

# Salvini anti-migrant pledge 'practically impossible to fulfil'

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Matteo Salvini's election promise to "send home" about 500,000 illegal immigrants from Italy will be virtually impossible to keep, campaigners said yesterday.

The pledge was popular with his far-rightwing supporters but authorities do not actually know how many illegal migrants are in the country.

Activists said the effort would also be hampered by formidable bureaucracy. Sergio Bontempelli, a campaigner for migrant rights with the Association of Rights and Borders, said: "Practically, it's impossible". He compared Salvini's campaign tactics to those of the US president, Donald Trump. "Words don't produce anything in terms of deportation, but they do produce a lot in terms of instigating hatred and violence."

The first anomaly in Salvini's rhetoric, according to campaigners, is the figure of 500,000 migrants. **Christopher Hein**, a professor of law and immigration policies at **Louis** University in Rome, said: "There is no credible statistic on the number of people in the country at this time without a valid residency permit."

Hein said a vague indicator of how many illegal immigrants might be in Italy could be gleaned from data on the numbers who had requested asy-

lum. About 130,000 applied in 2017, with about 50,000 being turned down. However, many of those who are rejected gain protection after appealing through the courts.

Italy's deportation procedure is messy, costly and largely unworkable. When an illegal immigrant receives a deportation order, they are first given the choice to return home voluntarily, a procedure that is usually organised by aid organisations. But few use this option, with just 1,500 expected to take it up in 2018.

If they do not go home voluntarily, they are given a deadline to leave the country; failure to do so is a criminal offence. At this stage, it is also up to the immigrant to obtain travel documents and fund their journey home.

For immigrants detained in one of the five CIE deportation centres, it is up to the Italian authorities to obtain travel documents from the countries of origin and to fund their return. This is an often insurmountable challenge, given that the relevant authorities in their home countries often do not exist, function efficiently or do not want their citizens back. Italy has bilateral deportation agreements with only Nigeria, Tunisia, the Gambia, Sudan and Egypt.

Alessandra Ballerini, a human rights and immigration lawyer, said: "Regularising migrants, enabling them to work, would be much cheaper. It would even allow for tax contributions into the coffers of the state."



▲ Matteo Salvini's tactics have been compared to those of Donald Trump

La promessa di Salvini sui migranti è 'praticamente impossibile da realizzare'

