

EDUCATION AS AN INSTRUMENT OF INTEGRATION FOR REFUGEE MILLENNIALS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to analyse the importance of education as a tool of integration and to focus on the specific challenges Refugee Millennials (RMs) face in Italy. The paper also considers how education related challenges have been addressed in the work of Association Mosaico-azioni per Rifugiati (Mosaico),¹ as well as other relevant good practices.

2. REFUGEE MILLENNIALS (RMS) IN EUROPE AND THEIR CHALLENGES IN THE ITALIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

2.1. MILLENNIALS (BORN BETWEEN 1980 AND 2000)

Generally, the 'Millennial Generation', or 'Generation Y', is a term used to describe population groups. They are the demographic cohort following 'Generation X'. Millennials are sometimes referred to as 'echo boomers' due to a major surge in birth rates in the 1980s and 1990s, and because they are often the children of the "baby boomers". The birth rate in this period increased and has become comparable to the birth rate after World War II. Although their lifestyle features vary by region and social and economic conditions, Millennials are defined by their increased usage and familiarity with media, communication and digital technologies.

2.2. RMS IN EUROPE

The number of RMs has increased in the past years, which is why it is important for us to pay more attention and consider them as a powerful resource of integration; RMs can act as a bridge between their communities and autochthones.

RMs are one of the most economically vulnerable persons in our society; without our help they struggle to access higher education. Many RMs have interrupted their studies due to being forced to migrate yet have the will to continue their education.

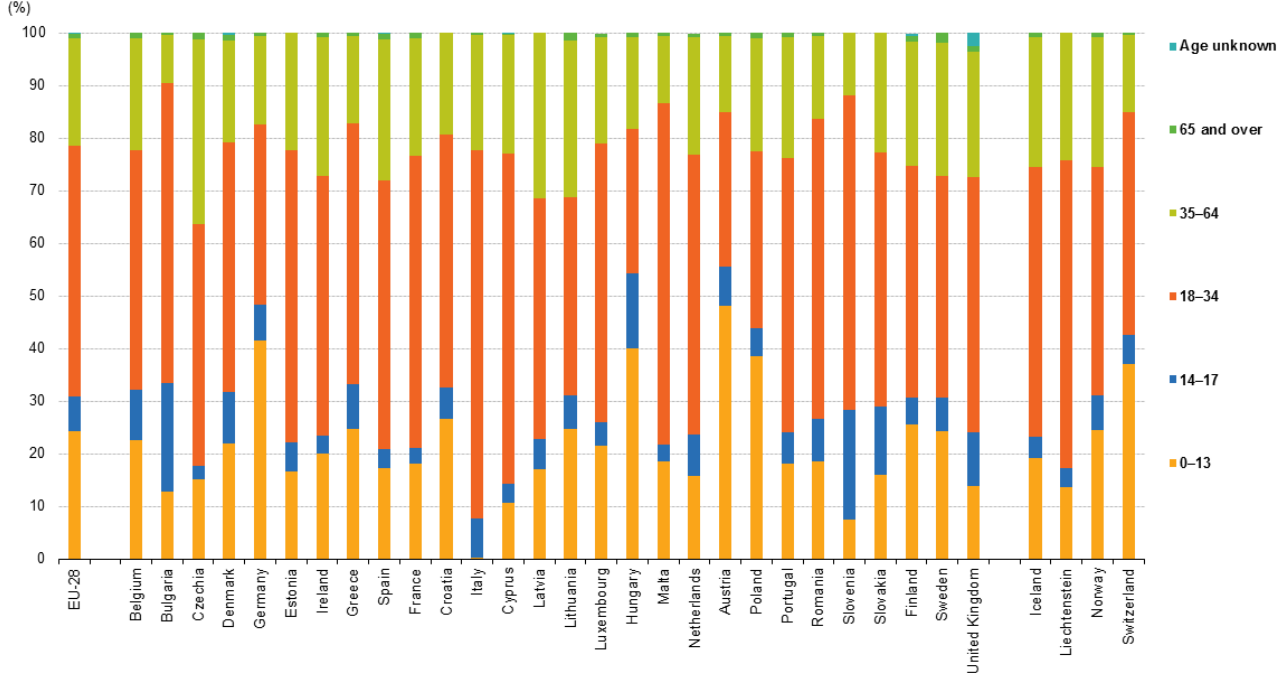
RMs from repressed countries (war zones and tribal conflicts), often have experienced situations where social inclusion is lacking. According to the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) EU+ asylum trends 2018 overview,² the top ten citizenships of origin in 2018 were Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Iran, Nigeria, Turkey, Venezuela, Albania, Georgia, Eritrea, Bangladesh and Yemen.

