Antonino Germanà, Elena Girasella, Giovanni Moschella*

# HIGHER EDUCATION AS A LEVER TO PROMOTE INCLUSION: THE ROLE OF "FRONTIER UNIVERSITIES"

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## 1. *Introduction*

This work is based on the assumption that the enhancement of the knowledge and skills of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers represents one of the main levers of inclusion and development. Investing in education and facilitating access to the highest levels of education not only guarantees full personal development but it also generates indisputable added value to the entire community. The assessment of a positive impact that goes beyond the private sphere is justified by the quantity and quality of the migration flows in this century[1]. Notwithstanding these simple remarks, the choice to undertake an educational path is still residual. It is, in fact, one of the most difficult paths to deal with,

* University of Messina, Italy. Although it is a work resulting from common reflections, Elena Girasella is the first author. The contribution of Prof. Giovanni Moschella can be found in par. 2.1 and the contribution of Prof. Antonino Germanà can be found in paragraph 3.2.

[1] This context does not allow us to enter into the merits of the cases, however, abundant statistics and analysis are available to which we refer for appropriate further information. Regarding the trend and consistency of the migration flows please refer, for example, to the recent publication of the United Nations, edited by the International Organisation for Migration "World Migration Report 2020" available at the following link https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/wmr_2020.pdf. For further evidence, please also refer to the OECD "2019 International Migration and Displacement Trends and Policies Report to the G20", available on the following website https://www.oecd.org/migration/mig/G20-migration-and-displacement-trends-and-policies-report-2019.pdf. For an in-depth analysis of the impact of the investments in higher education in favour of refugees, we refer to the various contributions produced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Among the last publications (2019) please note "Doubling our impact third country higher education pathways for refugees" available on the following link https://www.unhcr.org/5e5e4c614.pdf .

starting from the problem of demonstrating the level of previous studies by the documents. Regardless of age, precondition, motivation and expectations, the reception system implemented by the host countries causes the loss of the background of knowledge and skills which, on the contrary, should be recognised and further supported. The chosen point of view looks at the migration phenomenon as a matter of high political value, it can be ascribed to the capacity of institutions to guarantee sustainability and inclusion, through processes that, first of all, enhance human resources brought by the migration phenomenon and, moreover, that include in the social system people of different cultures and languages. The level of inclusion of immigrants is certainly related especially to the politics and legislative acts that the legal system adopts to overcome cultural, ideological and religious differences. In this framework, it must be considered that the concept of integration does not correspond to that of homologation and that the government intervention will be all the more effective the more it will be able to ensure coexistence and compatibility between different cultures, through its different institutional structures, within the constitutional principle of pluralism and that of equality, and, at the same time, guaranteeing to the immigrants an adequate level of rights, especially the social ones[2].

This work is intended to contribute to the affirmation of the right to education as a social right. Looking at the Italian university system we will try to give an account of its most recent evolution in the indicated direction with a specific focus on the experience of the University of Messina. This university is situated in the southernmost region of the Italian peninsula, Sicily, the island that represents the point of arrival from central route[3]. To do this, we will consider the legal framework and we will examine how it leads to the necessity to expand the sphere of social rights to be recognised to the individuals, besides any status linked to citizenship. Lastly, by illustrating the genesis and activities of CEMI "Centro per la Migrazione, l'Inclusione sociale e la comunicazione interculturale" (Center for migration, social inclusion and intercultural communication) of the University of Messina we will examine the way the contribution of universities in favour of the inclusion of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers is expected to become increasingly important.

[2] For further information on the subject, we refer, in Italian, to Moschella Giovanni, La legislazione sull'immigrazione e le prospettive della tutela dei diritti fondamentali: l'ordinamento europeo e l'esperienza italiana. Ordine internazionale e diritti umani, (2019), pp. 473-490.

[3] It is well known that flows from Morocco and western Algeria (the Western Route) go mainly to Spain; the flows from eastern Algeria, Tunisia and Libya (Central Route) are those that affect Italy the most; the flows that originate from Turkey and the countries of the Middle East (Eastern Route) mainly affect Greece.

