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Finally, Good News for Asylum Seekers in Italy

New Decree Rolls Back Some of the Worst Aspects of Immigration Policy
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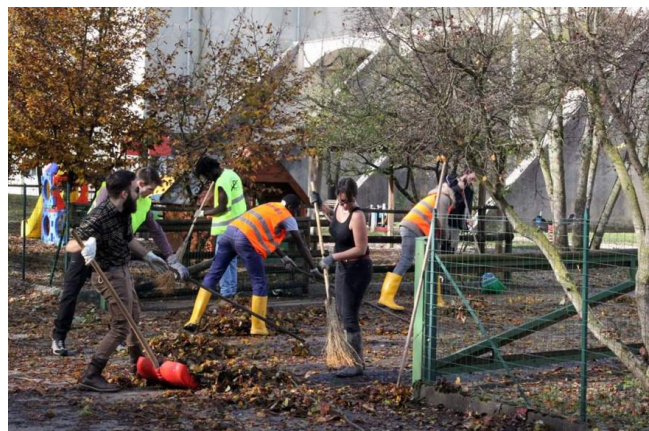
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It pledged last year to do so, and now the Italian government has restored some humanity to its immigration and asylum system. This week, the council of ministers adopted a decree that reverses many of the worst policies imposed by the previous interior minister and current leader of the anti-immigrant League Party, Matteo Salvini.

The decree isn't perfect, but it's a step in the right direction.

The decree, adopted October 5, essentially re-establishes in Italian law the residency permit on humanitarian grounds that Salvini abolished in 2018, now called "special protection." This two-year permit is for people who don't qualify for asylum, but who shouldn't be sent away because they would face a risk of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment. The permit is also for people who have family and social links in Italy, or who suffer from serious physical or mental health issues. By one estimate, more than 37,000 people became undocumented since 2018 because humanitarian permits were abolished.

Crucially, the decree allows people to convert this and other short-term residency permits into longer-term residency permits based on employment. This will help prevent people falling into undocumented status. The decree reduces detention pending deportation to three months from six.



Italians and asylum seekers from the local specialized reception center work together to clear debris after floods in Belluno, Italy, November 2018.

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While the previous government restricted the nation's reception system to recognized refugees and unaccompanied children, the new decree opens the doors to asylum seekers awaiting a decision. It also ensures asylum seekers have the right to register with the city hall where they live, since a Constitutional Court ruling this past July found the denial of this right made it “unjustifiably difficult for asylum seekers to access the services to which they are entitled.”

One large blot on the decree is the failure to take a clear stand against criminalization of humanitarian activities. The government chose to reduce from 1 million to 50,000 euros, rather than eliminate, the noxious fines on ships that perform search-and-rescue at sea. Last year, six United Nations human rights authorities called on Italy to incentivize rather than discourage shipmasters from fulfilling their moral and legal obligation to respond to ships in distress. The current government has delayed disembarkations and impounded rescue vessels on administrative grounds.

Parliament will have a chance to correct that, and make other improvements, when the decree is submitted for parliamentary oversight.

Region / Country

- Europe/Central Asia
- Italy

Topic

- Refugee Rights
- Asylum Seekers
- Migrants

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