained citizenship, and our children are Italian. Now we think the time has come for us to ‘disintegrate’: we want to promote our culture and teach our children our language, which would otherwise be lost. That’s why we formed the association five years ago (Interview, 24.05.22).

The *Diaspora migrants* association is also based in Fermignano and represents another example of the recent diversification in the composition and aims of migrant associations. It was founded in 2020 by three Sub-Saharan refugees, supported by two Italian activists. Having directly experienced the asylum system and the difficulties in the transition to full autonomy, their members seek to promote the social inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees, although the association has not yet implemented specific activities in the area.

Other associations promoted by foreigners living in several places and municipalities of the Pesaro-Urbino province, including Fermignano, are based in nearby municipalities. Two of these associations base their membership on nationality or gender: the *Japoo* association was formed about 13 years ago and now involves long-stayers as well as recently arrived Senegalese people; the *Donne del Montefeltro* association was formed about 9 years ago and is made up of Senegalese women, although membership is gender-based and members would also like to include other nationalities. Both associations are mostly aimed at mutual self-help among members, e.g. in the re-

turn of remains to origin countries and the financing of funerals, weddings or other celebrations, but also the search for work or housing (the main problems reported by several migrants communities during interviews and focus groups) and guidance to integration services and bureaucratic procedures, especially for newcomers.

We are an association of Senegalese formed many years ago. We Senegalese, like other nationalities, have in our culture this desire of getting together and support each other. We were formed to get together and also to support each other economically, for example, in the case of weddings, funerals or other difficulties in the country of origin as well as in Italy (Interview, 05.03.22).

If *Japoo* and *Donne del Montefeltro* aggregate migrants based on common origin, other recently-formed associations also aggregate around other factors, such as legal status or shared history of forced migration and social exclusion. As for the case of *Diaspora migrants* in Fermignano, *Giovani Profughi* is a recent-established association formed by sub-Saharan migrants of various origins who have recently arrived in Italy, including asylum seekers and refugees. In addition to directing migrants towards public and private services, this association also seems to play an informal but significant role by trying to directly solve the urgent problems faced by newcomers, asylum seekers and refugees who have been expelled or have exited the reception system with the support of the ca. 60 members and their own networks. While most of the associations interviewed do not appear to be openly involved in political struggles and claims, *Giovani Profughi* represents an instrument of resistance from below to exclusionary policies, such as the “Salvini Decrees”.

We are an association of migrant people who do not identify with a nationality, a region or a political belief... we are young refugees and asylum seekers who trying to fight injustice and social exclusion... Our association was formed in 2017 but formalised in 2020 after the “Salvini decrees” led to the expulsion of thousands of people from the reception system... We have organised ourselves and reacted, helping asylum seekers and refugees exiting the reception system to get a job or a place to stay. Since 2020, we have helped about 20 young people who had nowhere to go through other members who had already obtained a home and a job (Interview, 04.05.22).

Table 4. Composition, activities and links of migrant associations in the Fermignano context.