1. Mosaico's website is available at: <https://bit.ly/2zrSBGD>.

2. European Asylum Support Office, *EU+ asylum trends 2018 overview*, available at: <https://bit.ly/2X1pwHK>.

Table 1

Distribution by age of (non-EU) first-time asylum applicants in the EU and EFTA Member States, 2018



Note: due to the use of rounded figures in these calculations the sum of all age groups does not always equal 100 %.
Source: Eurostat (online data code: migr_asyappctza)



The above chart (Table 1) shows the distribution by age of non-European Union first time asylum applicants in the European Union (EU) and European Free Trade Associate (EFTA) States in 2018. The data demonstrates that RMs aged between 18-34 years old account for slightly more than half (51 %) of the total number of applicants. They, thus, amount to the largest share of applicants in 2018. It is also worth noting that most are male.³

2.3. CHALLENGES FOR RMS IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ITALY

Decisions on asylum applications (first instance decisions and final decisions)

The number of pending asylum applications in Italy are substantial as shown in Table 2 below and there are considerable delays in receiving a decision. Asylum seekers are, therefore, obliged to wait around 3 years⁴ before starting higher education studies or have to interrupt their studies for that time period. In Italy, those in the process of seeking asylum are not allowed to join universities and, thus, benefit from university education.⁵ As a result, asylum seekers may lose their motivation to join university, which can, in turn, generate feelings of exclusion.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Altreconomia, Diritto d'asilo: il 70% dei migranti "vinceva" in appello. Ma il Governo l'ha cancellato, 27 June 2017, available at: <https://bit.ly/2JhS3mx>.

5. Asylum Information Database (AIDA), Country Report: Italy, April 2019, available at: <https://bit.ly/2JjfEDf>.

Table 2⁶

	Applicants in 2018	Pending at end 2018	Refugee status	Subsidiary protection	Humanitaria protection	Rejection	Refugee rate	Subs. Prot Rate	Hum. Prot. rate	Rejection rate
Total	53,596	98,369	7,096	4,319	20,014	56,002	7%	5%	21%	59%
Breakdown by countries of origin of the total numbers										
Pakistan	7,368	:	426	655	1,360	6,139	4%	7%	14%	64%
Nigeria	6,336	:	1,356	158	3,252	13,561	7%	1%	17%	69%
Bangladesh	5,026	:	159	60	2,622	7,233	2%	1%	25%	70%
Senegal	2,867	:	110	29	1,350	4,620	2%	0%	21%	71%
Ukraine	2,517	:	41	150	671	865	2%	8%	36%	46%
Mali	2,266	:	112	504	1,232	3,318	2%	9%	22%	59%
Gambia	2,101	:	138	26	2,159	4,305	2%	0%	31%	62%
El Salvador	1,735	:	284	75	571	50	26%	7%	53%	5%
Morocco	1,734	:	64	2	273	809	5%	0%	20%	58%
Côte d'Ivoire	1,668	:	235	34	1,083	3,046	4%	1%	20%	57%
Guinea	1,421	:	129	18	1,180	2,710	3%	0%	25%	57%
Ghana	1,171	:	61	17	906	2,772	2%	0%	23%	70%
Georgia	1,086	:	12	4	181	226	3%	1%	42%	52%

Lack of information and recognition of qualifications

The mutual recognition of qualifications at some Italian public universities is free of charge for refugee status holders. However, the system is extremely complex and it is, sometimes, near to impossible to access relevant services due to the lack of information and bureaucratic complexity that exists. Although there are some initiatives⁷ which make the process of recognising qualifications less cumbersome, there are still many problems with qualification recognition, notably incomplete requirements or undocumented qualifications.

