



**On different paths:**

**the consequences of migration securitisation on migration governance  
in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia border region**

A Thesis research by

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## **Abstract**

This Master's thesis investigates the consequences of migration securitisation, especially in the domains of reception and border control, on migration governance in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia (FVG) region, located at the Italian North-Eastern border with Slovenia. The research aims to deepen the understanding of securitisation mechanisms and of the capacity of actors involved in migration governance to respond and adapt to them, both within their own activities and in their relations with other actors. The geographical area taken into consideration in this project is a privileged observatory. In fact, it is located at the end of the Balkan Route and it has been subject to increasing securitisation at a national and regional level after the 2015 'long summer of migration'. From the qualitative content analysis of policy documents, reports and interviews carried out in this research, it emerges that both external and internal securitisation strategies were employed in FVG: the former focused on border enforcement, combining militarisation, criminalisation and smartification practices. The latter, which proved more effective, aimed to downsize the public reception system and limit migrants' integration opportunities. Migration governance was negatively affected by increasing securitisation: even though some cooperation between subnational governmental and non-governmental actors remains thanks to direct individual relations, the two parties have increasingly diverging and irreconcilable objectives and means to achieve them. As a result, their capacity to adapt to the evolving migration phenomenon in the region is weakened.

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## **List of abbreviations**

- CAS** Extraordinary Reception Centre
- CPR** Centre for Permanence and Repatriation
- DASI** Rights, Reception and International Solidarity (network)
- EU** European Union
- FVG** Friuli-Venezia Giulia (region in North-Eastern Italy, borders with Slovenia)
- NGO** Non-Governmental Organisation
- SAI** System of Reception and Integration
- SPRAR** System of Protection for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

## 1. Introduction

During the last thirty years, migration into the European Union has increasingly been framed as a threat to the Union's countries national security, economic stability and national identity (Jaskulowski, 2019). This narrative reached one of its peaks after 2015, when conflicts and political persecution in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya caused a steep increase in migration influxes into the EU. During that year, over 1.8 million irregular border crossings at the Union's external border were recorded, quadrupled in comparison to previous years. Aiming to curb these increasing, undesired migratory movements, in the following years the EU and its Member States implemented more stringent migration control measures, especially at their borders (Sahin-Mencutek et al., 2022).

This was the case also in the Italian region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia (FVG), in the north-east of the country and bordering Slovenia. Despite not being situated at the external border of the European Union, this region is the first location in which migrants would want to apply for asylum when travelling along the Western Balkans corridor. The latter, known as 'Balkan Route', is a land migration route which extends from Turkey to Greece, the countries of former Yugoslavia, ending in Italy in the West. After the 2015 "long summer of migration", the EU response to mobility in the corridor shifted from humanitarian to securitised (Bergesio & Bialasiewicz, 2023). At the beginning of 2015, migrants could cross the Route in a few days thanks to civic initiatives and welcome policies implemented by some European countries, among which Austria, Germany and Sweden. From 2016 onward, mobility in the Balkans corridor became surveilled and criminalised through physical and legal means, such as erection of fences, border pushbacks, prison-like confinement, forced transit in reception camps (Zoppi & Puleri, 2022).

The FVG region and its border with Slovenia have also been subject to increasing securitarian migration policies since 2015, especially regarding border enforcement and reception activities on the territory. This thesis aims to identify and analyse the consequences of these migration policies implemented in the FVG region on the governance of migration in the area. More specifically, it strives to capture the adaptive strategies employed by governmental and non-governmental organisations in order to respond to the migration securitisation process, in terms of changes in the type and range of activities they carry out. Additionally, it aims to trace the evolution of relations and interactions among these

organisations, in order to study the efficacy of the current migration model in tackling migrant arrivals in a securitised context. Therefore, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question: *How does migration securitisation, in the domains of border enforcement and reception, affect migration governance in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region?*

This thesis adds to the literature on migration securitisation and migration governance, shedding light on their consequences and efficacy in a crucial geographical area in the European Union. As regards migration securitisation, the Italian-Slovenian border is especially interesting because it is one of the main terrestrial points of access and transit of migrants into the European Union, and it is an intra-EU border (Bergesio & Bialasiewicz, 2023). Concerning migration governance, the FVG region witnessed various migration waves, from the displaced persons from Istria after the Second World War, to the Yugoslavian refugees in the 1990s (Degli Uberti & Altin, 2024). Therefore, some NGOs have been active in the area for decades, offering services and support to migrants (ICS, n.d.); while since 2018 the regional council has been guided by a right-wing majority, after a left-wing one in previous years (FVG Region, n.d.).

In terms of migration securitisation and governance research, the Italian-Slovenian border has received little scholarly attention, if compared to the Mediterranean sea route and the Italian-French border in the north-west of the country (Amigoni et al., 2021). This research aims to gather insights related to governance and public administration, in an attempt to capture the changes which occurred in the area since the increase in migration securitisation efforts in 2015. Additionally, through its fieldwork and qualitative analysis, it wishes to contribute to the limited empirical knowledge on how migration securitisation policies are realised and enacted on the ground.

The focus on the Italian-Slovenian border is also useful to further the understanding of processes occurring in two bigger geographical areas: the Western Balkans and the European Union as a whole. With regard to the former, FVG's geographical position at the end of the Balkan Route allows to assess the practical effects of securitisation on migrants at the end of the journey. Moreover, the practice of readmissions carried out from Italy to Slovenia often caused chain readmissions to further, non-EU countries on the Western Balkan corridor, impacting also EU externalisation measures and often denying migrants' fundamental rights

(Astuti et al., 2021). Concerning the latter, migration securitisation policies implemented in FVG mirror wider trends in EU migration governance, such as the prolonged reinstatement of frontiers between EU states, readmissions and pushbacks of migrants (European Commission, 2024).

This thesis also has a societal relevance, since both governmental and non-governmental organisations could benefit from the insights offered by the analysis, especially in terms of adaptation to a context of securitised migration and improvement of the migration governance system. They could use the opportunities and constraints resulting from migration securitisation policies in the FVG region in order to inform their objectives and reach them more efficiently. Moreover, FVG citizenry could get factual information on how migration is managed in their region, avoiding the polarisation and dramatisation which often distinguish political statements and media reports on the topic.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

The following theoretical framework explores the main concepts related to the independent variable, migration securitisation, taking into consideration its history, rationales and modes. Moreover, it investigates the dependent variable, migration governance, focusing on the characteristics of relations within and between governmental and non-governmental organisations in governance systems.

### **2.1 Migration securitisation**

The concept of migration securitisation refers to the social construction of human mobility as a threat and as a crisis to manage (Bello, 2022). The ‘Copenhagen School’ firstly developed the notion of ‘securitisation’ in 1998, affirming that there exist no objective security issues, but only issues that are socially constructed as such, in order to legitimise an exceptional response to them. Coherently with this rationale, migrants are increasingly presented as ‘existential threats’ to the national identity and societal security of countries they arrive in, justifying a ‘politics of the exception’ aimed at eliminating the alleged danger that they pose (Diez & Squire, 2008). Huysmans & Buonfino (2008) observed that sometimes a ‘politics of the unease’ is also employed to legitimate migration securitisation: instead of focusing on a clearly identifiable security threat, it constructs a continuum of insecurities that spread from

one policy area to another. Thus, the ‘threat of migration’ can be linked to that of terrorism or welfare fraud, leading to the implementation of policies which address all these issues together and justify general surveillance and control mechanisms of the population at large (Diez & Squire, 2008).

The Copenhagen School held that security issues are constructed mainly through ‘speech acts’, public speeches and debates that discursively construct issues as supreme priorities (Bello, 2022). In the case of migration, scholarly research on the field (Bigo, 2002; Léonard & Kaunert, 2022) observed that the issue is securitised also through daily routines, practices and policies. Balzacq (2008) asserts that speech acts often precede and guide the choice of specific policy tools. For example, after the 9/11 attacks, migration in the EU started to be discursively depicted as a transnational danger closely linked to terrorism. As a consequence, the Union’s database systems, such as the Schengen Information System and the Eurodac, were strengthened and expanded in order to more accurately control migrants’ identity and movements across borders. Huysmans & Buonfino (2008) and Karamanidou (2015) do not identify such a chronological order, maintaining that discursive framings of migration as a threat and bureaucratic governance practices aimed at monitoring migrants, are used interdependently. In her research on European migration policies, Karamanidou (2015) highlights that securitised discourses cemented the symbolic, negative link between migration and criminality; but externalisation policies deterring migrants’ entrance into the European Union also conveyed the idea that migrants are undesirable, contributing to the same narrative and political aims.

According to Bello (2022), the level of migration securitisation in a country or region depends on the interplay of securitising actors, whose narratives, policies and practices support securitisation; and de-securitising ones, who contrast them through opposite discourses and actions. When securitising actors take the lead, they tend to construct migration as a crisis to manage, regardless of whether arrivals are increasing or not (Maguire, 2015). Therefore, securitisation in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, which is the main access point to Italy from the North-Eastern border, is likely to be driven by the political forces in power, more than by fluctuations in migrants’ arrivals.