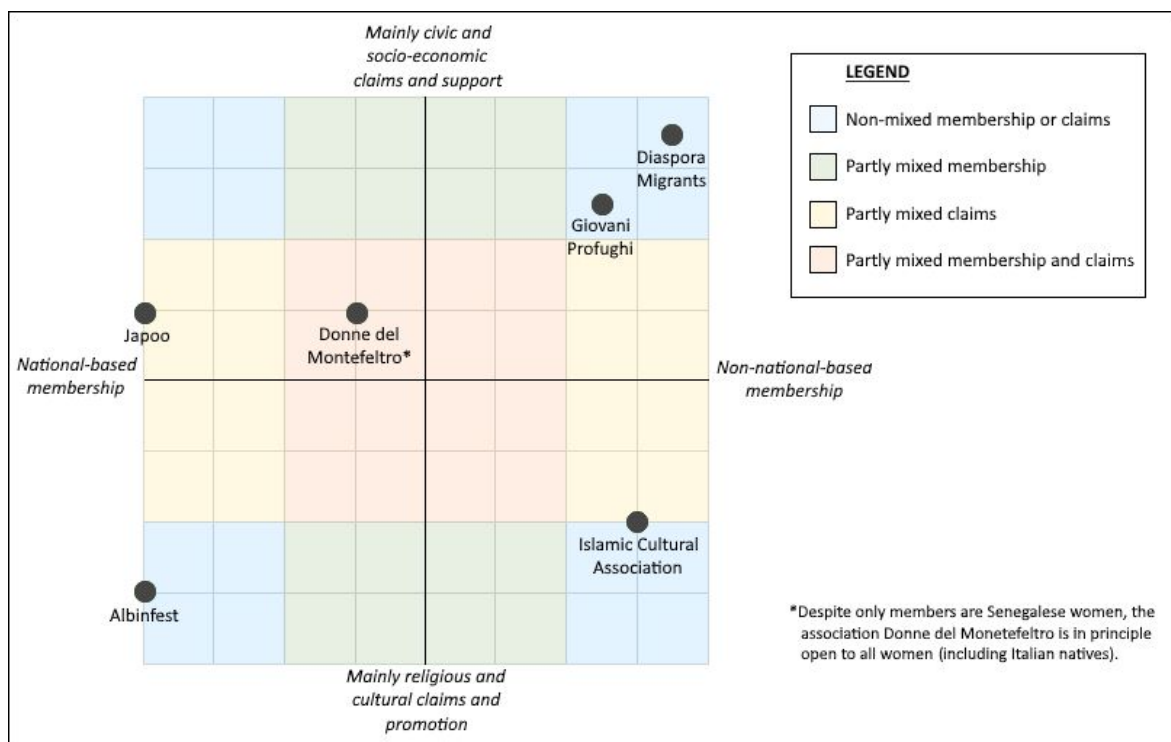
Association	Promoters and members	Years of activity	N. members and participants	Main ways of participation and interaction in the local network	Links and relations with other actors
<i>Diaspora Migrants</i>	Sub-Saharan refugees and asylum seekers	2	5	-	Other migrant association (spot)
<i>Albani</i>	Albanian community	5	7	Participation in Intercultural events; promotion of Albanian culture	Municipality of Fermignano; Other 'Albanian' associations
<i>Islamic Cultural Association</i>	Islamic community	15+	About 100	Participation in Intercultural events; Interreligious dialogue; Joint charity initiatives	Municipality of Fermignano; Marche Region (spot); Police forces (spot); Charity Organisations; Other Islamic Associations
<i>Giovani Profughi</i>	Sub-Saharan refugees and asylum seekers	2	About 60	Participation in Intercultural events; Joint charity initiatives;	Marche Region (spot); Reception service providers (spot); Trade unions; Charity organisations; Other migrant associations
<i>Japoo</i>	Senegalese community (mixed)	13	About 60	Participation in Intercultural events	Municipality of Vallefolgia; Other Senegalese associations
<i>Le Donne del Montefeltro</i>	Senegalese women	9	36	Participation in Intercultural events	Municipality of Fermignano; Municipality of Frontino; Trade Unions

Source: Own elaboration

To sum it up, the associations interviewed express different interests and claims, also reflecting a broader process of transformation in migrant stayers' status and their self-organisation in recent years. Thus, the overall landscape of migrant associations now differs in terms of composition (some aggregate members of a single nationality, others are cross-national), size (some are very small while others count over 50 active members), years of activity (some are recently born, while others have been operating for ten years or more) and aims. Regarding the associations' purposes, those based on more established communities at the local level (e.g. the Islamic and Albanian associations) aim above all at cultural and religious acknowledgement, while the others (the Senegalese associations) are more oriented towards socio-economic support among members and newcomers. The transnational associations formed by more recently arrived asylum seekers and refugees add to the above mentioned features a more marked and open demand for rights and

social justice. However, these features and purposes should not be understood as distinct and static since, perhaps due to the small scale of the context, associations may take them all into consideration, albeit in a different order of priority.

Figure 2. Tentative typology of migrant associations in the Fermignano context



Source: Own elaboration

4.4 Interactions and participation in the local network

In this section, we analyse interaction of local service providers/associations for and of immigrants from the institutional and non-institutional perspectives.

4.4.1 Institutional and non-institutional actors' participation and interaction in the local network

At the municipal level, the different actors that provide services and activities for migrants do not seem to interact very much. Indeed, during our research, we did not find any significant activity in which they worked together and participated in common projects. Collaborations among third-

sector organisations and other service providers in Fermignano concern sporadic and poorly structured emergency-related initiatives without proper structuring and shared co-planning paths. One of these activities was mentioned by the President of an association in Fermignano during an interview:

During the Covid pandemic, together with Caritas, the Fermignano Scouts, the Civil Defence and the Red Cross, we set up a “Spesa sospesa”²² initiative: every week, we distributed food parcels that we collected from supermarkets and mostly from Caritas. This initiative started during the first lockdown, continued throughout 2020 and part of 2021 and then re-emerged during the Ukraine emergency (Interview, 31.05.22).

