



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

# MANIFESTO ON AN INCLUSIVE UNIVERSITY

For university education  
of forcibly displaced  
persons





# The Manifesto on an Inclusive University is a support tool for Italian universities to facilitate access to tertiary education for forcibly displaced persons.

<https://www.unhcr.org/it/manifesto-on-an-inclusive-university/>

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The Manifesto on an Inclusive University was promoted by UNHCR in 2019 with the aim of supporting universities and tertiary education providers to **ensure increasing access to tertiary education** for forcibly displaced persons, based on a commonality of purpose and guiding principles, and more specifically **equality and non-discrimination, acceptance, knowledge, integration, valuing differences, and participation**. The Manifesto included **55 Italian universities** by the end 2022. This initiative is part of activities aimed at contributing to the UNHCR “**15by30**” target, i.e. to **increase the enrolment** rate of refugee students at tertiary education institutions from the current 6% to 15% by 2030. As noted in the UNHCR’s

2022 Global Report on Refugee Education, **talent is universal, but opportunities are not**.<sup>1</sup> We operate in a global context with a record 100 million forcibly displaced persons” in 2022,<sup>2</sup> where an increasing number of them live in protracted conditions of displacement and for whom a voluntary, dignified, and safe return would undoubtedly be the preferable solution but does not always prove feasible. Joint efforts are therefore essential to **offer concrete, effective prospects for local integration**. Social inclusion also takes place through the joint action of institutional and non-institutional actors, according to the “whole of society” approach promoted by the Global Compact on Refugees.<sup>3</sup>

1 UNHCR, *All Inclusive. The campaign for refugee education. A moral imperative. A united endeavour. A global priority.* 2022, available at <https://reporting.unhcr.org/document/3188>

2 UNHCR, *Global Trends Report 2021*, available at <https://www.unhcr.org/62a9d1494/global-trends-report-2021>

3 UNHCR, *Global Compact on Refugees*, <https://www.unhcr.org/it/cosa-facciamo/global-compact-sui-rifugiati/>

When looking at refugee students, it is the **initiatives and concrete actions put in place by Italian universities** that contribute to ensuring that the talent of those arriving in the country can find its necessary outlet and be adequately developed.

In 2022, the activities of the Manifesto on an Inclusive University focused on a few crucial aspects such as:

- Fostering opportunities for **continuous exchange and sharing of critical issues and good practices**, particularly through the construction of topical working groups composed of representatives of universities, refugee communities, and *DSU* entities, which addressed key issues such as the **recognition of qualifications**, the implementation of forms of **support to ensure access to and continuation of studies**, the construction of **networks at a territorial** level to help make the inclusion of refugee students more effective, and the **collection of essential information** for a better understanding of the needs of the student population of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international and temporary protection.
- Ensuring **effective participation by refugee students and their representative organisations** so that they can offer their valuable input in defining interventions that affect them.
- Providing specific **training opportunities for university staff** on the issues of international and temporary protection, the reception system in Italy, and inter-cultural communication with students who are asylum seekers and beneficiaries of international and temporary protection.

This document features the direct perspective of participants in the various activities outlined above, providing an account of the **main needs and challenges** that emerged during the various discussions and offering valuable suggestions on actions that can be put in place to **move forward** along this path.

To this end, it is clear there is both the need for a **formal structuring of the activities** related to the Manifesto on an Inclusive University within the individual universities and the need for an active **involvement** of further institutional actors such as the **Ministry of University and Research, CRUI, CIMEA, and ANDISU**, the latter together with its respective *DSU* regional bodies.

Through the Manifesto on an Inclusive University, UNHCR will continue to offer its contribution so that Italian universities can find a **space for permanent discussion and support** to progress towards their goal of achieving the “third mission”, favouring the promotion and use of knowledge to contribute to the social, cultural, and economic development of society and becoming active players in the **construction of increasingly inclusive communities**.

# Manifesto on an Inclusive University

## The universities' perspective

We are here to remember the millions of people fleeing violence, persecution, and wars - all behaviours that openly violate human rights. We are here to emphasise the right of every person, whoever they are and wherever they come from, to be helped and to have the dignity that follows a request for protection.

In December 2021, the Global Trends report counted 89 million people forcibly displaced. Since then, the invasion of Ukraine and other emergencies, not all of which are well known, ranging from Africa to Afghanistan to other areas of the world, have pushed the figure over the dramatic 100 million mark.

In order to overcome such a complex challenge, the only way forward is a **synergistic strategy based on a broadly participatory approach** capable of addressing the necessarily transversal character that any serious integration and protection policy must have, involving public institutions and solidarity actors. Welcoming refugees means not only ensuring hospitality services on the ground, but also **developing actions to facilitate the inclusion** of those who have sought refuge in our society by

guaranteeing their **right to education** as well as all other fundamental rights.