### **2.1.1 Migration securitisation rationales**

Migration securitisation is justified by politicians, public authorities and the media through various rhetorical arguments. Ceyhan and Tsoukala (2002) divide anti-immigration discourses in four groups, noticing patterns of similarity across countries and time periods. Socio-economic arguments associate migration with an increase in unemployment, a rise of the informal economy and a crisis of the welfare state. Securitarian propositions suggest that immigration causes a loss of sovereignty, weakening border controls and increasing crime. Borders have a particular significance in such arguments, since they divide the safe ‘inside’ of nations from the threatening and insecure ‘outside’. Identitarian claims consider migrants as a danger for the host societies’ national identity, traditions and homogeneity. Huysmans (2000) holds that, according to this discourse, migrants jeopardise the reproduction of the social fabric of society, which can thus survive only if they are excluded from it. This rhetoric of migrants’ fundamental non-assimilability also transforms integration into a cultural issue: migrants’ ways of life are presented as incompatible with the host society’s, and their cultural and religious characteristics are essentialised. Therefore, these ‘cultural others’ can never be fully part of society. Finally, political discourses exploit anti-immigrant, racist and xenophobic arguments to obtain political benefits. In fact, politicians position themselves on the topic of migration for electoral purposes (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002).

### **2.1.2 Migration securitisation modes**

Migration securitisation discourses are concretised in two main coexisting types of control, as summarised by Ceyhan & Tsoukala (2002): external and internal.

External controls are carried out before and at the borders, and are especially relevant due to the geographical position of the FVG region. For the purpose of this research, border control practices are divided in four categories, based on patterns emerging from the literature (Tazzioli, 2020; Williams, 2020; Achermann, 2021, Gülzau et al., 2021, Degli Uberti & Altin, 2024). Militarisation entails the deployment of police at the border, complemented by the erection of physical barriers, such as walls and fences (Gülzau et al., 2021). Both at the US-Mexico border (Williams, 2016) and at the Italian-French border (Tazzioli, 2020), increased militarisation has resulted in an increase in migrants’ deaths. Criminalisation refers to the increasing convergence between criminal and immigration law, resulting in the depiction of migrants as criminals and “security threats” (Serpa, 2021). Border checks result

from this narrative, and in the last years they were implemented at the Italian-French border, in Germany, Austria, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, suspending the Schengen Treaty (De Somer, 2019). “Smartification” refers to digital surveillance of mobility through (biometric) technology, aimed at tracing border crossings without border guards being present and identifying unwanted migrants (Gülzau et al., 2021). Finally, soft techniques of border control aim to deter migration indirectly, using public information campaigns to expose its risks, for example rape, kidnapping and death; and to instill fear, anxiety and potential guilt in migrants (Williams, 2020). Williams (2016) highlighted the use of fliers and television announcements to discourage migrant crossings at the US-Mexico border, while Ferrer-Gallardo & van Houtum (2014) noticed that the European Union also carries out similar initiatives in the origin countries of migrants.

Examples of internal controls, occurring inside the territory, include socioeconomic checks performed once migrants enter a country, in order to determine their status and the services they are entitled to (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002). Moreover, practices of detention and deportation have been expanded and normalised in the European Union since the 1980s, as is evident in the proliferation of ‘reception’ camps effectively constraining migrants’ mobility and of return programmes (Karamanidou, 2015). These securitarian provisions construct migrants as an ‘undesired’ presence in everyday life, thus hindering social integration processes and jeopardising social cohesion of host countries.

## **2.2 Multilevel governance**

Multi-level governance (MLG) can be defined as the interaction and joint coordination of relations between various levels of governance. It concerns both governmental and non-governmental actors, whose relationships are non-hierarchical and based on cooperation and consensus building (Scholten & Penninx, 2016). It is a suitable framework for this research because it represents quite accurately the governance dynamics in the FVG region. In its vertical dimension, MLG regards intergovernmental relations between representatives of local areas and those of external power sources, in particular the State (Smith, 2007). The horizontal dimension of MLG captures interactions among state and non-state actors at the regional and city level. In particular, it concerns relationships between regions and cities’ administrations and grassroot and non-governmental organisations (Bazurli & Kaufmann,

2023). In the following sections, the existing literature on the nature and evolution of these interrelations is explored.

### 2.2.1 Interrelationships among migration governance actors

In order to analyse the nature of relations between governmental and non-governmental organisations, it is necessary to understand how their goals and approaches interact. The “Four-C’s” framework proposed by Najam (2000) makes a preliminary, general distinction in this sense, summarised in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** *The “Four C’s” of NGO-government relations*

		Goals (Ends)	
		Similar	Dissimilar
Preferred Strategies (Means)	Similar	Cooperation	Co-optation
	Dissimilar	Complementarity	Confrontation

A relationship of cooperation between government agencies and non-governmental organisations occurs when the two share similar policy goals and prefer similar strategies in order to achieve them. This type of relation entails shared norms, open communication and some coordination of activities. Complementarity is likely when governmental and non-governmental organisations share similar goals but prefer different strategies. They are likely to reach arrangements in which they complement each other in the achievement of a shared end, which is usually the provision of a particular service. Co-optation relationships are the result of government and NGOs having converging strategies but diverging aims. These situations are often transitory, and one or both parties will attempt to change the goals of the other. A confrontation scenario is likely when governmental agencies and NGOs diverge on both preferred ends and means to achieve them. In these cases, NGOs can emerge as forces of reaction or resistance to particular governmental policies, pushing for policy change.

According to Geddes et al. (2019), actors in migration governance systems make sense of the environment in which they operate through interactions with one another. At the same time, they shape the environment through their own actions and relations. These interrelations can

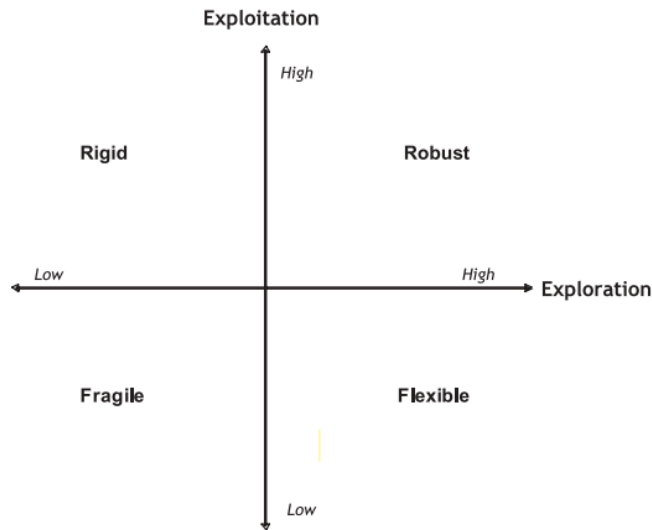
be analysed through the lens of collaborative capability, which is a set of attributes shown to lead to successful cooperation. Ulbrich et al. (2011) apply this concept to networked organisations, firms which respond and adapt to complex situations through both formal and informal contacts. However, the same characteristics, namely complexity and swift evolution, can also be applied to the migration context. Therefore, collaborative capability will be employed to evaluate the effectiveness of interactions among FVG migration governance actors, aimed at managing migrant arrivals in the region. Collaboration capability is based on trust, which builds around actors' credibility, predictability and willingness to act in benevolence to a relationship, and not against it. This means that actors are confident that their partners will meet their obligations and contribute as promised. Effective and open communication, especially in the form of frequent interactions and information sharing, can contribute to building trust in the first phases of collaboration and ensure its progression. Combining resources and taking advantage of specialised competences are also crucial elements of collaborative capability. In this regard, flexibility is important to give actors the freedom to modify and adapt their activities, in order to be able to react to continuously changing circumstances. Moreover, leadership shifts may be necessary, based on the knowledge and competencies required to implement specific activities (van der Meer-Kooistra and Scapens, 2008). If the collaboration proves effective, actors will be more likely to work again in the future, strengthening their relationships. Their capacity to learn from experience and adapt to swiftly changing circumstances is discussed in the following section.

### **2.2.2 Adaptive capability of migration governance actors**

Multilevel governance of the case study at hand underwent profound changes after the response to migration influxes in FVG shifted from humanitarian to securitised in 2015 (Bergesio & Bialasiewicz, 2023). The migration governance system had to respond to the new situation, developing its adaptive capacity. According to Duit and Galaz (2008), the latter can be conceptualised as a function of exploitation and exploration. Exploitation is the capacity to benefit from existing forms of collective action, striving to refine processes and practices in order to make them more efficient. Exploration is the capacity of governance to pursue learning and experimentation, gathering and analysing information about ongoing processes and testing new forms of governance, policies and practices within a given policy area, in a trial-and-error process. The balance between exploitation and exploration

determines the adaptive capacity of governance systems. Four types of governance can emerge from this process, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** *Adaptive capacity of the four governance types*



Rigid governance combines high levels of exploitation with low level of exploration, ensuring stability and predictability when there are no external changes in circumstances, and can be associated with state-centric approaches. Robust governance has high capacity for both exploration and exploitation, and is the only type of governance with sufficient adaptive capacity to respond to all sorts of complex processes. In fact, it can handle well both slow predictable change and rapid unpredictable change. In fragile governance, weak exploitation and exploration lead to poor adaptive capacity to new circumstances and to external shocks. Finally, flexible governance has well-developed capacities for exploration, such as learning processes and feedback loops, but is unable to translate this information into objects of exploitation. This can mean that exploration is carried out independently by multiple actors at the same time, it is not coordinated and not hierarchical and, as a result, adaptation tends to be haphazard and with no institutional foundation.