## 2. *Recognition and exercise of the right to education of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers*

Although anyone who leaves the country of origin to live elsewhere can be defined as a migrant, it is necessary a preliminary distinction as complex as the main legally recognised statuses. Hence the distinction between regular and irregular migrant - the latter is not granted the residence permit on the basis of the state regulations[4]; between refugee - the person who is granted the widest international protection[5] and asylum seeker, a condition of precarious subjectivity that lasts until the competent local authorities decide on the outcome of the request. The recognition of the rights varies with the status. We find the right to education among the fundamental, inalienable and universally recognised rights. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1984, the Art. 26 states: "*Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit*". Closely related to the principle of non-discrimination, the right to education is peacefully enshrined[6]. In addition, in 2017 Italy passed a law[7] dedicated to Unaccompanied Foreign Minors providing, among other things, the simplification of the procedures of the right to education. In particular (Art. 4, paragraph III): "the educational institutions of all levels and the training institutions accredited by the regions must activate the measures to allow the unaccompanied foreign

[4] In Italy, Law n.125/2008 introduced the crime of clandestinity for irregular immigrants who do not fulfil the obligation of removal.

[5] Based on the provisions of the 1951 Geneva Convention, and the subsequent 1967 New York Additional Protocol, the definition of refugee provided by Art. 1, Lett. A), co.2 establishes that refugee is considered the one who "(…) *As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.*".

[6] Remaining in the European context we find the main references to Art. 2 of the Additional Protocol (Paris, 20 March 1952) to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, signed in Rome on 4 November 1950 by the Member States of the Council of Europe. Reiterated references and further expanded in the European Social Charter, adopted in Turin on the 18 October 1961 and again recalled by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (or Charter of Nice) od the 7 December 2000.

[7] Law no. 47 of 2017 (known as "Legge Zampa"), containing «Provisions on Protective Measures for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors" (unofficial translation).

minors to fulfil the compulsory schooling and training, including through the organisation of specific projects that provide, where possible, the employment or coordination of cultural mediators, as well as conventions designed to promote specific apprenticeship programme".

### *2.1 The Italian Constitution example*

In the European legal framework, Italy represents one of the most significant cases in terms of recognition of rights not only as citizen but as man in itself, due to a constitutional charter that is unanimously considered modern[8] and that stands out for its intrinsic openness that led the constitutional jurisprudence to intervene copiously in the extension of the sphere of rights and duties attributable also to non citizen foreigners. In the Constitution, Section II of Art 1 establishes that sovereignty belongs to people, who exercise it in the forms and within the limits of the Constitution. However, this regulation does not provide to explicate the notion of citizen (although the population constitutes the whole of those who are related to the State by the relationship of citizenship). It is known that "the possession of citizenship is the constitutionally legitimizing prerequisite" to exercise all the legal situations of public law since the status of citizen represents the necessary condition to exercise certain rights and to carry certain duties "which place citizens in an exclusive relation to the authoritarian apparatus". As regards the recognition and protection of inviolable rights, art 2 of the Italian Constitution establishes that the Republic recognizes and guarantees these rights not only to the citizen, but to the man in itself, and it demands the fulfilment of mandatory duties of political, economic and social solidarity. In this interpretative key, the constitutional jurisprudence has extended the sphere of rights and duties attributable to foreigners. Here then, although some constitutional provisions formally assign certain rights only to citizens, in view of the openness of the constitutional text, it is unreasonable to exclude non citizens from the enjoyment of certain freedoms.

[8] The Italian Constitution came into force on 1 January 1948. Among its general principles, we recognize the Art. 2: "*The Republic recognizes and guarantees the inviolable rights of the person, both as an individual and in the social groups where human personality is expressed. The Republic expects that the fundamental duties of political, economic and social solidarity be fulfilled"* and the Art. 3: "*All citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law, without distinction of sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions. It is the duty of the Republic to remove those obstacles of an economic or social nature which constrain the freedom and equality of citizens, thereby impeding the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organization of the country*".