And it is based on this, following the spirit of our constitution and reaffirming its founding values, that the Manifesto on an Inclusive University was born, a programme that includes many universities scattered throughout the country, united by a single intent: to give value to their institutional mission and **guarantee the right to education that our founding fathers wanted to provide to all**.

The work of the universities, under the direction of the UN refugee agency, is aimed at **building a road without barriers for refugees**. Among the many barriers that every person encounters during their lifetime, those that cover the path of refugees are not only many but also difficult to overcome.

The first barrier is undoubtedly a **language** one: even those who have spent some time in the reception system have rarely been able to attain the language skills necessary not only to study but also to interact with the university's administrative bureaucratic language. Indeed, **access to information**, which is



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already naturally complex, becomes even more so due to the technicalities of the language, requiring the creation of a **single point within the universities to receive requests for information also – and at least – in English.**

However, in order to include those who want to enter university, it is not enough to guarantee accessibility to information: rather, rather we must act first by making people aware of available curricula.

There is therefore the need to **update the concept of orientation**, which normally takes the form of an information desk within the university. Indeed, some universities have taken orientation outside their walls to go and present their curricula to all **those who cannot get to that information desk.** The new orientation is thus made up of people who, often together with students who have agreed to act as tutors, leave the physical halls of the university and go to present their programmes in the buildings run by Reception and Integration System, or meet those referred to them by the Territorial Commissions that examine asylum applications.

Even with the aid of this innovative, revolutionary orientation system, there are still many more obstacles to building a barrier-free road.

Indeed, a diverse array of education systems also means diverse diplomas and degrees that make it necessary to identify a single pathway to unambiguously **recognise the educational path** of the future university students. But for refugees, this is not the only issue because added to this is the difficulty in obtaining documents, a difficulty that is amplified because it is absolutely **impossible for them to turn to the authorities** in their country of origin to obtain any missing documents. To this end, **many universities, again within the framework of their autonomy, have developed their own procedures** that meet the needs expressed by regulations, demonstrating considerable flexibility, creativity, and inclusivity, and in fact **allowing enrolment even in the absence of complete documentation.** They thus demonstrate their will to go beyond the Statement of Comparability issued by the CIMEA – for example, where the absence of

documents does not allow the actual possession of qualifications to be determined from documentary verification – by shifting the focus to the **assessment of competences through the involvement in the process of the teaching staff.**

In this obstacle course, breaking down one barrier is not enough because afterwards the road may appear to be immediately blocked by another. Indeed, next comes the **economic barrier**, which is often even higher for refugees, insofar as they not only have **no means of livelihood** but also **lack a support network** of family and friends. And it is here that institutions play a very important role by providing **specific resources** in the form of **scholarships**, but once again leaving it open to the inclusive will of the universities to add other forms of support such as **exemption from tuition**, contributions to **housing and board expenses** as well as **study-associated costs**, access to **free university accommodation**, and provision of **IT tools and teaching materials.**

One might think that at this point the journey is well under way, but the Manifesto on an Inclusive University does not intend to stop here. Rather, there is still a long way to go because, like any foreign student, refugee students are faced with the challenge of **integrating into a new reality**, in a foreign country, which they most likely did not choose. And while universities, as communities of young people, undoubtedly create opportunities for meeting others, the issue of being or being perceived as “different” is - rightly or wrongly - a further barrier. And this relates to another, perhaps final, challenge, involving the **need to coordinate** with those who

already work in the area in various institutional or voluntary capacity. This is a very difficult challenge that is still too often left to the goodwill of individuals, be they lecturers or administrative technical staff.

Indeed, it is well known that **positive integration in the local context** contributes not only to the refugees’ acquiring greater serenity, an essential precondition for a **successful education**, but also to facilitating the “after”, i.e. the **transition into the job market.**

It seems clear therefore that a solid model for the application of these steps, that each university should strive to implement within its own organisational system, is the **UNICORE University Corridors for Refugees** project promoted by many Italian universities with the support of the UN Refugee Agency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, but also of the Caritas Italiana organisation, the Waldensian Deaconry, and many other partners that have joined and who are working towards this goal. A project where the pathway is designed without barriers for true inclusion.