The combination of these theoretical lenses clearly identifies the characteristics of securitisation narratives and policies, as summarised by Ceyhan and Tsoukala (2002), then it captures their multifaceted consequences on migration governance from three different perspectives. In fact, it enables the analysis of the current state of affairs of migration governance in terms of *relationships* and *collaborations* among involved actors (Najam,

2000; Ulbrich et al., 2011), but it also gives insights into their *temporal evolution* through adaptive capability reflections (Duit & Galaz, 2008). This allows for a complete and nuanced answer to the research question.

### **3. Research design and methodological justification**

This section specifies the research question and describes the rationale for the case selection, the sampling strategies and the methods employed for the collection and analysis of data. Moreover, it presents an operationalisation table summarising the concepts outlined in the theoretical framework. Finally, it discusses some relevant ethical considerations.

#### **3.1 Research question**

The research investigates the consequences of increased migration securitisation, in terms of border enforcement and reception activities, on the role and interactions of governmental and non-governmental actors which operate in the field of migration in the FVG region. In particular, the research question under scrutiny is: *How does migration securitisation, in the domains of border enforcement and reception, affect migration governance in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia border region?* In order to conduct a comprehensive analysis, the following sub-questions will be investigated:

SQ1: Which migration securitisation policies are employed in the FVG border region?

SQ2: Which actors are involved in migration governance in the FVG border region?

E1: Based on the dynamics observed at the Italian-French border, which also registered an increasing number of migrant arrivals since 2015 (Amigoni et al., 2021), the expectation is that securitisation is mainly aimed at reinforcing the border to prevent migrants from entering the FVG region. Moreover, the ‘migration crisis’ is expected to be related to an institutional narrative, more than to an actual increase in the number of migrants. Finally, non-governmental organisations and individuals are expected to play a more prominent role in supporting migrants, subsequently to increasing securitisation.

SQ3: How did the introduction of migration securitisation policies affect the *activities* carried out by the actors involved in migration governance in the FVG border region?

SQ4: How did the introduction of migration securitisation policies affect the *relations* among actors involved in migration governance in the FVG border region?

E2: On the basis of research carried out in other Italian border regions and cities, for example Syracuse in Sicily (Panebianco, 2022), local (horizontal) governance is expected to take a prominent role in migration governance. However, Martins and Davino’ fieldwork (2023) in the Italian region of Lombardy, where there is high support for the same populist and anti-immigrant ‘Lega’ party as in FVG; raises the expectation that non-governmental actors have limited collaboration with governmental ones. Thus, governmental and non-governmental actors are expected to develop separate forms of assistance to migrants, even though direct human relationships and personal connections could promote collaboration and exchange between them.

Answering this set of questions will provide a descriptive and analytical overview of the migration governance system in the FVG region and its evolution due to migration securitisation, which has occurred in the area especially since 2015.

### 3.2 Operationalisation

The following table operationalises the main concepts of the research question. As regards the independent variable, that is migration securitisation (Table 1), the broader theme of migration securitisation is taken into account within it. The dependent variable, migration governance (Table 2), is analysed in its relational, collaborative and adaptive dimensions.

**Table 1.** *Independent variable: migration securitisation*

Concept	Dimensions	Subdimensions	Indicators
<b>Migration securitisation</b> Process of characterising migration as a	<b>MS rationales</b> (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002, Follis,	Socio-economic	Policy documents and interviewees mention “migrants stealing natives’ jobs”, migrants causing rising unemployment and/or a welfare crisis.
		Political	Policy documents and interviewees mention an “immigration emergency” which needs to

security threat, justifying more stringent approaches to migration control (Boswell, 2007)	2021)		be contained also through the use of force; and/or employ racist and xenophobic arguments.
		Identitarian	Policy documents mention protecting Italian culture and values from immigrants.  Interviewees mention “Italians first”, migrants jeopardising Italian values and identity, Italians becoming a minority.
		Securitarian	Policy documents and interviewees mention Italian authorities’ aim to “take back control” of the country and control borders more strictly; refer to migrants as ‘criminals’.
	<b>MS modes: external control</b>  (Williams, 2020; Tazzioli, 2020; Gülzau et al., 2021;)	Militarisation	Policy documents and interviewees mention building walls and fences at borders, introducing border police and/or joint patrols of bordering countries.
		Criminalisation	Policy documents and interviewees mention (internal) border checks, formal and informal readmissions, pushbacks at the border.
		Smartification	Policy documents and interviewees mention use of biometric surveillance at the border to identify migrants (gathering of fingerprints, retinal scanning, voice patterns, drones, camera traps).
		Soft enforcement	Policy documents mention campaigns and messages aimed at dissuading migrants from coming to Italy. Migrating is framed as “bad” for migrants’ health and “dangerous” for their lives.
	<b>Modes: internal and societal control</b>  (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002)	Socioeconomic controls	Policy documents and interviewees mention controls to verify migrants’ socioeconomic status, highlight that services are limited or not accessible for both undocumented and legal migrants.
		Detention and return	Policy documents and interviewees mention reception camps which migrants can rarely/never leave and/or (assisted) return programmes.

**Table 2.** *Dependent variable: migration governance*

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Subdimensions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<p><b>Government bodies - NGOs relations</b></p> <p>Interactions and relationships between governmental actors (national and local government, police) and non-governmental actors (volunteer organisations, NGOs networks) (Bazurli &amp; Kaufmann, 2023)</p>	<b>Mode of interaction</b>	Cooperation	Objectives and means of action stated in gov and NGOs official documents and by interviewees are the same.
		Co-optation	Gov and NGOs interviewees and official document statements agree on objectives but criticise and/or disapprove of means employed to reach them.
		Complementarity	Gov and NGOs interviewees and official document statements agree on objectives and work non- antagonistically towards them.
		Confrontation	Gov and NGOs interviewees and official document statements criticise and/or disapprove of each other’s objectives and activities. They feel threatened by each other’s activities.
	<b>Collaborative capability</b>	Trust	Policy documents and interviewees mention “trust in other actors”, “common goals”, “shared beliefs”.
		Communication	Policy documents and interviewees mention frequent meetings and/or communications, and sharing information with other actors.
		Commitment	Policy documents and interviewees assert that actors respected their commitments and were predictable and coherent in their activities. Mention of flexibility and leadership shifts among actors when dealing with novel and evolving situations.
	<b>Adaptive capability</b>	Exploration	Gov and NGOs actors implemented new services and networks after the increased migration securitisation.
		Exploitation	Gov and NGOs actors continued using the existing networks and services after the

			increased migration securitisation. They adapted them to respond to new needs, aiming to increase their efficiency.
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### 3.3 Methods

This research employs qualitative research methods, combining policy document analysis and semi-structured interviews, in order to understand the implications of migration securitisation on migration governance in a crucial area for migration into the European Union (Babbie, 2016).

#### 3.3.1 Case selection

Migration governance in the FVG region is an instance of multilevel governance in a context of increased securitisation of migration in the European Union. The geopolitical position of the region, at the Italian North-Eastern border with Slovenia, is particularly relevant because it is one of the main terrestrial points of access and transit of migrants into the European Union, and because it is an intra-EU border (Bergesio & Bialasiewicz, 2023). FVG's geographical position within Europe is specified in Figure 3; while Figure 4 outlines its provinces, where migration governance actors carry out their activities.

**Figure 3.** *Friuli-Venezia Giulia's geographical position*



Image: Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/place/Friuli-Venezia-Giulia>

**Figure 3.** *Friuli-Venezia Giulia provinces*



Image: Itay Heritage [https://www.italyheritage.com/visit-italy/ita/regioni/friuli-venezia-giulia/#google\\_vignette](https://www.italyheritage.com/visit-italy/ita/regioni/friuli-venezia-giulia/#google_vignette)

Despite its geographical relevance, not much scholarly research focuses on the region, and it is mainly concerned with historical (Degli Uberti & Altin, 2024), ethnographic (Altin, 2019) and geopolitical (Bergesio & Bialasiewicz, 2023) perspectives on migration. This research aims to further nuance the existing literature, gathering insights on governance and public administration in this region. The latter could be useful to better understand wider trends and processes in EU migration governance, related to the suspension of the Schengen free movement area (Amigoni et al., 2021) and the externalisation of migration policies to non-EU countries along the Balkan Route (Astuti et al., 2021). The analysis focuses on the time period 2015-present, since the ‘long summer of migration’ gave impetus to the migration securitisation process.

### **3.3.2 Data collection**

Combining document analysis and interviews in this research project is functional to get a comprehensive overview of migration securitisation consequences on migration governance.

