

case was detected it was already late to contain the virus in its infancy. However, what has been immediately evident was that the availability of resources was not adequate to face the health crisis.

The First Government Response: A Gradual Lockdown

The first government response (Italian Civic Protection, 2020) focused mainly on the sanitary crisis, given the available resources. On 23 February, in order to contain the spread of the virus, 11 Municipalities of Lombardy and 1 in Veneto were identified as 'red zones' by the first Decree Law. The government established a series of strict containment measures for these territories: prohibition of leaving, suspension of all events, educational services and schools of all levels, museums and public offices, commercial and work/business activities with the exception of those that provide essential services.

It took one week to realise that the 'outbreak' was spread in several areas, mainly in three northern regions: Lombardy, Emilia Romagna and Veneto. All universities were closed and on 8 March, a second Decree created two levels of 'protection zones'. More strict measures applied to the residents of the Region of Lombardy and other 14 Provinces in the northern regions. For unknown reasons, the news about the extended lockdown was spread by the media the night before the official announcement. This caused panic and many people, working or studying in the North, decided to leave to reach their families in the Southern regions. The high number of people that moved to the South and the awareness of a weaker health system in these regions may have influenced the decision to extend the lockdown to the overall country, through a series of subsequent decrees. On 9 March, a new decree established the creation of one single 'protection zone' for the entire national territory. On 11 March, all non-essential businesses were closed. On 17 March, a shared protocol was signed, providing that production activities may continue only if adequate levels of protection were guaranteed to the workers. The agreement indicates the adoption of 'smart working' (working remotely), as much as possible. On 22 March, a new decree established the interruption of all industrial or commercial production activities, except those listed in an attached list. The government also banned the movement or relocation of persons to a municipality other than the one in which they were located, except for justified work needs, extreme urgency or for health reasons.

The Response of the Health System(s)

Starting in March, hospitals in the North of Italy reported system saturation, due to very high patient loads requiring intensive care. One of the most afflicted areas was in the city of Bergamo. The shortage of hospital beds, ventilators and health professionals became a concrete threat (Nacoti et al., 2020). Health professionals from different disciplines were converted to COVID-19 patient care. An issue all over the country was that tests were not available for the majority of the health workers and sometimes not even adequate personal protection equipment. By 22