Regarding the relationship between local organisations and the Municipality of Fermignano, the research found two different paths, depending on the actors and the issues in which they were involved.

On the one hand, there is an individual-based relationship between some of these actors and the Municipality, linked to the current administration's particular sensitivity to civil society organisations and issues related to migration processes and socio-economic hardship, as pointed out by the President of an association in Fermignano:

We have, and I want to emphasise this, excellent cooperation with the Fermignano administration. Also, because social services often call and consult us, we cooperate. We notify all people we assist to social services so that they have an up-to-date map, and sometimes, they ask us for help when they have difficulties with various problems, including bureaucratic and economic ones. So, there is close cooperation with local institutions (Interview, 31.05.22).

On the other hand, some actors pointed to a lack of cooperation between organisations and the Municipality, which led to overlapping and competing for aid and support initiatives for migrants. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic was a destabilising event, as it was also at the national level. Service slowdowns, closures, and restructuring, mainly due to the first lockdown restrictions and limited accessibility due to subsequent Covid-related restrictions, significantly affected service delivery. Reportedly, with the closure of the municipality's immigration service during the Pandemic, many migrants in distress turned to other service providers, which had to compensate for the absence of municipal services.

²² Suspended/pending shopping, whose name refers to the tradition of petty solidarity of “pending coffee” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caff%C3%A8_sospeso)

Honestly, there is little cooperation [...] because instead of complementing each other, sometimes there is even competition. I can mention the municipality of Fermignano, which, for example, has set up an immigration office operating two half days a week. Sometimes they come to us because there is no one there; during the pandemic period, it was the rule, so we indeed need much more cooperation in this sense [...] We used to collaborate, but there is still little or almost no coordination between us (Trade Union operator, interview 25.05.22).

The research thus showed that, at the municipal level, despite the presence of several third-sector, civil society and voluntary organisations interested in migration issues, a common and participatory path aimed at the meeting, exchange and collaboration between these actors and local institutions is still missing. The lack of continuous sharing between the parties prevents the construction of a structured and active local network capable of acting as intermediary at the wider territorial level to which it is rather difficult to refer.

At the supra-municipal level, while some organisations have an ongoing interchange with public institutions, these relationships are developed almost exclusively within the framework of specific short-term (mostly two-year) projects financed by international, national and regional funds (e.g., FAMI/AMIF) and implemented together with municipalities, ATS and Prefecture.

There has been an improvement in recent years concerning the relationship between the third sector and institutions. [...] There is a desire on the part of administrations to co-design, to enter into subsidiarity pacts [...] We are collaborating much more with local authorities, on the one hand indeed, because we are opening up to new networks by dedicating ourselves to the territory. Still, there is also a greater interest on the part of institutions wanting to network with the third sector. Let's take the example of these two FAMI projects with the Prefecture of Pesaro: if you think about it, the lead partner is the Prefecture, but it has the support of third-sector associations. Lately, we have collaborated much more with local authorities, Prefecture, municipality, ATS, and social services (Third sector operator, interview, 19.05.22).

Interviews often revealed that in implementing these projects, the public and civil society organisations involved do not always succeed in intercepting migrants' needs and interests. These dynamics are reinforced by the fact that such activities are often top-down, implemented without a proper need assessment, relation-building with migrants, and co-design.

Institutional relations are also often limited to meetings convened by the Prefecture – “Territorial Council for Immigration” - on territorial security or the management of asylum seekers and the reception system, as highlighted during an interview by a trade union operator:

Our relations with institutions are mainly with the Prefecture. At the municipal level, we have interacted with the job placement office and the Immigration Service Center as part of a project for the job placement of two asylum seekers, but these are occasional relations. With the Prefecture, on the other hand, there is a periodic table every six months or a year, which also involves other associations and organisations. In addition, we interface with the Prefecture whenever we have problems, such as delays in renewing residence permits or malfunctions of the online system used for administrative procedures, such as citizenship procedures and family reunification. With the war in Ukraine, we requested a meeting with the Prefecture together with the Ukrainian community of the Province, which gave guidelines on how to deal with the situation of Ukrainian refugees (Interview, 25.05.22).

Next sections analyse migrant associations and their participation in the local network.

4.4.2. Migrants' participation and interaction in the local network

The interviews also reveal limited interaction between migrant associations, institutions and other third-sector organisations. Regarding public-private cooperation, almost all of the associations interviewed have a formal relationship with the municipality. However, this interaction mainly concerns the organisation and implementation of festivals and intercultural events rather than decision-making processes or implementation of services. In one case (*Islamic Cultural Centre*), the association was also consulted by the local police to address minor local security issues. None of the local associations analysed participated in the Territorial Council for Immigration convened by the Prefecture, nor were they invited to be part of it. At the regional level, two of the six associations interviewed met with the former regional administration in a formal event to which they were invited along with other organisations operating in the Marche region.