The analysis of policy documents clarifies the legal and institutional framework within which all actors operate; while reports, especially those published by NGOs, help to map the evolution of migrant arrivals and the response of the FVG reception system. Websites, articles and press releases contribute to contextualising this information. A purposive, non probabilistic sampling strategy was used to identify and select the relevant documents for the

analysis (Babbie, 2016). Policy documents were found on the official website of the Italian Ministry of Interior, while reports were obtained through the websites of NGOs which focus (part of) their work on the area. During interviews, further suggestions on relevant documents to include in the analysis were asked to participants. The documents were manually screened to check whether they included words and concepts related to “migration (emergency)”, “Friuli-Venezia Giulia”, “Italian-Slovenian border”, “Balkan Route”, “(grassroot) reception system”, “border controls”, “informal readmissions”. Documents which responded to these characteristics were considered for the analysis. For a simplified overview of the analysed documents, see Table 3.

**Table 3.** *List of document types*

<b>Document type</b>	<b>Amount per type</b>
Policy document	7
Report	15
Official Website	7
Newspaper Article	6
Press Release	7

Semi-structured interviews with members of different organisations concerned with migration in the FVG region allowed to gather specific and in-depth experiences and perspectives on the practical consequences of working in a securitised border context (Babbie, 2016). In particular, they shed light on the efficacy of migration securitisation practices, in terms of the changes, opportunities and limitations they entail for the range and type of activities carried out by actors. Interview participants were identified through both a purposive and a snowball sampling strategy (Babbie, 2016). The former identified “information rich cases” at the national and local level, namely people with extensive knowledge of the issue and area of interest (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018). These potential participants were selected based on my own knowledge of migration-related actors in FVG, acquired during a previous internship in the area; and complemented by consulting websites and initiatives various actors collaborate in. Snowball sampling was conducted in a later phase, asking the first interview participants to indicate other people with expertise in the field who would be willing to take

part in the research. Purposive sampling ensured that the most relevant actors working on the ground in FVG were included in the research, while snowball sampling helped to approach individual interviewees who were not immediately reachable when contacting organisations and governmental offices. An interview guide with open questions was developed, but interviewees could introduce connected topics and deepen specific perspectives, based on their positionality and experience (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2018). Interviews were transcribed on encrypted Microsoft Word documents (as part of the Erasmus University Microsoft 360 pack) and stored into a password-protected folder on the researcher’s laptop (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2020). For an overview of research participants, see Table 4.

**Table 4.** *List of research participants*

<b>Research participant number</b>	<b>Research participant function</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
RP1	Researcher / Activist	Lungo la Rotta Balcanica
RP2	Former Gr.I.S. FVG coordinator, coordinator of Rete DASI activities	Rete DASI (Rete per i Diritti, l'Accoglienza e la solidarietà Internazionale del FVG)
RP3	Doctor / Gr.I.S. FVG coordinator	Gr.I.S. FVG (Gruppo Immigrazione e Salute Friuli-Venezia Giulia)
RP4	Worker / Activist	Diaconia Valdese Trieste
RP5	Coordinator of migrants’ reception activities	Centro Balducci
RP6	Founder and coordinator of activities	Linea d’Ombra
RP7	Volunteer	Ospiti in Arrivo
RP8	Volunteer	Ospiti in arrivo
RP9	Doctor / Professor / Activist	DONK Humanitarian Medicine / 2001 Agenzia Sociale
RP10	Coordinator of activities / Researcher / Activist	ICS (Consorzio Italiano di Solidarietà)

### **3.3.3 Data analysis**

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the relevant documents and the interview transcripts. This research method was chosen because it is highly systematic, allowing for the classification of large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories. Moreover, it helps identify themes or patterns, which enable to generalise and draw conclusions on the gathered data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

The coding process was carried out in Atlas.ti, employing an abductive approach. Prior to the content analysis, some deductive codes were derived from the theoretical framework, and their indicators were defined in the operationalisation table (Mayring, 2000). Deductive codes included migration securitisation rationales and modes of interaction among actors. Moreover, during the content analysis new codes were created inductively, capturing key words or concepts and allowing for new insights to emerge. The mixed approach grounded the analysis in theory, while simultaneously allowing flexibility in capturing documents' insights and interviewees' perspectives (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

### **3.4 Ethical considerations**

Due to the high level of politicisation of the topic of migration in Italy, especially related to securitisation and border governance, some ethical reflections need to be made. The analysed documents are publicly available, therefore they mainly relate to qualitative interviews. Since the pool of relevant participants in FVG is limited and the majority are NGOs members, particular attention has to be given to maintaining their anonymity, avoiding accidentally revealing their identities by including specific details and opinions in the final text (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2020). Moreover, considering the rather localised and specific scope of the research, it has to be kept in mind that its results risk being used by anti-immigration actors, in order to fuel xenophobic narratives and/or reinforce securitisation policies (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2020).

## **4. Empirical findings and analysis**

This chapter presents an analysis of the collected data and a discussion of the findings' implications. Firstly, the progression of migration securitisation in the FVG region is outlined. Secondly, a mapping of the actors involved in migration governance in the area is

provided. Lastly, the evolution of actors' activities and relations among each other is investigated in light of increased migration securitisation.

#### **4.1 The migration securitisation process in the FVG border region**

This section briefly analyses migration policies implemented in Italy and in the FVG border region, which led to a progressive securitisation of the area. Both perspectives are useful to contextualise the timing and content of migration securitisation in the region.

##### **4.1.1 National migration securitisation policies**

Law Turco-Napolitano (40/1998) was the first significant legislative step towards migration securitisation undertaken by the Italian government, in 1998. It actively tried to combine a strict control of migrant arrivals and departures, by introducing migrant workers' quotas in Italian regions and expulsion of irregular migrants; with integration paths for regular migrants (Sciortino & Vittoria, 2023). In 2002, it was followed by the Bossi-Fini law (189/2002), which implemented detention for irregular migrants and consolidated expulsion procedures, but at the same time it established the "System of Protection for Asylum Seekers and Refugees" (SPRAR) (SAI, 2024). This network of reception centres and local migration organisations, coordinated and funded by the Italian Ministry of Interior, provides medical, social and psychological assistance, Italian language courses, legal and career guidance (Delli Zotti & Greco, 2017). In FVG, it hosts small groups of migrants in apartments and it fosters social integration initiatives and professional training projects, especially in the construction and craftsmanship industries (DASI Network, 2024).

The securitarian objectives of Italian migration policies became more explicit consequently to the Arab Spring, when mainly asylum seekers and refugees arrived in the country. Migration was increasingly conceived as an 'emergency' to be managed through restrictive policies, taking urgent action to limit arrivals. In order to accommodate peaks of arrivals, Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS) were established in 2015, offering only food and accommodation to migrants, without integration programmes such as Italian language courses and professional training (Bello, 2021). While officially this is due to their emergency nature, CASes are coherent with a detention rationale, aiming to isolate migrants and constrain their mobility. Since then, CASes have become the norm and currently host the

majority of migrants, especially in FVG, where at the end of 2023 they provided 92% of reception places (Ministry of Interior, n.d.).

Securitarian internal controls, in the form of migrants' detention and return, were enhanced in 2017 by the Minniti-Orlando decree (13/2017), which established the Centres for Permanence and Repatriation (CPR). Here, migrants whose asylum application has been rejected wait to be repatriated, so as not to burden the SAI system, and one has been opened in FVG's Gorizia province (Balsamo, 2023). Moreover, in 2018 and 2019 two "Security Decrees" (113/2018 and 53/2019) abolished "humanitarian protection", which is included in the Italian Constitution, aiming to obstruct the asylum-seeking process and *de facto* leading to migrants' detention for prolonged time periods. "Special protection" substituted it, for specific instances of migrants who could not leave the territory due to severe humanitarian situations. Additionally, the Decrees cut funds for SPRAR, now renamed SAI (Reception and Integration System). Finally, the 2023 Cutro Decree (20/2023), approved after a shipwreck in the Mediterranean which caused 91 migrant deaths, limited the application of the "special protection" and strengthened the CPR network. Moreover, it excluded asylum seekers from the SAI system, limiting their integration possibilities (ECRE, 2023).

#### **4.1.2 FVG-specific migration securitisation policies**

FVG-specific migration policies mainly have a securitarian rationale, aiming to enforce the Italian border with Slovenia in order to limit migrant arrivals. A timeline focusing on securitisation measures implemented in FVG since 2015 is available in Annex 1.

Militarisation is visible in the establishment of Italian-Slovenian mixed police patrols, firstly introduced in 2019 with the declared aim to limit irregular migration along the Balkan Route, then suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic and resumed in 2021 (Ministry of Interior, 2019). This strategy is complemented by criminalisation in the form of police checks at the border between Italy and Slovenia, introduced in October 2023. This suspension of the Schengen free movement area was originally adopted only for ten days, in order to counteract the risk of terrorist attacks linked to the Israel-Palestinian conflict in the Gaza Strip, but then it was extended for six months and is still ongoing (Ministry of Interior, 2024a). Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi affirmed that border controls would also help limit migrant arrivals from the Balkan Route, however no substantial change was noticed by NGOs

working in the border area (Abandoned Lives report, 2024). SIULP, the main police union in FVG, affirmed that police checks are not efficient because they only focus on the region's five main border crossings, disregarding minor access points. In fact, the Italian-Slovenian border spans 232 kilometres, it encompasses three provinces and it is difficult to patrol thoroughly because it is very porous, with numerous passages in the Julian Alps and in the woods. Therefore, it is easy for migrants to avoid border checks when entering the FVG region (RP9, personal communication, June 2024). In order to solve this issue, the FVG regional council employed a smartification strategy, announcing the installation of sixty-five camera traps at the border with Slovenia to detect migrants' passage. However, it is not clear whether these devices have been activated and used (Congiu, 2024).