### *2.2 Towards an international standard*

This trend, that developed in the European legal culture since the 90s of the last century, has allowed to expand the sphere of rights also to non citizens. An international debate raised on the issue due to the necessity to read the changes related to the so-called globalization, with the analysis of the new migration flows, both outside and within Europe, as a result of the collapse of the former Soviet regimes. In reference to the extensive literature, at least two contributions are worth of being cited here. The first is stated by the constitutionalist Sabino Cassese[9]: "*with so many residents from different countries, the States become places that host not only citizens but also residents, whom must be recognized many of the rights guaranteed to citizens (practically all with the exception of the rights of political nature) (…) The result is a separation between rights and belonging to the original community, the nation; a devaluation of citizenship; the necessity to look at the rights of the foreigners through a different prism from that of citizenship, referring them not to the national law, but to the human rights recognized at the supra-state level".* The second, by Seyla Benhabib[10], summarises the view posted by the first and it broadens the question in a multidisciplinary key: "*(…) migration, rather than representing a threat to the political and legal culture of a country, promotes a dimension of juris generative politics because of a mixture of different cultural identities".* In this context social rights, included the right to education, are susceptible to maximum extension. In order to exercise these rights it is required the possibility to benefit from certain public services, the intrinsic limit to the full realization of these rights is the economic sustainability of the services connected to them. The discretion of the legislator on the extent of the social rights is normally tempered by the actual availability of economic resources. The migration flows, that affected Italy and other European countries in the last decade, entailed a series of legislative measures to regulate the entry of large groups of non-EU foreigners into the territory of the State. We can state that, at an early stage, this legislation was aimed to guarantee a progressive process of social and labor integration, also through the recognition of fundamental rights. However, in the last period, this legislation has gradually been oriented mainly towards a limitation of the entry of foreigners, especially the non- Community citizens (in fact the EU citizens enjoy a particular level of guarantee) and a sanction system was consequently introduced, justified by a growing sense of insecurity, also economic, that is of-

[9] Cassese Sabino, Stato in Trasformazione, translation of the Extract from Rivista Trimestrale di Diritto Pubblico Anno LXVI Fasc. 2 – 2016. Milano, Giuffrè Editore (2016).

[10] Benhabib Seyla, Another Cosmopolitanism, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006.

ten exploited to influence the public opinion in this sense. This contributed to transform the issue of immigration into a problem of public order and it caused a significant weakening in the recognition and protection of human rights and the fundamental rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This trend inevitably raises the necessity to deeply reflect on the legislative discipline on immigration, in relation to the fundamental principle of contemporary constitutional systems, it means that the principle of equality which in the Italian Constitutional system is fully extended also to foreigners, and that encounters, from this point of view, only one absolute limit: the principle of popular sovereignty. However, the discipline of social rights in the framework of the European Union does not seem to correspond to the most advanced conception of contemporary constitutional systems with a social basis (formal and substantial equality), as what is relevant to these rights in action and for the realization of the aims of the European order is their instrumentality to the needs of economic development and competitiveness typical of the common market. This assumption configures them as residual rights. Following the Lisbon reform, the European Union Treaty tends, at least formally, to strengthen the protection of social rights, also in reference to the values in Art. 2, common to the Members State in a society characterized by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men. In the last Art. 3 of the Treaty on European Union TEU, alongside the prediction according to which «The Union shall establish an internal market» it is also expected that itself is committed «It shall work for the sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth and price stability, a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment […]». The Union fights social exclusion and discrimination and it fosters justice and social protection, gender equality, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child. «It shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States». Nevertheless, to the contrary of the fundamental rights of the first generation, the protection of social rights in the European Union system, even after the Lisbon Treaty, appears indirect and purely possible, since the expected commitments are not directly connected to their protection but they are functional to the interests related to the implementation of certain Union policies and to the right of competition and the market law. Furthermore, the nature of inviolable rights and the supreme constitutive principles of the democratic order does not seem to extend to social rights. As a consequence, there is a further problem concerning the effectiveness of these rights in relation to their justiciability, in other words the effectiveness of

the jurisdictional instruments accomplishable by the subjects to guarantee their protection, both with regard to the coverage of expenditure and the existence of a jurisdiction in matters in Chief of EU, although it does not adversely affects the competence of individual member States.