Decent work opportunities

RMs often struggle to find decent work opportunities. Such a situation leads them to dropping out of education and they are, instead, encouraged to undertake vocational training by personnel in reception centres. Discrimination based on RMs nationality, the lack of recognition of their qualifications and the absence of a welfare system which they can rely upon means that they often undertake menial work in order to find an immediate solution to their financial issues.

Most RMs work in the agriculture sector in difficult situations which could be compared to slavery.⁸ The situation for humanitarian protection status holders is even more precarious and the risk of mistreatment particularly high since a job contract of any kind is needed in order to renew their residence permits. Where migrants are irregularly residing, are poor, illiterate and/or unhealthy, the situation is even more severe. It is very challenging for RMs to develop on their own, learn new languages, new cultures but to, nevertheless, be

6. Pending applications as of 28 December 2018. Rejections include inadmissibility decisions. Commissione Nazionale per il diritto di Asilo (CNDA), Prima Sezione, Richieste di asilo, available at: <http://bit.ly/2u3FIR5>.

7. Such as, Qualify me! a website offering guidance on legal procedures for the recognition of foreign professional and academic qualifications, available at: <https://qualifyme.it/>. See also Cimea, website available at: <http://www.cimea.it/it/index.aspx>.

8. The Guardian, Are your tinned tomatoes picked by slave labour?, 20 June 2019, available at: <https://bit.ly/2RoR33L>.

unable to settle.⁹

Free movement and unemployment

One of the challenges for RMs integration and overall willingness to remain in the host country is the obvious unemployment rate in some EU countries and the implications this has for RMs education. For example, RMs would prefer to study in the language of the country they would hope to go to, a country where unemployment levels are lower, rather than pursue education in a local language. Examples of this occur very often in Italy where young refugees fear that by learning Italian they will be bound to the country. Instead, they would prefer to learn English rather than Italian, since employment levels are far higher in the UK than in Italy, a country with high unemployment rates.¹⁰ Indeed, according to The Twenty-Third Italian Report on Migration 2017, there is a phenomenon of youth not being engaged in education, employment or training (NEETs).¹¹ Furthermore, due to the Dublin Regulation¹² refugees have no right to emigrate to another EU country for job opportunities or studies, unlike EU citizens.

Housing and welfare

Reception centres are not designed for refugee students. In Italy, refugees are to leave reception centres after 6 months from the date of being granted refugee status, without any form of welfare or social assistance. Refugees have no right to the new Italian welfare system “*reddito di cittadinanza*” (citizen or basic wage). Under the new system, a foreigner is entitled to welfare only after they have a long-term permit (at least 10 years residence in Italy).¹³ Most refugee students live in private housing or squats.

Housing remains a great dilemma for refugee students. Whilst some universities offer free accommodation for refugees, the absence of grants which cover other costs are a big obstacle for refugees to continue studying. The Association Mosaico¹⁴ is trying to offer a solution to this in Turin, in the North of Italy, with 2 projects: Refugee Students Support and UNRESST which reaches out to more than 20 students.¹⁵

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

By looking at the implementation of various policies and projects that cover the access of refugees to education and best practices, the paper illustrates possible recommendations going forward.

3.1. IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES

Specifically the use of best practices and research, such as how the Council of Europe addresses the issue of youth. The Council of Europe has developed many initiatives, the most recent one being ‘Bridges to New Beginnings: Developing synergies in different sectors supporting inclusion, human rights and participation of young refugees and migrants.’¹⁶ Moreover, the Council of Europe has drafted guidelines on working with young refugees and migrants, fostering cross-sector co-operation.¹⁷ The aim and objectives of these guidelines have been to:

9. The Global Slavery Index, Country Studies, Italy, available at: <https://bit.ly/2Jd7dLs>; The Guardian, Salvini crackdown: bulldozers demolish Italian camp housing 1,500 refugees, 6 March 2019, available at: <https://bit.ly/2XDvYoZ>; France 24, ‘Modern slavery’ for migrant tomato pickers in Italy, 20 February 2018, available at: <https://bit.ly/2O1BsVP>; Borgen Magazine, The Challenges with Refugee Housing in Italy, 8 March 2019, available at: <https://bit.ly/2Jhx5FP>.
10. Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) figures place youth unemployment at 40% in Italy and in the EU at 34.7%. The youth unemployment rate in Italy increased in January 2019 up on December 2018. The youth unemployment rate in Italy averaged 28.88% from 1983 until 2019.
11. Fondazione ISMU – Iniziative e Studi sulla Multietnicità, The Twenty-third Italian Report on Migrations 2017, 2017, available at: <https://bit.ly/2VdtQ9P>; Il sole 24 ore, Istat: la disoccupazione dei giovani risale al 40,1%, 31 January 2017, available at: <https://bit.ly/2LpHzpD>.
12. Council of the European Union, Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast), OJ L. 180/31-180/59.
13. Il sole 24, Reddito di cittadinanza solo agli italiani? No, anche a 162mila famiglie di stranieri, 18 January 2019, available at: <https://bit.ly/2RNUAc5>.
14. For more information see: <https://bit.ly/313NrbS>.
15. Asylum Information Database (AIDA), Country Report: Italy, April 2019, available at: <https://bit.ly/2XG47at>.
16. For more information see: <https://bit.ly/2EcmASz>.
17. A. Henriques, Guidelines on working with young refugees and migrants: Fostering cross-sectoral co-operation, available at: <https://bit.ly/2K5s6tQ>.

- » Develop a better understanding of young refugees and migrants' situations and how different sectors work with this group as well as building on the knowledge developed in the youth field;
- » Create a space for mutual understanding and synergies among different actors acting in one way or another for young refugees and migrants;
- » Disseminate and learn from good practices of cross-sectoral co-operation and of working with young refugees and migrants;
- » Identify gaps in intervention for further planning and development in different fields.

3.2. BEST PRACTICES

Mosaico's approach is to provide guidance and orientation for refugee students through UNRESST¹⁸ and Refugee Students Support projects,¹⁹ providing a study space and tutor service, legal translation of certificates, assistance with obtaining job grants from local authorities, books, computers and transport, financial support for housing and living benefits, IELTS and language courses. Upcoming projects include the use of technology in order to obtain information.

On a National level, Mosaico calls for the same rights and benefits given to beneficiaries of humanitarian protection as those given to refugees. More sharing of information on these issues among social actors (unions, local authorities etc). Accessing funds and researching into funds so as to gain economical support.

On a European level, Mosaico advocates for a stronger transnational network between universities, national institutions, and organisations who work on the recognition of foreign qualifications and tuition free access to European universities.

Foundation for Refugee Students (UAF)

Since 1948 the Foundation for Refugee Students (UAF) supports and counsels highly skilled refugees in the Netherlands. They are helped with their studies and to find suitable employment.²⁰

Code Your Future

A non-profit organisation supporting refugees and disadvantaged individuals with achieving their dream of becoming web developers.²¹

4. CONCLUSION

It is very important to give RMs a chance to improve their capacity and to obtain a degree, thereby enabling them to become a resource for the community. Education is a means to achieve integration and is essential for social inclusion. Higher education can also increase work opportunities, preventing RMs from having recourse to the welfare system. For RMs, in particular, their identity is shaped outside of their countries of origin, which allows them to be easily integrated into their new societies. However, it must not be forgotten that the greater part of RMs have either a low level of formal education or have not benefitted from formal education at all. They are, therefore, in need of both formal education and informal education such as life coaching on subjects which arise from basic needs and which are related to living conditions, work, vocational training orientation, travel and social relations. This would enable them to continue their education and take intermediate school certificates or start vocational training courses. A characteristic of this kind of education could be defined as "existential" in that it enables RMs to rethink their life course when obstacles are placed in the way which prevent RMs from imagining their future.

18. UNITO for Refugee Students and Scholars Turin, website available at: <http://www.mosaicorefugees.org/unresst/>.

19. For more information, see: <https://bit.ly/2YppXfo>.

20. Website available at: <https://www.uaf.nl/english>.

21. Website available at: <https://codeyourfuture.io/about/>.



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