“Informal readmissions” were an additional criminalisation strategy introduced by the Ministry of Interior in 2020. On the basis of a cross-border agreement between Italy and Slovenia, signed in 1996 but never ratified by the Italian Parliament, the Italian police can bring migrants found on Italian territory back to the border with Slovenia, placing them under the authority of Slovenian police without giving migrants an official document acknowledging the procedure (Degli Uberti & Altin, 2024). *De facto*, this agreement prevented migrants from applying for asylum in Italy, denying their right to seek international protection; and from contesting the readmission decision, since they could not legally demonstrate that they had been readmitted to Slovenia (Melting Pot, 2022). Moreover, it caused a chain of pushbacks along the other Balkan Route countries: from Slovenia to Croatia, and from Croatia to Bosnia, outside the Schengen area (Di Pascale, 2021). In these States, migrants are reportedly victims of inhuman and degrading treatment by the national police forces (Chiodi et al., 2021). In January 2021, the Rome Court of Cassation established that informal readmissions were illegal, and they were suspended until November 2022, when the current Interior Minister Piantedosi reactivated them, aiming to give new impetus to the contrast of illegal migration (Melting Pot, 2022). However, the annual report “Abandoned Lives” (2024), which analyses migrant arrivals from the Balkan Route in Trieste, highlighted that 90% of readmission proposals were refused by Slovenian police in 2023, leading the Italian government to abandon this strategy.

In conclusion, the securitarian approach towards migration adopted in Italy since the 1990s aligns with a ‘politics of the exception’. The issue gained increasing prominence in the political debate and surveillance and control strategies were specifically targeted at migrants.

Politicians' speech acts presented migration as an 'emergency' and were complemented by various policies contributing to the same narrative, which progressively isolated migrants in CASes and CPRs and constrained their reception and integration opportunities. Policies' exceptional character is especially evident in FVG's informal readmissions: despite even leading to human rights violations, in 2020 they were normalised in the name of preventing illegal migration to Italy. In FVG, migration securitisation is driven by the securitarian objective of limiting (irregular) migration to Italy and it is concretised in a combination of external and internal controls. The former, namely militarisation, criminalisation and smartification, are designed to complement each other and used interchangeably, based on their effectiveness. The latter mainly regard the downsizing of the public reception system and of the range of services offered to migrants, leading to a state of permanent emergency in the region.

## **4.2 Actors involved in migration governance in the FVG border region**

A mapping of governmental and non-governmental actors operating in migration reception and control in FVG is presented in this section, in order to clarify the subjects involved in migration governance in the region.

### **4.2.1 Governmental actors**

The governmental actors participating in migration governance are the same in all FVG provinces. At the national level, the Ministry of Interior manages migration and asylum matters, adopting national policies which are implemented at the local level in every Italian region. The Ministry's aim, as stated in its official website, is to combine the control of migrant arrivals with the reception and integration of asylum seekers, guaranteeing public order and safety (Ministry of Interior, n.d.).

At the subnational level, the national authority is represented by Prefectures, administrative offices which coordinate and oversee the implementation of migration policies in provinces (Bello, 2021). Their action is complemented by Questures, namely the local police departments present in every province, which manage residence permit requests (Ministero dell'Interno, 2024). The FVG Region oversees and supports migration-related projects in the areas of reception, education, employment, housing, cultural mediation, anti-trafficking (FVG

Region, 2024). FVG municipalities also take part in migration governance, by proposing or supporting reception and integration projects for migrants.

#### **4.2.2 Non-governmental actors**

The objectives and activities of non-governmental actors operating in the field of migration in FVG are shaped on the basis of the specific characteristics and necessities of the territory in which they work. These actors can be divided in three categories: those only offering services to migrants, such as cooperatives, those focusing on advocacy projects linked to migration management and awareness in the region, and those combining the two. For clarity, the most relevant non-governmental actors will be presented based on the province they are active in.

In the city of Trieste, an informal NGO solidarity network consolidated around Piazza Libertà, a public square next to the train station. It offers basic, first reception services to migrants. The volunteer organisation “Linea D’Ombra” initiated it in 2019, after observing that migrants arriving from the Balkan Route were not adequately taken care of by neither governmental nor non-governmental actors (RP6, personal communication, May 2024). Thus, it started providing basic medical assistance, especially for wounds caused by the journey; and giving out food, clothes and information to allow migrants to continue their route, if they wished to. In fact, most migrants arriving in FVG are only transiting in the region, and go on to other Italian regions or EU countries. Other NGOs progressively joined Linea D’Ombra: “San Martino al Campo Community” and “Diaconia Valdese” attend to migrants on the streets and manage a day centre where they can have a shower, charge their phones, socialise and receive information and guidance. “Caritas” also recently opened a new dormitory. The medical voluntary association “DONK” provides free healthcare, while mediation services are managed by various associations. “International Rescue Committee”, in collaboration with the other organisations, publishes a monthly statistical report of migrant arrivals in FVG (RP1 and RP4, personal communication, May 2024). In Trieste, the cooperatives “Duemilauno Agenzia Sociale” and “Lybra” offer integration projects. Finally, the “Italian Consortium of Solidarity” (ICS), active since 1998, plays a crucial role in advocacy and in managing SAI and CAS apartments through public funds. Therefore, it is in direct contact with local authorities and also has a political weight in FVG migration governance (RP1, personal communication, May 2024).

The Udine province is the heart of the formal NGO network “FVG Rights, Reception and International Solidarity” (DASI network), founded in 2009 after the abolition of a regional migration law which deprived migrants of additional rights and services in FVG. The network gradually expanded to include various private organisations in the FVG territory, including ICS. The main reference points in the DASI network are “Gruppo Immigrazione e Salute Friuli-Venezia Giulia” (Gr.I.S. FVG) and the “Balducci Centre”. The former proposes and supports projects fostering migrants’ right to health (Gr.I.S. FVG, 2013). It is connected to Udine’s Social Medicine Department, which offers public healthcare assistance to migrants, also those without a residence permit, who would not otherwise have access to such a service (RP3, personal communication, May 2024). The Balducci Centre is a reception centre for migrants with a regular status which has been active since the 1980s, moreover it hosts many DASI network awareness initiatives, among which conferences, books and reports presentations. The Balducci Centre has a unique status in FVG: it hosts twenty-five people through an agreement with the Udine Prefecture, and it can freely choose the remaining twenty-five. Therefore, even though it is bound by governmental support, it has a margin of independence from regional authorities, which allows it to engage in advocacy and denunciation activities (RP5, personal communication, May 2024). Ospiti in Arrivo is also part of the DASI network, and it does not receive any public funds. Thus, it conducts consistent advocacy work to denounce the challenges and deficiencies of the province’s reception system. This NGO was founded in 2014, in response to the increasing number of migrant arrivals from the Balkan Route, in order to give them basic assistance in the Udine train station, where they arrived by train from Trieste and Gorizia. Since then, they maintained their street activity, providing migrants with food, blankets and information to continue their journey, since the majority of people transit through Udine and often only spend one night at the station. Moreover, they opened an Italian language school for migrants who decided to remain in Udine (RP7, personal communication, May 2024). Caritas, Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders also operate in the Udine province (RP1, personal communication, May 2024). The cooperative OIKOS ETS offers guidance and integration services to migrants (OIKOS, n.d.).

In the Pordenone and Gorizia provinces, “Solidarity Networks” of volunteers are part of the DASI network. They are mainly composed of citizens and activate when necessary, especially to provide migrants with food, clothes and other materials. The Catholic parishes

are also involved in reception activities, offering their spaces to host migrants (RP1, personal communication, May 2024).

In conclusion, actors working in the field of migration in FVG all know each other directly or indirectly and interact formally and informally. While national and local authorities foster a securitising agenda, NGOs have had a de-securitising role since the late 1990s and adapt their services to provinces' specific context. In fact, migrants arrive in the Trieste and Gorizia provinces directly from Slovenia and they transit through the Udine and Pordenone provinces only in a subsequent phase.

### **4.3 The influence of migration securitisation policies on actors' activities**

This section explores the consequences of migration securitisation policies on the type and range of activities carried out by migration-related governmental and non-governmental actors in the FVG region.

