



# CLIMATE SECURITY AND THE GLOBAL NORTH: SPOTLIGHT ON ITALY

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Climate insecurity is not only relevant to the global south. Italy's geography, social, political and economic dynamics, present a unique combination of security pathways with the potential to be negatively influenced by climate change. This article briefly examines three of these pathways – migration, the economy and natural disasters – to highlight the importance of mainstreaming climate-related risks into security strategies of the global north. A failure to mitigate these pathways, and the interplay between them, could pose significant threats for a G20 member.

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## The Economy

Recent [Bank of Italy](#) research into different sectors, markets and socio-economic outcomes predicts that Italy's gross domestic product (GDP) per person could fall by between 2.8 and 9.5% by 2100. This is for a nation whose [near-zero growth in GDP per head since 2000 is already the worst in the OECD](#). A potentially bleak outlook reflects the impact of [predicted temperature rises of 2°C or more by 2050](#), combined with an increased frequency and intensity of

drought, heavy rains, hailstorms and other extreme weather events. Together, these factors could significantly hamper sectors such as agriculture, real estate and tourism.

Economic decline in Italy could increase instability by exacerbating the north-south divide and furthering the permeation of organised crime. Italy's regional divide is already the most economically profound in Europe, with the southern province of Calabria exhibiting a GDP that is just 56%



of the EU average. Home to one third of the country's population and one quarter of the economy, unmitigated economic stress in the south could see it burden the north where the GDP can be up to 127% of the EU average. When economies struggle in Italy, Mafia groups such as the *'Ndrangheta* in Calabria and the *Gomorra* in Campania, increase their influence by providing services in place of an absent state; an approach seen repeatedly during the pandemic. There would also be external impact as increased societal divides and a weakened economy limit Italy's international influence. Reduced funds would likely be channelled internally, along with more defence and security assets, to protect national institutions from rising crime and corruption, and to safeguard against social unrest.

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#### Disaster Relief

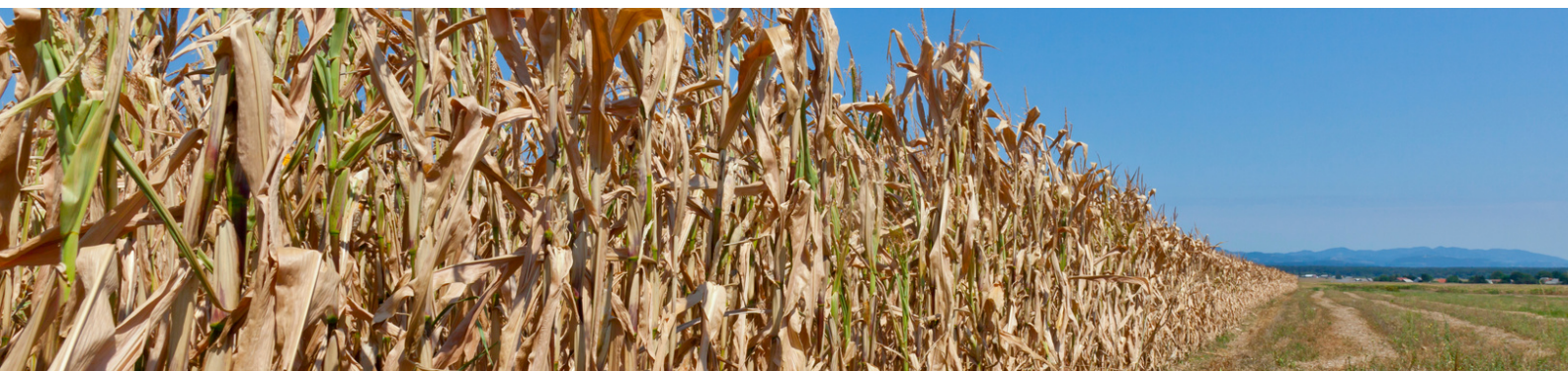
Italy is prone to natural disasters. This summer, extreme heat caused [the government to declare a state of emergency in an area of the north](#) and in November, a landslide on the island of Ischia [killed 11 people](#) following heavy rains. Due to Italy's disposition to physical risks, the *Dipartimento della Protezione Civile*



(Civil Protection Department) has direct links into the Armed Forces. Should there be a natural disaster, the [Italian Armed Forces can be called upon immediately](#). As climate change increases the incidence of rapid onset natural disasters, the Italian government will need to ensure that military assets are not overly relied upon to provide military aid to civilian authorities (MACA). Doing so would pose a risk to achieving their [standing requirements](#) and negatively impact national security.