Global Compactor for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)[11] has opened a glimmer that bodes well for the Community management of the migration issue. It is not a Treaty but an intergovernmental pact so it can not be considered legally binding but it is from a political perspective[12]. Without discussing the programmatic points of the 2018 agreement, we recall for our purposes what has been recently evoked both by the International Organisation for Migration (OIM) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)[13]. In September of this year, on the eve of the relaunch of a new pact intended to strengthen the aforementioned signed during the Marrakesh Conference, the two United Nations organizations appealed to the European Union to adopt a truly common approach based on the principles of solidarity and full respect of human dignity, on which all aspects of the migration governance and asylum issues are to be based. In the supporting statements it is written that "*People on the move can be part of the solution*". In this context, the importance of leveraging education can not be overlooked, in relation to the ability to enhance previous experience and the aim to support the migrants' access to training paths and higher education in the host countries.

Now let's have a look at the international regulations that are useful to systematize the right to education in favour of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. A specific reference to refugees is contained in the Geneva Convention of 1951 (and the subsequent additional Protocol of New York of 1968), in particular Art. 22 establishes that "1. The Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education. 2. The Contracting States shall accord to refugees treatment as favourable as possible, and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, with respect to education other

[11] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/614638/EPRS_BRI(2017)614638_EN.pdf

[12] Italy is not yet among the 164 signatory countries as it has decided to refer the matter to the Parliament.

[13] For an immediate comparison visit: UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR's Recommendations for the European Commission's Proposed Pact on Migration and Asylum, January 2020, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/5e3171364.html [accessed 29 September 2020] e IOM Views on the Roadmap for the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum, August 2020, available at: https://eea.iom.int/publications/iom-views-roadmap-eu-new-pact-migration-and-asylum.

than elementary education and, in particular, as regards access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships". And whether the Geneva Convention is the supranational reference par excellence, the Lisbon Convention forcefully explicates the principle according to which the right to education includes also the right of recognition of education qualifications and to do this it guarantees uniformity in the European context. The scope is significant in comparison to what has been observed previously especially with regard to the lack of formal documentation. For our purposes it is recalled what is stated in Section VII –Recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation: "Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence".

Italy ratified the Convention five years later its promulgation, in this way it exceeded the traditional concept of equivalence in favour of the so-called recognition "according to the purposes" that in the academic field universities manage by virtue of their autonomy. "The competence to recognize cycles and periods of studies achieved abroad and foreign qualifications, for the purposes of: access to higher education, the continuation of university studies and the achievement of Italian university degree, is attributed to universities and higher education institutions that exert their competence within their autonomy and in compliance with their respective regulations, without prejudice to bilateral agreements on the matter[14]." The recognition of qualifications achieved abroad for the purpose of pursuing the studies (for academic purposes) is responsibility of universities and higher education institutions that exert within their autonomy and in compliance with bilateral and international conventions[15]. Let's see now what happens in practice.

[14] The "Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region" was drafted by the Council of Europe and Unesco and it was approved on 11 April 1997 during the diplomatic conference in Lisbon. It was ratified by the Italian law n. 148 on 11 July 2002, published with the English text and a translation in Italian, in the ordinary Supplement to the GU n. 173 of 25 July 2002.

[15] Art. 48 of the D.P.R. 394/1999.

## 3. *Observations on the Italian university system under the test of migration flows of the last decade*

As seen, the recognition of formerly achieved qualifications as well as formal and non-formal competence and professional qualifications play a crucial role in the access to higher university education of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. In Italy, the Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalencies (CIMEA) operates for these purposes[16]. The Centre, since 1986, is appointed by the Ministry of higher education as the official Italian centre dealing with the NARIC - National Academic Recognition Information Centres network of the European Union and the ENIC - European National Information Centres network of the European Council and UNESCO. Following the aforementioned ratification of the Lisbon Convention, the Ministry of Education, University and Research[17] has entrusted CIMEA as national information centre concerning the qualification recognition in force in Italy, the Italian higher education system and the qualifications awarded at a national level. CIMEA gives to the applicants its technical - administrative advice concerning the requests for recognition of qualifications. If the applicants are already under international protection, the service is free, in other cases it is subject to a fee. In Italy the criterion to activate the procedure of recognition of degrees and qualifications depends on the availability of the documentation. In other European contexts, for example Germany, Norway or Sweden, the criterion is based on the legal status granted to the migrant.