#### **4.3.1 Migration securitisation consequences on governmental actors' activities**

In addition to implementing national securitisation policies, the FVG regional council actively promoted migration securitisation especially from 2018, when the current President Massimiliano Fedriga, part of the right-wing party 'Lega', was elected. The regional council's declared aim is to limit irregular migration from the Balkan Route and to favour migrant reception in CAS buildings, to the detriment of SAI and 'grassroot reception' projects (FVG Region, 2020). The SAI system was considerably downsized, going from 369 reception places in 2015 to 218 in 2024; and now offering only five projects. In particular, the Udine SAI project was closed in 2022 by the municipal council; and in Trieste CAS reception structures provide the same standards as SAI ones only due to the intervention of private associations (RP1, personal communication, May 2024). As regards both the number of SAI reception places and the relation with the region's population, FVG occupies the last position in Italy (SAI Report 2022). Moreover, in the first half of 2024 FVG prefects announced the intention to close the bigger CAS in Udine, which hosts 550 migrants; and Trieste's 'Silos', a former warehouse where up to 400 migrants camp illegally (DASI Network Report, 2024). The Silos was cleared at the end of June (Il Post, 2024) without a precise and efficient plan on how to redistribute displaced migrants, who probably ended up in the streets, risking an increase in social distress in the city.

The regional and municipal councils also reduced grassroots reception projects, which provide housing to migrants in apartments distributed on the territory, affirming that they are difficult to control and obstacle the objective to limit migrants' presence in FVG. Therefore, they closed Udine's "AURA" grassroots reception project in 2018 and now this reception model survives only in Trieste, where it is deep-rooted, since it was founded in the 1990s (RP10, personal communication, June 2024). Moreover, subnational authorities cut migration-related investments and funds, obliging service providers to offer lower reception standards (RP5, personal communication, May 2024).

Additionally, NGOs noticed a general inefficiency in local authorities' management of requests and procedures, including longer waiting times in Prefectures and Questures for migrants to obtain appointments and documents; and public officials' harassment of migrants, for example mistreating them or giving them wrong information (RP4 & RP5, personal communication, May 2024).

#### **4.3.2 Migration securitisation consequences on non-governmental actors' activities**

Various NGOs were founded specifically in response to the evolution of the migratory phenomenon in the FVG region. This is the case of ICS, which started building a grassroots hospitality system for migrants in the 1990s, even before the national reception system was created, in order to welcome displaced persons from Bosnia-Herzegovina. More recently, Linea D'Ombra and Ospiti In Arrivo were established to make up for public authorities' lack of assistance to migrants who had just arrived in the region. These can be considered instances of exploration, since observation of the environment and circumstances informed the specific services and values promoted by these associations. Other NGOs, such as Lungo La Rotta Balcanica and Diaconia Valdese, tailored their action to the already existing network, in order to complement and support it, in an example of exploitation (RP1 & RP4, personal communication, May 2024).

In general, NGOs' activities did not change substantially as a result of migration securitisation in FVG. Most organisations provide emergency or basic services, which continue to prove necessary. However, especially since the Security Decrees and the COVID-19 pandemic, NGOs increasingly substituted themselves to public authorities in

service provision to migrants, at the same time receiving less financial, logistic and ideological support from regional and municipal institutions. For example, before 2020 the Trieste municipality managed a “Help Centre” in the train station, open every day and offering healthcare, housing and mediation services. Officially due to the pandemic, the municipality closed the service, which was reopened in 2022 by the NGO network, which now carries out the same activities without any public assistance (RP4, public communication, May 2024). In some cases, NGOs have to defend services which are no longer deemed necessary by public authorities, for example Italian language courses, which are not mentioned in the Cutro Decree (RP8, personal communication, May 2024). Finally, border enforcement strategies did not impact NGOs’ activities, nor the number of migrant arrivals in FVG (RP6 & RP10, personal communication, May-June 2024).

The evolution of NGOs activities is primarily due to the changing needs of migrants and specific characteristics of FVG provinces. DONK introduced a psychological service when Afghan migrants, especially unaccompanied minors, started arriving in the region, since they are more subject to abuse and violence during their journey along the Balkan Route (RP9, personal communication, June 2024). Ospiti In Arrivo set up Italian language courses to favour integration of migrants who decide to remain in Udine (RP7, personal communication, May 2024).

Public authorities’ migration securitisation agenda led NGOs to form stronger networks and to focus their joint efforts on advocacy and political action to uphold migrants’ rights. Organisations worked together to denounce the illegality of informal readmissions, successfully leading the Rome Court to acknowledge the situation and declare them illegitimate. In Udine, through a public report the DASI network demanded action from public authorities regarding some migrants who do not receive the reception services they are entitled to in the main CAS building (DASI Network, 2024).

It can be said that FVG migration actors exemplify flexible governance, in which exploration is dominant over exploitation. However, governmental and non-governmental actors work in opposite directions: the former try to detach from the current system by enforcing borders and curtailing reception and integration services; the latter implement novel, alternative structures to ensure that basic services are still available to migrants. Despite learning from past experiences and from each other, successfully adapting to migrants’ evolving needs, NGOs’

exploration is forced and limited. On the one hand, it is the only viable option, due to the absence of common ground and dialogue with governmental actors. On the other hand, the lack of public resources and support limit the expansion of NGOs' reach, not allowing them to pursue exploration to the extent they wish.

#### **4.4 The influence of migration securitisation on actors' *relations and interactions***

The migration securitisation process promoted by Italian governmental authorities not only affected the type and range of activities carried out by migration governance actors in FVG, but also the vertical and horizontal relations among them; which are analysed in this section.

##### **4.4.1 Migration securitisation consequences on vertical migration governance relations**

As regards the vertical relations between national authorities and NGOs operating in the field of migration in FVG, there have never been substantial direct exchanges and the situation did not change consequently to increased migration securitisation. Some NGOs, such as Diaconia Valdese and Gr.I.S., have national counterparts which participate in the ministerial roundtables and can pressure national authorities to address specific issues (RP2, personal communication, May 2024). Ministry of Interior officers, including the commissioner for the 'migration emergency', visited FVG multiple times, especially after the implementation of border enforcement measures; but only met with governmental actors from the Trieste Prefecture and municipality (Ministry of Interior, 2024b). However, the divergence in political objectives and approaches towards migrants' reception and integration processes places national authorities and local NGOs in an antagonistic relation of confrontation.

##### **4.4.2 Migration securitisation consequences on *horizontal* migration governance relations**

###### **Subnational authorities - NGOs relations**

Within the horizontal migration governance dimension, collaborative capability between subnational public authorities and local NGOs deteriorated as a consequence of increased securitisation, due to substantial incompatibility of values and objectives.

Formal reception activities are still funded and coordinated by Prefectures and carried out through formal partnerships with NGOs and cooperatives, which provide the services to migrants. However, public authorities' declared willingness to dismantle regular reception

and integration programmes, cutting funds and projects and favouring migrants' concentration and marginalisation in CAS and CPR buildings, caused a fracture among non-governmental associations. Some accepted the new, lower standards of service provision, while others denounced them as unacceptable, leading to a state of confrontation with subnational authorities (RP5, personal communication, May 2024).

Various NGOs notice public officials' lack of commitment to their duties: they show open inefficiency and inaccuracy in their activities, preventing the lawful and systematic application of migrants' rights. Therefore, NGOs need to exert increasing pressure on institutions to hold them accountable, and are met with rising hostility and attempts to obstruct reception processes (RP4 & RP7, personal communication, May 2024). In Trieste, on the one hand the police did not interrupt Linea D'Ombra activities aimed at helping transiting migrants without being identified, even if they were illegal; since they were functional to allowing migrants to leave FVG more quickly and without public support (RP6, personal communication, May 2024). On the other hand, during the COVID-19 pandemic it accused the two NGO founders of 'favouring illegal migration' when they sheltered a migrant family in their house for one night, probably aiming to destabilise Linea D'Ombra's action (Front Line Defenders, 2021). Moreover, NGOs are subjected to strict controls by public authorities: the police often patrol Piazza Libertà, and any bureaucratic inaccuracy on the part of NGOs could spark formal contestation by public authorities (RP6 & RP10, personal communication, May-June 2024). Therefore, subnational governmental actors are not coherent nor predictable in managing migration in FVG, applying double standards to NGOs' activities when they serve their own objectives. Moreover, their intervention is often just a reaction to the pressures of non-governmental associations.

According to some NGOs, this behaviour is part of a specific political project coherent with securitisation, which aims to render FVG inhospitable for migrants, so that they decide not to remain in the region (RP10, personal communication, June 2024). This suspicion further eroded NGOs' trust in public institutions, progressively limiting communication and exchange. While public authorities promoted a unitary and coordinated organisation of reception activities during the Help Centre and AURA project, now cooperation is reduced to specific individual cases, within the 'Vulnerables' Table' (RP3, personal communication, May 2024). Additionally, the antipodal positions of governmental and non-governmental actors on migration governance reduced flexibility: since they both promote and carry out

entirely different projects, they are less willing to compromise and combine resources and competencies, resorting to continue on separate paths.

Some persisting positive relations between governmental and non-governmental actors are mainly due to specific persons: Prefects who wish to collaborate more with NGOs, Questure officials who are more sensitive to migrants' conditions and rights, public employees who acknowledge the complexity of migration governance and the need to compromise between different interests and approaches (RP5 & RP9, personal communication, May-June 2024). However, these contacts are mostly informal and cannot ensure continuity in collaboration and exchange.

### NGOs - NGOs relations

FVG NGOs' response to increasing migration securitisation was fragmented, since the region never had a unitary and coordinated non-governmental network of associations. However, the challenges derived from securitisation and the increasingly antagonistic relations with public authorities led NGOs to establish and consolidate cooperation through both formal and informal networks.