I am - or perhaps it is better to say that we are - aware of the complexity of the issue, but I hope that all those involved are willing to take concrete steps to address what can rightly be seen as a common challenge. Because, to quote others, **even if it is more common to believe in places without men, even if it is strange to think of them, there are also many men without places, and it is for them that we universities, with the support of the government, must make at least the right to education a reality.**

**Maria Paola Monaco**

*Delegate of the Dean for Inclusion and Diversity  
University of Florence*

# Strengthening of local and regional networks that foster the inclusion of refugees and their local integration

## The power of joint action and coordination

The work of the first group focused on analysing the potential added value offered by the **construction and consolidation of local networks** built among universities but also between universities and public or third-sector organisations.

In Piedmont, the **PIU-AEI Network** (Welcoming, Fair and Inclusive Piedmont Universities) was established and launched in 2022. This initiative, supported by the Deans of the four universities in Piedmont,<sup>4</sup> was launched in early 2022 with the convening of a meeting between the Deans and the representatives of the local government bodies concerned, especially the municipalities, prefectures, and police headquarters where the universities are located. The aim is to **strengthen, by means of networking, the initiatives necessary** to guarantee **living, studying, and working conditions** that at least partially mitigate the drama of those who, already part of the university community or aspiring to join it, find themselves in the condition of being asylum seekers, beneficiaries of international or

temporary protection, but also coming from countries in fragile and unstable conditions due to geopolitical, institutional, economic, or climatic issues. These students of today and tomorrow are a **resource for our community** and can act as a **bridge of solidarity** between their countries and continents of origin and their new host countries. The name chosen for the network of Piedmontese universities has a symbolic but also a structural significance: first of all, **welcoming**, as a distinctive trait of the universities, of the people who live, study and work in them, of the community, of the institutions, bodies, associations; **fair**, as it gives back to the people – with particular attention to women – who come from traumatic pasts and difficult regions the ability to benefit from the opportunity of a high-profile education; finally, **inclusive**, so that the beneficiaries of the project can become part of a community that makes them feel they are the architects of their own future, “bridges” between their homeland and host communities, responsible for the construction of a **just, peaceful, and inclusive society** for sustainable development

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4 Turin Polytechnic, University of Eastern Piedmont, University of Turin, University of Gastronomic Sciences of Pollenzo.

as indicated in Sustainable Development Goal no. 16, “peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development”. The first meeting of the PIU-AEI committee held in February 2022 was attended – in addition to the four Piedmontese universities – by the UNHCR, the Municipality of Turin, the Municipality of Vercelli, the Municipality of Bra, the Piedmont Region, EDISU, IRES Piemonte, the Prefecture of Turin, the Police Headquarters of Turin, the Prefecture of Vercelli, the Police Headquarters of Vercelli, the Compagnia di San Paolo, the Ufficio Pio Foundation, the CRT Foundation, the CRC Foundation, and the UPM-Migrant Pastoral Office. This first meeting will be followed by a second one expanded to include representatives of the regional volunteer organisations working on the issues of reception and integration of students included in the abovementioned categories.

With regard to specific initiatives carried out by Turin Polytechnic in the context outlined above, some **dedicated measures** were enacted following the emergencies arising from the situations in **Afghanistan** and then in **Ukraine**. Together with many other universities nationwide, the Turin Polytechnic also participated in the **UNICORE 4.0** project, providing three scholarships for refugee students to attend a Master’s degree course. **Memorandums of understanding** were also signed between UPM, the University of Turin, and the Turin Polytechnic and between the Waldensian Deaconry and the Turin Polytechnic to support the reception and integration of students seeking and benefiting from protection. **Moreover, three scholarships for refugees** were set aside for the 38th cycle **doctoral call for applications**.

Of particular importance, similar to what has been done by other universities adhering to the Manifesto on an Inclusive University on the issue of psychological support, is the collaboration with **Passi@UniTo**, which **offers psychological support services to those students who feel they need it**. Passi@UniTo is a pilot project of the University of Turin aimed at fostering the presence and **improving the academic integration** of international students enrolled at UniTo, mainly coming from non-EU countries and having educational, scholastic, and social models that are culturally different from European ones. Launched with MIUR funds in June 2019, in the wake of previous projects carried out

at the University (the UNRESST network - UNITO for Refugee Students and Scholars Turin and the UNIT-EDU project), Passi@UniTo is a psychological counselling service that offers a **space dedicated to listening and understanding** the practical difficulties and emotional issues that may arise during the course of one’s studies in Turin. As already mentioned, all these initiatives aim to **strengthen inclusion opportunities** for refugee students or those in refugee-like situations. However, it is important that the term **inclusion** be used carefully so as not to end up generating a barrier between those who are considered “normal” and those who are “included”, i.e. those who have benefited from specific forms of support. On the contrary, it must describe the **extraordinary diversity** of the entire academic and non-academic community and the style of **“togetherness”**.