With regard to the municipality of Fermignano, it is worth noting that despite the lack of formal channels of interaction, migrant groups acknowledge the growing efforts of the municipal administration to promote dialogue, inclusion and participation in recent years. In particular, the presence of a foreign-born councillor in the city council since 2016 seems to have benefited the various migrant groups in the area, not only improving their political representation but also encouraging them to put forward some of their needs and demands to the municipality and even to the region administrations:

In recent years we have noticed a more inclusive approach by the municipality of Fermignano. Although it is not our purpose, we have also realised that politics is the only way to achieve certain things [...] I mean that having someone to talk to and willing to listen to us is really crucial. Until a

few years ago, that was our main problem. Now we know who to talk to and we can eventually get directed to other levels...Finally, things have changed. We now have the first officially-recognized mosque in the whole Region and the fifth in the whole country... We had the Marche Region recognize circumcision as a service provided in the public health system [...] We wanted a cemetery because, during the Pandemic, the remains could not be returned to home countries, and we managed in a short time to obtain a space reserved for non-Christians and the Islamic community in the municipal cemetery (President of a migrants' association in Fermignano, interview, 04.06.22).

The municipality has been supporting us since we registered the association four years ago... We can now teach our language as the municipality provides us with a place and materials to hold our language courses. We are also involved in the yearly organisation of the *Popoli in Festa* event, where we invite some Albanian singers and dancers to perform in the public square. It is a great occasion to make our culture known (President of a migrants' association in Fermignano, interview, 23.05.22).

Popoli in Festa and other similar intercultural events in Fermignano and nearby small and medium-sized municipalities (e.g., Vallefoglia, PU) seem to be particularly appreciated by migrant communities, as these initiatives provide an opportunity for visibility, engagement with local institutions and participation in civic and social life at the local level. Overall, however, all migrant associations interviewed noted little attention to their involvement in decision-making tables on migration issues.

We are very pleased with the involvement in the organisation of the festivals and events. However, we have not yet been involved or consulted in decision-making processes on migration issues. We would like to participate on this level as well (President of a migrants' association in Fermignano, interview, 23.05.22).

Since we registered the association, we have written many times to the Prefecture and the local administrations asking to be heard but have never been received (President of a migrants' association at the local level, interview, 05.03.22).

There also seems to be limited interaction between immigrant-promoted associations and other civil society actors operating in the Fermignano area and at the provincial level. Apart from sporadic initiatives such as festivals, in fact, there is little room to engage in common tables and to carry out shared activities with other local organisations. Overall, only a few have been involved in the implementation of some of the activities carried out locally: two associations (*Islamic Cultural*

Center and *Giovani Profughi*) have participated in some charity and food distribution initiatives in collaboration with another larger civil society organisation in the area (*Caritas*), particularly in the aftermath of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

We would like to cooperate more with other organisations. With the pandemic, we thought we could help people in need, whether Italian or immigrants. So, we went to *Caritas* and told them we were willing to engage in any activity they were undertaking, we were told we could help by distributing food boxes, and that's what we did in many municipalities (President of a migrants' association at the local level, interview, 05.03.22).

Beyond these occasional initiatives, some migrant associations often turn to unions or larger third-sector organisations to solve the immediate needs of their members and newcomers, revealing a relationship of dependence rather than a horizontal relationship that influences decision-making.

While some of the associations interviewed have links with "similar" organisations in other municipalities, provinces or regions²³, there is little interaction among the different immigrant-promoted associations in and around the Fermignano area. Although some of these associations know each other or are aware of other immigrant-promoted organisations, opportunities and resources to meet and exchange are quite rare.

We are not very much in touch with other associations promoted by migrants in the area. Actually, we don't know them... Instead, we are in touch with other 12 Islamic associations of the Pesaro Urbino province [...] we can say it is a religiously inspired network to exchange ideas but also some practices...for example, we have shared the way we managed to establish our own mosque or the procedures through which we obtained the cemetery from the municipality (President of a migrants' association in Fermignano, interview, 04.06.22).