Formal networks, such as the DASI network and the anti-trafficking network, were able to remain consistent in their action, despite the limitations imposed by national and regional policies on reception activities (RP2, personal communication, May 2024). Informal networks, especially the one of Piazza Libertà in Trieste, were able to make their presence more visible in the city, fostering the shared political aim to contrast public authorities' anti-immigration narratives. Through their central position in the city and calls for action on social media to make their activities known, they obtained national and international support of persons who agree with their mission of upholding human rights of migrants and supporting their freedom of movement; even more so in light of the increasing marginal role played by institutions in migrants' reception (RP6, personal communication, May 2024).

In general, cooperation among NGOs is sustained by personal relations and exchanges: people who are active in the field of migration in FVG usually have known each other for many years and are in direct contact with one another. This allowed for the creation of a flexible regional network of information exchange and collaboration, in which each NGO's positionality and role are well-defined and known. This organisational mechanism became

more crucial as public authorities started delegating more and more responsibilities to them. Especially in Trieste and Udine, each organisation has a clear idea of which NGOs and persons are present and can be contacted in order to solve a certain issue or provide migrants with a specific service, within and across provinces (RP4, personal communication, May 2024).

As already mentioned, NGOs' focus on advocacy to contrast public authorities' narratives and actions on FVG migration contributed to revive or strengthen existing connections. In fact, after the divide created by different non-governmental associations' reactions to the cutting of SAI funds by the Security Decrees, now collaboration is starting again on specific topics. Some examples are the DASI network's report denouncing the Prefecture's failure to provide reception services to some migrants who were entitled to them; or NGOs' joint proposals to find solutions to the housing crisis in the Udine province, which does not allow migrants to find accommodation outside reception centres (RP5, personal communication, 2024). Moreover, the Piazza Libertà NGO network publishes a monthly statistical report with the number and characteristics of migrant arrivals, in order to refute the 'migration emergency' narrative fostered by institutions (RP1, personal communication, May 2024).

In conclusion, migration securitisation made the objectives and means of FVG governmental and non-governmental actors incompatible, leading to a confrontational situation in which each pursues their own separate goals and is not open to collaboration with the other. Occasional cooperation and complementarity are due to individual actors' sensitivities. In absence of mutual trust, since local authorities strictly control NGOs' work and NGOs do not consider subnational institutions credible and predictable, the leadership shift causing NGOs to take on more tasks and responsibilities in migration management has an utilitarian character. Having a more marginal role and refusing to combine resources with NGOs, public authorities can more easily denounce the latter's inadequacy in managing arrivals and justify the 'emergency' narrative of migration in FVG. This lack of flexibility and exchange results in poorer reception standards and integration opportunities for migrants.

## 5. Discussion

On the basis of the previous analysis, this chapter reflects upon the expectations of this research. Moreover, it highlights its contributions to the literature and indicates some directions for further investigation on the topic.

As regards expectations related to migration securitisation, findings are nuanced. The securitarian rationale guiding the implementation of various border enforcement strategies, aimed at protecting the Italian territory and limiting migrant arrivals, is indeed prominent. However, a further contribution to the literature emerges from the qualitative analysis (RP4, RP6, RP10, personal communications, May-June 2024). In fact, it seems that public institutions' anti-immigration narratives have become progressively more basic and inarticulate, while at the same time justifying stricter forms of external and internal control. Governmental actors seem to simply 'not want migrants in FVG', implementing whichever securitisation strategies work best at a certain time to limit their presence in the region. This is evident in two opposite provisions applied in FVG: in 2020, informal readmissions were extensively employed to push migrants back along the Balkan Route, exposing them to violence and human rights abuses. In 2023, when they were not deemed effective anymore, they were substituted by policies dismantling FVG's public reception and grassroots hospitality systems. By excluding an increasing number of migrants from reception services and forcing more and more of them to live on the streets in precarious health conditions (Abandoned Lives report, 2024), these policies aim to create an inhospitable environment in FVG, pushing migrants forwards to other Italian regions or European countries. These empirical observations point to a possible development in securitisation theory: speech acts are no longer necessary to justify securitisation policies. This could be due to the high level of political and social polarisation reached by the topic of migration in Italy and the European Union since 2015, which eliminates complexity and only leaves space to two opposite positions: in favour or against migration. Therefore, any securitising policy and behaviour is functional to reaffirming public authorities' anti-immigration positionality, making further justifications superfluous and shifting the focus away on the increasingly harsher consequences on migrants.

The analysis also confirms Amigoni et al. (2021) findings on the role of institutions in shaping the migration emergency. FVG public authorities repeatedly declared that FVG

cannot host any more migrants because all available spots are full, and that grassroots hospitality is not efficient in managing migration. At the same time, however, not only did they not propose alternative solutions, but they reduced reception places, limited migrants' integration opportunities and delegated more and more responsibilities to NGOs. The increasingly marginal role occupied by institutions in FVG's migration governance can itself be considered an internal securitisation strategy. Public authorities' inefficiency in processing asylum and residence permit requests and their withdrawal from reception and integration projects leaves a governance void, actively producing insecurity in society and fuelling fear and hostile attitudes towards migrants. In turn, this justifies new, harsher anti-immigration policies, since public authorities can claim the need to 'take back control of the situation'.

Concerning migration governance, as expected the subnational level of governance is predominant in driving migration securitisation, even though national policies, especially the Security Decrees, gave legitimacy and impetus to the regional project. Non-governmental organisations also acquired a more prominent role, but they were forced to do so in order to still be able to provide migrants with basic services, in light of governmental actors' decreasing support. This research enriches the debate on NGOs' role in migration governance by observing that the type and standards of services they offer to migrants did not substantially change due to securitisation. This could signal that NGOs are used to being contested on their values and obstructed in their work, therefore they developed resilience and some form of independence from institutional collaboration in order to be able to carry on with their activities. Further empirical research in similar situations of confrontation between governmental and non-governmental actors could help understand whether FVG NGOs' reaction to securitisation follows a pattern.

This research also contributes to nuancing the migration governance literature by analysing a context in which there is no cooperative willingness among involved actors. In fact, public authorities consider NGOs as an obstacle to their securitising agenda, while numerous NGOs decided to drastically diminish contacts with local institutions after realising that their inputs and collaboration attempts are disregarded. The lack of trust, communication and flexibility between the two parties led them on two different and antagonistic paths. Both invest considerable resources to limit and contrast the other's action, as in the case of NGOs drawing the Rome Court's attention on informal readmissions and participating in trials to support migrants' cases (RP4, personal communication, May 2024). However, this risks

going to the detriment of everyday service provision to migrants, contributing to limiting its intensity and reach.

Actors' adaptive capacity is also impacted by their confrontational governance relationship. Therefore, this research suggests that Duit and Galaz's framework (2008) should be complexified, in order to adequately represent the reality of governance systems. In fact, it should take into account available resources and constraints which affect exploitation and exploration capacities. In particular, this analysis highlights that non-governmental organisations have exploratory capacity and willingness, because they created networks and migrant reception models which proved able to withstand securitisation efforts. However, the limited financial resources and the strict controls by governmental officials do not allow them to pursue exploration to the maximum of their ability.

Additionally, this research confirms expectations derived from Martins and Davino (2023), emphasising the crucial role of informal relations in maintaining some form of collaboration between governmental and non-governmental organisations and in strengthening NGOs' cooperation. Informal exchanges seem the most promising way forward in advancing collaborative capability among FVG actors, and further research on informal governance at the local level could allow to capture its prominence and potential more accurately.

In conclusion, FVG migration governance follows the trends of other securitised environments, through a specific anti-immigration political project which NGOs and individuals who wish to uphold basic human rights strive to resist and contrast. Additionally,

## **6. Conclusion**

This research investigated the consequences of migration securitisation, especially in terms of reception activities and border enforcement strategies, on migration governance in the Italian border region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia. A number of conclusions can be drawn on this relation, through the fieldwork and the subsequent analysis.

Migration securitisation in the region intensified since 2015, after the increase in migrant arrivals from the Balkan Route due to the Arab Spring's conflicts and consequent destabilisation. It was mainly guided by a securitarian rationale, aimed at protecting the

‘inside’ of Italy from the ‘threatening Other’, and it concretised in a combination of speech acts and various policies. At the border, militarisation, criminalisation and smartification practices were employed; however only informal readmissions had a relevant impact on migrant arrivals, before being judged illegal and thus gradually interrupted. At present, internal securitisation strategies, including the downsizing of the SAI public reception system in favour of the CAS ‘emergency’ approach, had a bigger role in discouraging migrants from remaining in the region. In fact, it actively limits migrants’ opportunities for the whole duration of their stay, beyond socioeconomic controls carried out at first arrival.