The strength provided by the existence of a regional network, such as the one set up in Piedmont, but also, for example, in Emilia Romagna, is also that of acting as a **stimulus for the creation of further networks and organisations**, both **within the universities**, since for functions of such complexity the presence of a working group operating in a coordinated manner and in relation to specific areas of competence is essential, and **among universities**, since continuous contact between organisations is a powerful tool for facilitating new actions and generating continuity over time. In this regard, **the network built thanks to the Manifesto on an Inclusive University and UNICORE is a driving force for actions promoted locally** by each individual university and for mutual sharing among the universities in Italy. Precisely for this reason, these networks need to be further strengthened, including fostering a **coordination of the actions implemented by the various existing networks** that work on similar issues in certain respects, such as RUnipace, RUS and Scholar at Risk.

Precisely during the moments of exchange offered by the Manifesto on an Inclusive University, with specific regard to the topic of developing networks at local and regional levels, several challenges also emerged that need to be addressed for universities to be truly actors of inclusion. First and foremost, the need to **increase communication and sharing with respect to refugee issues within universities**, reaching out to migrants in general.



Then there is the importance of **involving the student community and related associations** (e.g. through the establishment of buddies or other forms of peer support) while ensuring a **more active involvement of refugee organisations and representatives** in the activities of the various universities vis-à-vis applicants and beneficiaries of protection. The involvement of refugees in the **definition and organisation of initiatives and information processes** also plays an essential role in ensuring greater **effectiveness of the actions** put in place by universities. It was precisely from the exchanges with refugee students during the meetings held in 2022 that the need emerged to **further develop the methods used to communicate** the opportunities offered by universities, not limiting them to official websites but also using social media in a more judicious and conscious manner, capitalising on the role that UNHCR and universities can play

in reaching out to potential beneficiaries. In order to adequately respond to this need, the creation of a database that also contains information on the background and level of schooling of applicants and beneficiaries of protection could be useful in order to define what the best methods to ensure they receive relevant news might be.

Ultimately, to be able to adequately support such initiatives within universities, it is necessary to **develop internal organisational structures**, equipping them with **specific expertise** but also with the **economic and human resources** necessary to manage such activities. This internal strengthening must necessarily be accompanied by an **enrichment of external relations** with local institutions but above all with volunteer organisations, without which a person will find it difficult to receive a **complete, holistic response to their integration needs**.

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# Support measures to enable access and continuation of studies for refugee students

## Priority areas for intervention and concrete actions to be implemented

The subject of the second group's analysis, i.e. the development of **forms of support to enable access to and continuation of university studies for students seeking and benefiting from protection**, being both broad and complex, is closely linked to the topics dealt with by the other two working groups. Putting in place concrete actions for the effective achievement of these objectives cannot but include the creation of networks at a regional level, but also the promotion of the professional integration of those enjoying protection, a need that is often felt even before the end of their studies.

Participation in working groups at a national level encourages and supports the **development of concrete actions** at a local level by fostering **dialogue and shared knowledge** not only between universities and the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, but also between the universities themselves, and between them and refugee associations, with a sharing of projects and the search for solutions for specific issues. At the same time, the stimuli and ideas coming from this networking must be redesigned and **adapted by each university** considering the needs and

particularities of the university and the local context it operates in. Learning in concrete terms what has already been done by universities that have been working on the Manifesto for longer and/or with more resources should not be discouraging. In fact, the usefulness of a policy of "small steps" has been pointed out many times, of a **step-by-step progression** that is nurtured and benefits from relationships and results that are sometimes unexpected and different from those initially imagined, i.e. that are built up as we go along.

When defining priority areas of intervention and designing concrete actions for each, one must be aware of the obstacles and issues that one will face. Reference was repeatedly made within the group to difficulties in terms of **lack of personnel** – felt more keenly even than the need for financial resources – to devote to this project notwithstanding a widespread internal agreement on the underlying principles and values. Indeed, the actions prompted by the Manifesto on an Inclusive University require particular flexibility and time to be devoted to the different stages of the project, and above all to the recipients of the actions implemented. Ways must be



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found to get such message across. Within the group, it was agreed that in response to possible criticism on the amount of time spent on a project necessarily targeting a limited number of beneficiaries, it was advisable to focus on the **quality** factor, on the **significance of these actions for an inclusive and open university**, on the multiplier effect they can have and on the **positive repercussions for other categories of students as well**. Considering the time issue, the foreseeable “crisis” situations of those who follow projects such as this one related to welcoming immigrants, as well as the **interdisciplinarity and intersectionality** underlying the Manifesto on an Inclusive University, it is understandable how **the Manifesto contact person**, who very frequently holds various other positions, **requires a structured discussion and interaction with co-workers, areas, and services within the university**. Mediated solutions acceptable to university governance must be therefore found. One of these, which has already been tried in some places, is **the establishment of working groups made up of lecturers and technical-administrative staff** who hold positions

and perform tasks in various capacities related to the main areas of intervention of the Manifesto on an Inclusive University.