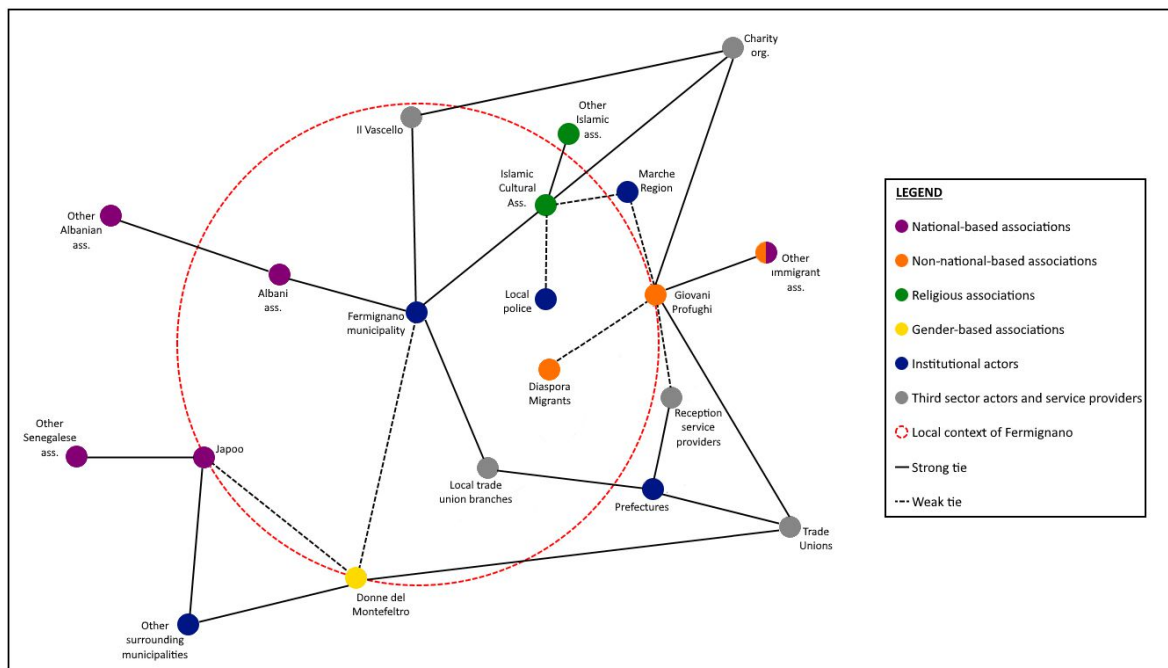
We don't know of other associations promoted by immigrants based in Fermignano or nearby municipalities. However, we collaborate with the network of Albanian associations in Italy...It is useful because we also get some guidelines and teaching materials from the Albanian Ministry of Education, which help us with our language courses (President of a migrants' association in Fermignano, interview, 23.05.22).

²³ For example, the Islamic association meets regularly with other Islamic associations in the province of Urbino; the Albanian association is part of the Italian network of Albanian associations; the Senegalese community has some exchanges with another Senegalese association in the municipality of Fano.

We know other associations promoted by immigrants but we have never organised anything together. I'm not sure if they are still active and doing something. We are not very networked among ourselves. We had started to communicate, but the pandemic stopped us...I'm aware that some associations even dissolved (President of a migrants' association at the local level, interview, 09.04.22).

In sum, the various immigrant-promoted associations do not interact intensely and frequently not only with local institutions but also with third-sector actors and other civil society associations in the area. As a result, they have a very limited ability to influence local inclusion policies, as well as the activities, projects and services that are implemented by other organisations. For these reasons, such associations also lack the awareness or realization that they are part of a proper local network.

Figure 3. Map of the network of actors involved in the immigration and integration field in the Fermignano context



4.5. Obstacles and challenges to participation

The obstacles to migrants' participation in the territorial network concern several aspects. First, migrants' involvement in participatory settings is limited since they are usually considered more as beneficiaries rather than protagonists of these measures. This is mostly due to the lack of for-

malised paths allowing the voice of migrants to be heard, which leads migrants to carry out claims through informal and person-based relationships, and to the still low level of inclusion, both individually and at the community level, within the network of civil society actors and public institutions. However, it cannot be ignored that some forms of participation, such as the strictly political one, seem not to be among the main priorities of some groups, especially those of recently arrived persons who primarily have to deal with practical matters as legal status, accommodation and work. Such framework is linked to a long-existing approach to policies towards the migrant population in Italy, which is characterised by a pendulum between securitisation through exclusionary and restrictive policies and the creation of dependency and “assistentialism” in social services that often denies migrants’ independence (Marchetti, Pinelli 2017; Altin *et al.* 2017; Ambrosini 2018; Pitzalis 2018).