The FVG governance system was affected by migration securitisation efforts both in terms of activities carried out by its actors and of relations among actors themselves. Coherently with an anti-immigration narrative, governmental actors started occupying an increasing marginal role in governance, withdrawing financial, logistic and ideological support from public reception and integration projects and slowing down bureaucratic procedures to provide migrants with documents and permits. NGOs, on their part, focused on ensuring that migrants consistently had access to basic services, such as healthcare, food and shelter; but the intensity and reach of their activity had to expand due to public institutions’ line of action. Despite increasingly relying on private financial support and volunteer work, and facing more and more institutional opposition, NGOs managed to continue their action in all FVG provinces.

Relations between subnational authorities and local NGOs were affected the most by increasing securitisation. While before 2018 they cooperated on SAI reception programmes and showed commitment to their role and responsibilities, currently they are in a state of confrontation, due to increasingly polarised aims and means to achieve them. Both their collaborative and adaptive capacities were weakened as a consequence: trust, communication and flexibility are limited, since none of the parties wishes to give more ground to the other. Moreover, the current flexible governance risks turning into fragile governance, in which actors are too busy contrasting each other to respond adequately to evolution in migration influxes in the region. In conclusion, the divergence of positions weakens both governmental and non-governmental actors, and ultimately goes to the detriment of migrants, who have less and less opportunities to express their agency.

## **6.1 Limitations**

This research project aims to answer the research question in a complete and nuanced way, however it has some limitations. Firstly, it represents NGOs' perspectives more extensively and accurately than governmental institutions', since in-depth interviews were carried on mainly with non-governmental actors. It would be enriching to extend the investigation to public authorities' personal experiences and reflections, beyond policy documents and official declarations, in order to get a more complete understanding of their values, narratives and perceived challenges<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, this research does not systematically connect every migration securitisation decision to all its consequences on FVG migration governance. If, on the one hand, this requires rather thorough analysis, on the other hand a more detailed mapping of the temporal evolution of migration governance would help trace more accurately the development of dynamics and mechanisms, deepening the knowledge of securitisation processes' stages.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

After investigating the consequences of migration securitisation on migration governance in the FVG border region, this research can suggest some areas of improvement to the involved actors, so as to increase the efficacy of the governance system as a whole. The objectives of both governmental and non-governmental actors are increasingly opposed and polarised, and the lack of exchange and cooperation derived from this situation is one of the main issues in FVG's migration management. The following recommendations acknowledge this point, focusing on guaranteeing the respect of human rights and the rule of law.

While suggesting a change in the national political positions on migration is probably too far-reaching, subnational authorities should recognise the potential of migrants who remain in FVG, considering them as a resource. If timely guaranteed independent housing, Italian language courses, guidance in the job market; migrants could more easily become active members of society. They could respond to the demand of workers in the construction and manufacturing industries, or employ the skills learned in their country of origin or during their journey, such as language mediation, in the FVG region.

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<sup>1</sup> The authorisation for an interview with the Gorizia Immigration Office was denied by the Central Direction of Immigration and of Border Polices, since the requested information could not be disclosed for the purposes of the Master's thesis.

NGOs should further formalise their networks within and between provinces, enhancing the sharing of resources and specialised knowledge and competencies, in order to offer a broader range of services to migrants, going beyond basic assistance. This would also increase the effectiveness of NGOs' political leverage on institutions, allowing them to call public authorities out more systematically and to enlarge issues more easily. Ensuring national and international civil society's support already proved crucial for the Trieste NGO network, and could be an effective way of gathering resources and visibility independently from governmental collaboration.

Finally, direct relations between individuals of governmental and non-governmental bodies should be strengthened, since they could open more windows of collaboration despite actors' diverging positions on migration management. Moreover, they could ensure more systematically that governmental officials perform their tasks efficiently, respecting migration legislation and protecting migrants' human rights regardless of their political convictions.

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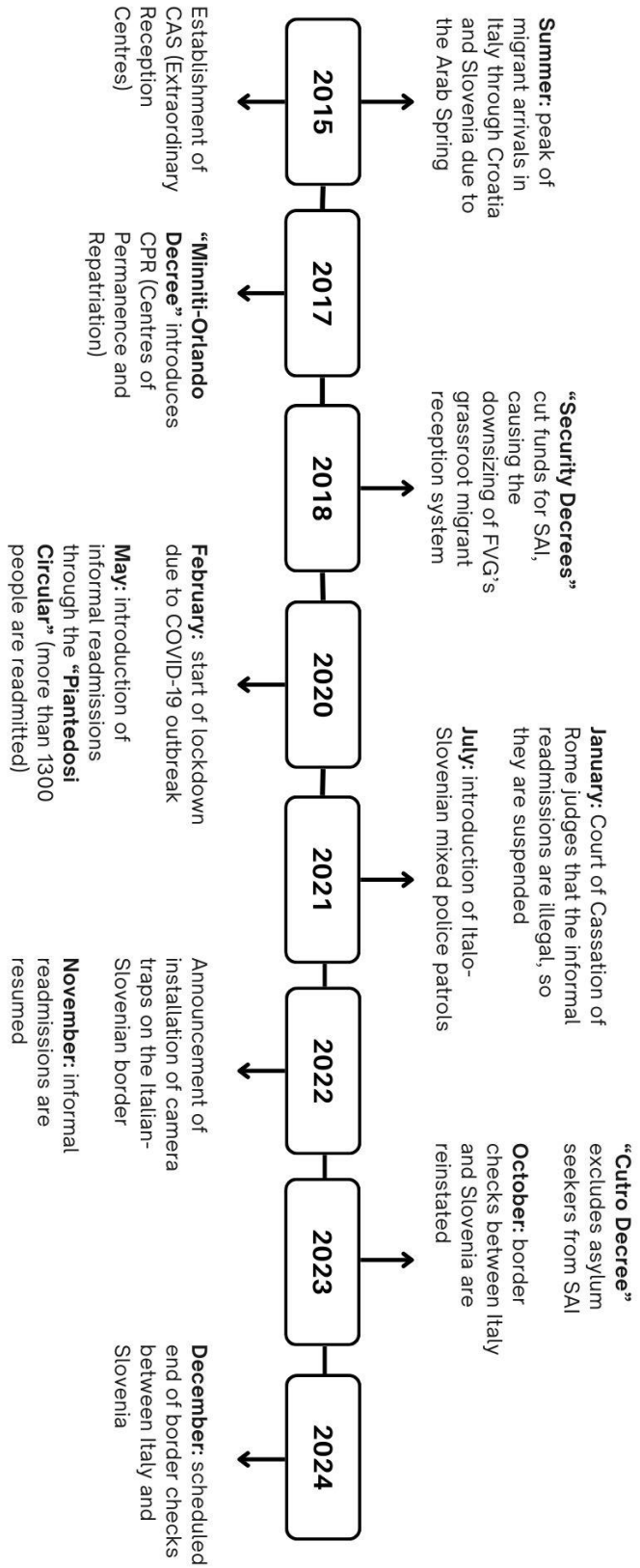
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## Appendices

### Annex A. Timeline of migration securitisation in Friuli-Venezia Giulia border region (2015-present)



**Annex B.** *List of documents for the content analysis*

Note: the titles of all documents have been translated to English, but they are available in the original language through the links provided in the references.

Document number	Type of document	Date	Title of document	Reference
1	Report (ICS)	26 June 2024	“Abandoned lives. Report on the situation and needs of migrants arriving in Trieste from the Balkan Route - year 2023”	Retrieved from <a href="https://www.icsufficiorifugiati.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Vite-Abandonate-2023.pdf">https://www.icsufficiorifugiati.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Vite-Abandonate-2023.pdf</a> accessed 28/06/2024
2	Newspaper article (Altreconomia)	2 May 2024	“Invisible and excluded. Hundreds of people are cut out of the reception system in Udine”	Retrieved from <a href="https://altreconomia.it/invisibili-ed-escluse-a-udine-centinaia-di-persone-sono-tagliate-fuori-dalla-accoglienza/">https://altreconomia.it/invisibili-ed-escluse-a-udine-centinaia-di-persone-sono-tagliate-fuori-dalla-accoglienza/</a> accessed 20/05/2024
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## **Annex C. Interview guide**

### **Introductory questions**

1. Can you tell me about the organisation you work for and explain what is your role in it?
2. Which activities related to migration does your organisation carry out in the FVG region?

### **Specific questions (NGOs)**

3. Did you notice an increase in anti-immigration discourses and policies since the Balkan Route started being regularly used in 2015? How so?
4. Did you notice any changes in migration governance since the Balkan Route started being regularly used in 2015? How so?
5. How were the activities carried out by your organisation affected by these processes?
  - a. How were they impacted by anti-immigration discourses?
  - b. How were they impacted by external / internal securitisation policies?
6. What kind of relations do you have with other NGOs active in the context of migration in FVG?
  - a. How did they change in response to migration securitisation?
7. What kind of relations do you have with subnational governmental institutions (municipality, Prefecture, Questure)?
  - a. How did they change in response to migration securitisation?
8. What kind of relations do you have with national governmental institutions (especially the Ministry of Interior)?
  - a. How did they change in response to migration securitisation?
9. Do you think the current migration governance system is efficient in managing migrant arrivals in the FVG region?
  - a. How would you modify it in order to increase its efficiency?

### **Concluding questions**

10. How do you think migration governance will evolve in FVG, in light of increasing migration securitisation?
11. How do you think the role of your organisation will evolve in this context?