Thus Italian universities can rely on the information derived from the so-called "Statement of comparability" issued by CIMEA after an investigation based on all the documentary evidence that the applicant is able to provide or, if it is not sufficient, on the verification of the statements made in support of the poor documentation. In addition, CIMEA has implemented the "European Qualification Passport for Refugees" (EQPR), a service dedicated to the development of an innovative procedure for the recognition of refugee qualifications in case of complete absence of documentation. According to the information disclosed on the reference website, the activity of CIMEA is proven by about 20,000 requests for information a year. As regards the statistics of the release of certificates for university enrolment, CIMEA receives on average a thousand requests a year relative to refugees qualifications. With regard to the amount of Certificates of Comparability successfully issued by CIMEA, since 2016 to date, the number is

[16] http://www.cimea.it/en/index.aspx

[17] At that time, Ministry of University and Scientific and Technological Research.

constant with about a hundred Certificates produced every year, with a significant increase in 2019 with almost double the Certificates of Comparability issued[18]. It is important to take into consideration that the amount of requests for the release of Certificates of Comparability is higher than the certificates actually issued annually, this is because who requests this certificate may not have obtained yet the definitive status, may not be in possession of all the documents necessary to conduct an assessment, or may not be in possession of an appropriate qualification for the recognition of degrees for academic purposes. CIMEA statistics regarding the issue of "European Qualification Passport for Refugees", valid for refugees with little or no documentation, as mentioned, are available for the two-year period 2018-2019. During this period of time, CIMEA carried out specific evaluation sessions by interviewing about 176 candidates, for a total of EQPR issued with positive result that corresponds to 80% of the interviews held in Italy. These data seem to be significant although limited in comparison to the number of potential beneficiaries considered the consistency of the flows. However, this is not the place to analyse causes and consequences of the underutilisation of the current system. In general, it is possible to reasonably suggest the opportunity to spread more and better information to international communities and reception facilities, entitled to support the first inclusion paths.

From the academic year 2016-2017, in order to promote the beneficiaries of international protection to access the academic career, an impetus was given by the publication of the first CRUI - Conference of Italian University Rectors - call to award 100 scholarships to students with international protection and a valid study certificate for the enrolment in the Bachelor's degree program, Master or PhD. This initiative was the result of the signing of the "Memorandum of Understanding on the right to study of young students with international protection", on 20 July 2016, between the CRUI and the Ministry of the Interior. The aim was to support deserving young students in the continuation of the education path forcefully interrupted in the country of origin. By signing the protocol, CRUI committed to promoting the insertion of students at individual Universities to allow attendance to a Bachelor's degree program, Master or PhD, in view of the commitment of the Ministry to provide universities with scholarships intended to supply the necessary services to guarantee the right to education. The initiative is still in place, although it is limited only to refugees, it represents a valid support for the participating universities that take charge

[18] The Statistics are taken from a document produced by CIMEA in April 2020 entitled "Valutazione dei titoli dei rifugiati, documento tecnico - metodologico per le istituzioni della formazione superiore", available in Italian at the following website: http://www.ponricerca.gov.it/media/395872/documento-tecnico-metodologico.pdf

of the beneficiary students. In fact, it is necessary to consider that the acquisition of financial resources by universities includes the total exemption from university taxes and contributions, the access to libraries and services offered to students but, in practice, it permitted to develop a broader support network to meet the daily needs. Let us consider, in fact, taking charge of students that, as assignees of scholarships (in terms of services given the disbursement of the financial contribution directly to universities), leave the reception system experienced up to that time. In the impossibility of transferring money directly to students who do not have sufficient resources to incur living expenses as well as those related, for example, to personal care, Universities were forced to take action, experimenting procedures and collaborating, within and outside the Academy, to ensure adequate responses. A constantly rising commitment is requested from the public university system, strengthened by the policies of internalisation and public engagement that determine its action[19].