In our context, the relationship between the Prefecture and the associations remains rather formal and not based on equal participatory positions. In the specific case of the "Territorial Council for Immigration" managed by the Prefecture at the provincial level, although there are two representatives of migrant associations, a problem of representativeness emerges:

“Two migrant associations” what’s the point? I mean, if you invite the Imam and the Senegalese association, what kind of representation have you given of the involvement of all the associations in the territory? (Third-sector operator, interview, 01.06.22).

Thus, a concern rises related to the institutional perception of immigrants as one homogeneous category, eclipsing the specificities of each community. In addition, some participants pointed out that the low participation of migrants in these Councils is due to the fact that they are organised mainly on weekday mornings when most migrants work.

Another critical element is that there is no operational continuity on migration issues, and the frequency of the Council often depends on the sensitivity of the Prefect in charge:

If the Prefect is interested in the matter, the Council is convened once every three months, if the Prefect is not, time intervals are even longer, so to say, it also depends on the Prefect who is there how often the Council is convened [...] the previous Prefect cared a lot and convened us at least 4/5 times in two years. Now much less (Third-sector operator, interview, 01.06.22).

Finally, as many interlocutors pointed out, Council meetings at the Prefecture are often organised as “top-down” information sessions, during which the Prefect gives directions and/or information, with no space for open discussion, sharing and exchange among the participants.

Unlike the presence of Territorial Councils for Immigration at the provincial level established by the Prefecture, at the local level, there is no mention of immigration councils in Fermignano and neighbouring municipalities. While, on the one hand, our study highlights the lack of formal institutional channels of migrant involvement, on the other hand, interviews emphasise that the traditional mechanisms experimented in past years (local Immigrant Councils and/or Deputy Counsellors) are considered outdated tools unable to represent the present complexity of migrant presence in the local area.

[The council] was fine in the 1990s, but in 2022, it doesn't need to be done. (Migrants) have to participate in the democratic life of a country, they have the tools that the administration has given and then there is the way of associationism which is a reference point for us [...] I believe that the migrant council was fine in the 1980s but not in 2022 (Local politician, interview, 30.09.22).

Overall, despite these considerations, the relations between the migrant communities and the municipalities seem to be occurring mainly on an individual/informal basis and relating to immediate/urgent needs, so much so that – despite considering representative bodies as “outdated” – another research and listening campaign we conducted at regional level showed an ambivalent regret for the lack of such discussion arenas (Angelucci 2020). The involvement of migrant communities in the process of policy-making still appears to be weak, and institutional/formal practices to promote participation in political life are limited. This limitation is also mentioned by the representative of an immigrant association:

I say this personally but also in behalf of the community, we have always been away from politics, the political terrain, and so on [...] What was our problem? Our problem was not knowing who to talk to [at the institutional level] for certain issues (Interview, 04.06.22).

In fact, we find that migrants at an official level are involved in the organisation of specific events/festivals dedicated to the theme of migration, peace or solidarity, however the construction of decision-making paths starting from migrants' experiences, needs and interests is completely neglected. In this regard, internal difficulties within the associations are also related to the immigrant communities' abilities and willingness to participate.

First, material difficulty related to basic necessities such as housing and work and precarious legal status should also be mentioned. Overall, many interviewees agreed on the need to improve social inclusion and integration services and extend access to rights (including voting and citizenship) to remove the obstacles and further stimulate political and civic participation.

In my opinion, there is an issue with priorities: a migrant in a new society must first have documents, a job and a roof over her/his head, then she/he can participate in social and political life. It cannot happen before that [...] if your first thought is to find somewhere to sleep, then all other things take second place (Interview, 08.06.22).

Another difficulty in participation is linked to the weaker organisation compared to established local civil society bodies and limited availability of time and economic resources, in fact associations are based on the voluntary support of their members, as pointed out by the President of a migrants' association in Fermignano:

We dedicate our spare time, we are all volunteers, and we have very few economic resources. We are all workers, and we have our own lives, our own families, plus we there are only a few of us...the time we can dedicate to the association is little. We t do our best with our limited resources (Interview, 23.05.22).

The lack of skills, expertise and knowledge of regulations, administrative mechanisms and bureaucratic procedures also limits the networking opportunities and the overall capacity to influence decision-making processes. In some cases, as in the Islamic community, there is also difficulty in attracting women or second generations and young people, who seem less interested in the religious-type forms of aggregation, that seems more attractive for first generations of North African immigrants.