Italy's use of the armed forces to enforce repeated national lockdowns during the pandemic provides a timely point of comparison to the relative ease with which

the military can be used internally during emergencies. In comparison with countries such as the UK, Germany and France, the use of the armed forces as a societal enforcement tool in Italy reflects a different psyche to countries where militaries were used to mainly assist with medical provision. The Italian psyche is also exemplified through the deployment of 5000 soldiers on the national operation *Strade Sicure* (Secure Streets) that has been on-going since 2008. *Strade Sicure* sees soldiers deployed on standing patrols and at fixed locations throughout Italy and by default of its size alone, inhibits wider military taskings.



When blending climatic predictions with civil-military relations, Italy needs to clearly define the threshold above which it will turn to the military for assistance to its civil authorities. Integral to setting the threshold comfortably high, and allowing the military to maintain its primary focus, is the development of sufficient civilian options to manage the projected rise in natural disasters. In the first assistance, an increase in MACA taskings would diminish Italy's strong reputation for deploying high numbers on international missions. Secondly, and more threatening, would be a weakened national defence as the military struggles with competing demands.

### Migration

Despite the majority of climate migration being short-distanced, rural to urban and intra-national, long-distance immigration into Italy is already politicised. The 85,282 immigrants arriving by boat into Italy in 2021 is a 60% rise from 2020 and continues the exponential growth since 2019 when 11,471 migrants arrived. Although this rise cannot be attributed to climate change alone, the causal relationship is due deeper analysis to establish the extent to which long-distance migration is being influenced by climate change. Such research would likely influence Italy's national security policy and military deployments. In 2018, Italy deployed a bilateral support mission in Niger as it is a known transit route for migrants moving through Libya and onto Italy. More recently, Giorgia Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia* party have advocated the use of naval assets to stem the flow of immigration.

Meloni's continuation of Matteo Salvini's anti-immigration stance captures another security risk. Some argue that her government's approach risks isolating Italy in Europe by publicly condemning the EU's voluntary migrant redistribution scheme. Her outspoken approach has also sparked bilateral fractures with France as her government waited 20 days before denying a rescue vessel's 230 passengers access to Italy. Such fissures could be seen as the materialisation of European and North Atlantic fracturing that will only increase if migration continues to influence Italy's electoral outcomes. Again, the need for understanding the role of climate as a catalysing force is key.



Short-distance climate migration also destabilises NATO's southern flank, inclusive of Italy. Using Africa as an example, evidence shows that armed groups such as Al shabaab recruit from internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and urban areas – both of which are increasingly populated by climate migrants. Italy's security policy has long reflected a concern for such groups. They are the second largest contributor to NATO's out-of-area operations after the US, and the first European nation for deployments in UN peacekeeping missions. At present they have deployments in Libya, Egypt, Somalia, Djibouti, Niger and Mali and an inherent interest in the fight against terrorism in Africa. An increased prevalence of climate displacement will lead to an increased number of IDP camps, rural-urban migration and recruitment by armed

extremist groups that reduced military missions, overseas development assistance and diplomatic support cannot prevent.

### Conclusion

A failure to mainstream climate security and recognise the interconnected pathways risks negative cascading security implications permeating on a national level and limiting the ability of the Italian government to project force and influence. In a worst-case scenario, untreated risks in Italy could pose a risk for the wider European security infrastructure as a G20 and NATO member cedes metaphorical and physical territory to a cocktail of climate-related threats. The lesson for Italy and wider developed economies is clear: Climate security is not selective.