In this sense, universities carry out activities to encourage the sharing and connection of results with a non-academic audience. However, the commitment of universities in developing public engagement strategies for multicultural integration is not a mere benevolent effort, as stated previously, it is a collective investment. The impossibility of exploiting previous experiences and the difficulty of thinking and carrying out a career development represent an aspect of strong frustration for the migrant, refugee or asylum seeker who believes that he or she can not adequately contribute with their possibilities to the development of the host society. However, it also represents a limitation for the host country that is unable to satisfactory enhance the human resources at disposal, even when they have the potentiality to contribute to social and economic life with an adequate support. Universities therefore play a leading role. The educational function affects the cultural level of the social context, the ability to propose an intercultural pedagogy satisfies the need for inclusion, the implementation of an intercultural thinking as a training proposal innovates the social system. In the framework of the many experiences of multicultural integration with university governance[20], we see now the experience of the University of Messina.

[19] For further information on the role of universities, in addition to the institutional mission linked to teaching and research activities, see for example: Davies Sarah R., Research staff and public engagement: a UK study. Springer, 2013; Ostrander Susan A., Citizenship and Governance in a Changing City, Temple University Press,U.S., 2013.

[20] For a quick but/and accurate feedback about the best practices in the Italian University System, please refer to the catalog created within the "In Here" project, funded by the European Community and available at the following link: https://www.inhereproject.eu/outputs/good-pratice-catalogue .

### *3.1 The case of the University of Messina: a frontier university on a frontier city*

We label the University of Messina as a "frontier university" as it is the only public university in a metropolitan city that is protagonist in the migrant reception system because of the disembarkation in its port. Messina is in fact one of the Italian cities where hotspots are based and it has still many first and second reception centres. In fact, the Italian system establishes that migrants arrived "irregularly" to be hosted, for the time necessary for the recognition of their legal status, in first reception centres, called hotspot[21]. Currently there are four cities in Italy where hotspots are based, three of which in Sicily: Lampedusa (Agrigento); Pozzallo (Ragusa) and Messina and one in Puglia, in Taranto. Foreign citizens entered Italy illegally are housed in these centres where, if they request international protection, they are greeted for the time necessary to complete the verification procedures of the related requirements, otherwise, they are detained with a view to expel. Asylum seekers are then transferred to first reception centres[22] that are currently nine nationwide, including one in Messina, and Extraordinary Reception Centres (CAS)[23]. According to the information of the Ministry of the Interior, there are more than 5,000 active structures on the national territory, with a capacity of more than 8,000 seats. Messina is therefore a frontier city or, better to say, a frontier university city. Over the last year - since April 2019 to April 2020 - 8 disembarkations took place in Messina, for a total of 979 migrants. 671 of them are asylum seekers. In the reference year, almost 6,000 people in total obtained the renewal/issue of the residence permit (5992). A human capital that cannot be worthy considered only for the substance of the numbers[24].

In fact, numbers do not justify the commitment of the University of Messina to direct its own policy in favour of the inclusion of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. To devise its strategy, the University listened carefully to the demands of the territory and, in some ways, it anticipated the needs.

[21] Hotspots are also defined as crisis points by art. 10 of Legislative Decree no. 286/98, introduced by D.L. n. 13/2017 converted into Law n. 46/17.

[22] First Reception Centres (CPA), pursuant to Article 9 of Legislative Decree no. 142/2015

[23] Structures found by the Prefects following a specific calls for tenders (pursuant to Article 11 of Legislative Decree no. 142/15).

[24] Data provided by the Messina's Police Station, Immigration Office.