These problems, in some cases, are intensified by the difficulties in registering associations, especially in the regional register, since 1) the association must possess specific characteristics and meet several requirements to register; 2) the bureaucratic process to register is neither simple nor utterly accessible to the foreign population, which often does not have the tools and/or time to follow it. This fact emerged strongly during an interview with one of the largest non-government organisations operating at the national and provincial levels:

Migrant associations are often very fragile, especially from a bureaucratic point of view, so they may not be registered, they may not have a statute, they may not have a legal personality [...] the passage in which most migrant associations got stuck was when the decision-makers behind the "social promotion association register" began to reject all the statutes of migrant associations of a single nationality, which were, in fact, the most numerous, i.e., the association of Romanians, the association of Ivorians, [...] because their statute was considered not to have the criteria of democracy as it referred to a national group only. Naturally having not been recognised as an association, they struggled more and eventually dissolved (Interview, 01.06.22).

It is also highlighted by the President of one of these associations:

An association must be registered with both the municipality and the Region. At the municipality, we managed to be recognised. At the regional level, on the other hand, we have tried several times, I have personally written two or three times, but we couldn't manage to get registered. When something happens in the region, the registered associations are contacted. But we are not recognised and cannot participate in regional meetings when there is a regional initiative (Interview, 05.03.22).

Despite all these difficulties, however, there are diverse forms of participation that express multiple interests. While for some, the main issue to face is formal integration through legal recognition, as in the case of newcomers, for other long-standing migration flows, new interests and claims emerge, such as recognition of a place of worship or even “a path of disintegration by promotion of the culture/language of origin since integration has already been achieved” (President of a migrant's association in Fermignano, interview, 23.05.22). Within this diverse array of associations and their claims, policy-making processes need to be able to capture all needs.

In conclusion, the case area we focused on presents some critical issues, mainly concerning the low level of involvement and participation of migrant communities and the lack of a proper territorial network for discussion and exchange capable of bringing together different organisations on common grounds, activities and objectives. Nevertheless, a weak but slowly-rising interest of migrants themselves in civic and political participation seems to emerge, though they might lack the means, knowledge, and often the time to take an active part in political life. In the case of Fermignano, it is possible to trace some initiatives which can be potential starting points for building a network of relations and innovative practices of migrants' inclusion and participation.

Based on this study, some policy challenges and related recommendations can be identified for small and medium-sized municipalities regarding the participation of migrants in decision making processes, as summarised in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary of policy challenges and recommendations to deal with them, based on the report's results.

N	Policy challenge	Recommendations
1	<i>Disproportionate reliance on (national) communities and associations for the participation of immigrants, which risks excluding more vulnerable groups or the acknowledgement and experience of individuals.</i>	a) Organising individual-based information campaigns about the possibility of immigrant participation at the local level, especially pointing the attention to non-immigration-focused councils; b) Using, whenever possible, low-threshold criteria for people to be part of local councils.
2	<i>Poor consideration of practical obstacles to the complete participation of immigrants in participative bodies (time constraints, travel expenses, etc.).</i>	a) Defining the schedule and the programme of local forums, meetings and councils through the direct involvement of the participants; b) Using, whenever possible, measures to facilitate the participation (e.g. blended mode, allowance, mediation with local firms for permits).
3	<i>Lack of formalised communication pathways between immigrants and supra-local institutions (e.g., the Prefecture).</i>	a) Up-scaling demands of the local immigrant population (collected, for instance, in local forum, bodies or through an immigrant office) towards supra-local institutions; b) Creating the direct connection between the local immigrant population and supra-local institutions through the promotion of forums involving both these actors.
4	<i>Very limited inclusion of immigrants within non-immigration-focused participative local bodies.</i>	a) Providing, whenever possible, access to local participative bodies based on residence or domicile, especially within sub-municipal councils or councils on specific issues (e.g. youth councils); b) Fostering the inclusion of citizens with immigrant backgrounds within the electoral list; c) Using or creating established networks of SMSTs to advocate the political participation of immigrants at a higher territorial level; d) Introducing the figure of the immigrant Deputy Councillor, assigning actual powers to it and organising an adequate information campaign about the election that also reaches individuals.
5	<i>Disproportionate reliance on informal personal-based contacts for the connection between immigrants and the administration.</i>	a) Creating or enhancing an immigrant office, which focuses not only on legal and bureaucratic issues but also on a larger set of tasks, such as housing and labour support. b) Including immigrants within the design, implementation and evaluation of the immigrant office, providing, for instance, periodic open meetings to discuss the activities of the office and the needs of the local immigrant population.
6	<i>Existence of material constraints to participation regarding the satisfaction of basic needs for individuals or the fulfilment of strict legal criteria for associations.</i>	a) Ensuring the accessibility of local welfare, using, whenever possible, the residence or the domicile as a criteria for local social policies and providing easy-to-access information about procedures; b) Facilitating the access to information and documents by providing the translation of relevant documents; c) Providing legal and bureaucratic support for registration of associations and other similar issues through the creation or the enhancement of an immigrant office.

N	Policy challenge	Recommendations
7	<i>Difficulties to reach some groups of the immigrant population (e.g., women or young people) with traditional civic participation tools.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Fostering the inclusion of immigrant associations in the general network of local associations to widen their scope of action through the creation of local platforms; b) Launching awareness campaigns on the importance of activism and associations, especially with young people within schools; c) Promoting the training of local associations on how to include and relate with hard-to-reach populations; d) Creating local councils on specific issues that can interest these groups (e.g., youth council), giving them actual powers, such as the possibility to present proposals to the municipal council.
8	<i>Lack of complementarity and exchanges of policy experience among municipalities in this field, especially regarding practices specifically focused on SMSTs.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Creating or joining national and transnational forums and networks of SMSTs about these policy issues (as well as other ones). b) Including immigrants within SMSTs' networks by allowing their representation in specific consultative bodies or in general forums. c) Forming specific thematic tables or platforms within SMSTs' networks to discuss these policy issues and exchange experiences.

Source: Own elaboration

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Annex. Components and activities of the local network

Table 6. Components and activities of the local network.

Actors	Type of Organisation	Main Activities	Scale	Role of migrants
Il Vascello	Association	Free health assistance; Second-hand materials and goods free sharing; Intercultural Cooking courses; After school support	Fermignano	Members + Beneficiaries
CGIL local branch	Trade Union	Social security, social and welfare rights; Fiscal assistance; Administrative assistance (i.e. family reunification; residence permits; citizenship)	Fermignano	Beneficiaries
CISL/ANOLF local branch	Trade Union / Association	Social security, social and welfare rights; Fiscal assistance; Administrative assistance (i.e.; family reunification; residence permits; citizenship); FAMI/AMIF projects.	Fermignano	Members (employee) + Beneficiaries
Diaspora Migrants	Association	Orientation to social inclusion services for refugees and asylum seekers	Fermignano	Promoters
Albani	Association	Promotion of Albanian language and culture	Fermignano	Promoters
Islamic Cultural Centre	Association	Religious dialogue and activities; promotion of Arabic language; self and mutual aid	Fermignano	Promoters
Caritas Italiana local branch	Association	Food Aid; Shelters; Social Inclusion; FAMI/AMI projects.	Pesaro Urbino Province	Beneficiaries
Arigay Agorà local branch	Association	LGBTQ rights protection; assistance in asylum applications and training to Territorial Commission members; intercultural city tours; FAMI/AMIF projects.	Pesaro Urbino Province	Beneficiaries
Labirinto	Social Cooperative	Reception of asylum seekers and refugees; Social inclusion; FAMI/AMIF projects.	Pesaro Urbino Province	Beneficiaries
Refugee Welcome	Association	Family-based reception for refugees exiting the institutional reception system	Pesaro Urbino Province	Beneficiaries
L'Africa Chiama	NGO	Afterschool support; Social and labour integration of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors; FAMI/AMIF projects.	Pesaro Urbino Province	Beneficiaries
Giovani Profughi	Association	Orientation to social inclusion of newcomers, asylum seekers and refugees; Self and mutual aid	Pesaro Urbino Province	Promoters

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Actors	Type of Organisation	Main Activities	Scale	Role of migrants
Japoo	Association	Self and mutual aid; Orientation to social inclusion services for newcomers	Pesaro Urbino Province	Promoters
Le Donne del Montefeltro	Association	Self and mutual aid; Orientation to social inclusion services for newcomers	Pesaro Urbino Province	Promoters
Prefecture of Pesaro-Urbino	Public Authority	Entries, for work and family reasons and applicants for international protection; citizenship applications; coordination among different stakeholders operating with/for immigrants through the Territorial Council of Immigration; FAMIAMIF projects.	Pesaro Urbino Province	Service beneficiaries
Immigration Desk (The Municipality of Fermignano)	Public/local Service	Accompaniment for paperwork (residence permits, etc.); organisation of the <i>Popoli in Festa</i> ; orientation services (employment centre, etc.)	Fermignano	Service beneficiaries
ATS IV	Public/Local Authority	General welfare services towards migrants, FAMI/AMIF projects	Urbino (and other 8 Municipalities)	Service beneficiaries

Source: Own elaboration