*3.2 The University of Messina Centre for Migration, social inclusion and intercultural Communication"*

Starting from 2016, when it was established the Interdepartmental Centre called "Centre for Migration, Social Inclusion and Intercultural Communication", briefly CEMI. The first research groups sensitive to the issue were already active in the University and started arising opportunities for comparison and collaboration with other public and private Subjects, in various ways competent in the management of migration flows, which in those years were recording peaks of considerable range. The choice was to converge energies, ideas, actions in a single internal point of reference - for the academic community, - and external - for the regional, national and international community. The aim and the activities of the Centre are referred to in Art. 2 of the Statute which states: "In view of the institutionalization, qualification and strengthen of the University commitment to the progress of the social and economic system, the fundamental goal of the Centre is to promote projects for the development of activities and initiatives aimed - in many aspects - to multicultural integration and social inclusion. In particular, the activities of the Centre will be directed, mostly but not exclusively, to asylum seekers and holders of status connected to the request for international protection". In addition to the reference to the procedures for the recognition of qualifications and the validation of competencies, we have focused on previously, the activities indicated range, for example, from the experimentation of formative experiences dedicated to international students as well as external experts operating in the welcoming supply chain to the realization of activities, also in partnership, funded by national and Community resources. Today the work of CEMI is enhanced by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) which in Italy launched the "Manifesto of Inclusive University[25]" , this initiative is part of the commitments indicated by the Global Compact on Refugees, the document was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 2018, as we have already mentioned, it addresses Governments, civil society and even Universities. In this way, the University of Messina is gaining a growing experience. Worth of mention is the implementation of the Regional Plan for Immigration 2016 - 2018[26], through which CEMI experienced pilot actions that involved in

[25] For more information, it is available in English the Fact Sheet 2019 Italy edited by UNHCR.

[26] The University of Messina has in fact won the manifestation of public interest launched by the Sicilian Region to co-design interventions that can be funded through the resourced provided to the regions by the Ministry of the Interior through the Asylum, Migration and Integra-

particular schools and associations, as well as immigrant communities resident in Sicily. Hence, the ability to promptly intercept possible users, among the immigrants just arrived on the island, deserving and eager to undertake university studies, often forcibly interrupted. In 2016, it was possible to enrol two refugee students, a boy and a girl of Eritrean origin from a refugee camp in South - Sudan, today there are 8 students with a migratory background taken in charge by CEMI, only half of them enjoy the refugee status. The latest government interventions[27] have influenced in a restrictive way the already fragile reception system and management of migration flows in Italy. The process to obtain the legal status functional to the full inclusion of immigrants has become even longer and more difficult, with consequently further precarious conditions. The University of Messina has therefore extended its commitment also in favour of asylum seekers, thus trying to anticipate, grasp and support the multiple requests of capable and deserving young people whose future has become even more uncertain.

In September 2019, the University of Messina resolved to exempt students seeking asylum from the payment of university fees and extending them the access to university living services and in April of this year it resolved on the possibility of providing food and accommodation services also to asylum seekers that are attending the last classes of high school and that intend to continue the university studies. This meets the needs of many deserving students at risk of sudden transfer. As seen, the commitment of the Universities required the testing of innovative, flexible, always evolving mechanisms as the needs, situations, expectations and perspectives of the immigrants to whom these services are addressed. A number that is still poor in comparison to the potential but it is significant in its value transcending statistics. The CEMI experience is enriched on the way by inter-institutional collaborations and partnerships with public and private system, at local, national and European level in the awareness that every single intervention makes sense if it contributes to animate a virtuous social network. With this spirit it was intended to contribute to the realisation of

tion Fund (FAMI). FAMI fund multi-action notice 2014 -2020 - OS2 Integration/ Legal migration - ON2 integration - regional intervention plans for the integration of third country citizens - Actions 01 - 02 - 03 - 04.

[27] The reference is to the decree law 4 October 2018 no. 113, coordinated with the conversion law 1 December 2018 no. 132 known as the Security Decree passed by the then Minister of the Interior Salvini who, among other things, abolished the possibility of granting humanitarian protection and the Security Decree bis. Law decree 14 June 2019, no. 53, containing "Urgent provisions on public order and security", then ratified with the Law 8 August 2019 no. 77 known as "closing ports".

the project Erasmus + KA205 "Social inclusion of refugee youth through social entrepreneurship" for which this contribution was prepared.

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