Taking a closer look at the actions and areas of intervention, in continuity with the findings of the 2021 working groups, aspects affecting not only access, and thus increasing enrolment, were addressed but also the continuation of studies. Among the first were various proposals to **perfect the system of degree recognition** (such as full recognition of the statement of comparability and an advocacy action for an annual calendar of EQPR passport sessions), a greater **appreciation of prior skills**, the usefulness of free enrolment in individual courses also for asylum seekers in order to facilitate assimilation in the university as well as a **foundation year** aimed at the acquisition of the language and cultural skills required to pass the admission tests. With respect to measures to support the continuation of studies, the importance of a better **rationalisation of the resources allocated to people enjoying international protection** was highlighted also by UNIRE; besides greater uniformity

in the amounts and methods of granting scholarships, there is a need for flexibility in recognising to refugee students the amount provided for students living away from home and in defining the requirements and duration of accommodation. When outlining the accompanying services (guidance, tutoring, psycho-social support), the effectiveness of a **complementarity between professional and peer support forms** was emphasised, **involving refugee students** (in associated and/or individual form) from the planning phase to the delivery and monitoring phases. Opportunities for social inclusion, such as language exchanges between students, study groups and free sports, also foster continuing studies. A further priority area of intervention concerns **training for university staff**. It was both stressed and demonstrated how basic interdisciplinary training, such as the programme implemented by UNHCR during 2022, can be valued and recognised for technical-administrative staff while also being used to prepare tutors.

Communication within the university also involves **communication between the academia and the various organisations on the ground** - first and foremost with refugee associations - engaged in the inclusion of beneficiaries of protection. Alongside the need, particularly with respect to institutional dialogue, to have a **web page on the UNHCR website dedicated** to the Manifesto on an Inclusive University, which in turn links to **those of the individual universities** in the network, and to use the **most popular social networks**, a suggestion was to set up an **institutional mailbox for the Manifesto where questions could be sent to** and to have short **video testimonies** instead of lengthy descriptions

to communicate success stories inside and outside the university. In order to also understand how to develop the project, meetings involving different categories of actors (financial supporters, operators of reception centres, associations, etc.) can be effective. Proceeding in this way also makes it possible to gather suggestions on the priorities to be focused on to **address the difficulties and barriers** that prevent refugees from even considering access to university education as a possibility.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the aspect related to the **collection of data** of enrolled students who may fall under the scope of the Manifesto on an Inclusive University. This is deliberately done, in the end, because it is precisely through the **implementation of services and actions** that one can justify how the reference to the type of residence permit becomes compulsory data at the time of enrolment for all non-EU students. Once again, **having precise data on refugee students**, also indicating their degree programme, helps to **improve the planning of the Manifesto** on an Inclusive University in the individual universities.

The areas of intervention and priorities outlined so far cannot be considered in isolation, but rather a coordinated and holistic approach is required. For this reason, solutions include **composite working groups that also look outside the university**, as well as **action plans covering the various areas of intervention** and taking into account the priorities that emerge from the working groups. Calls for access are not enough in themselves: we must act first and put the potential beneficiaries in a truly welcomed position, while at the same time focusing on making them feel **empowered and motivated**.

**Isolde Quadranti**

*University of Verona*

# Consolidation of job orientation and placement support services

## A sharing of experiences

The group's work focused on the commitment of the universities that have joined the Manifesto on an Inclusive University in facilitating and promoting the **employment of refugee undergraduates or recent graduates**, based on the objectives defined at the end 2021 within the Manifesto. The different experiences of the universities that participated in the project were shared and some summaries are provided below.

The representative of the **University of Trento**, for example, elaborated on the actions implemented by the University's Job Guidance Office, which has been dealing with student placement and guidance for some time and in particular with supporting the **identification of internships while still studying**. There is no active involvement of refugee students in the project as their numbers are still very limited, but there was an initial collaboration which started last year to support the first refugee students at the end of their studies.

A specific university programme was approved at the **University of Verona** in connection with the initiatives of the Manifesto on an Inclusive University,

as well as with respect to the activities of the job placement office. Specifically, **online meetings between companies and graduates** were organised in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce with the idea of showing participating companies the possible benefits of hiring refugees and at the same time supporting graduating refugees in the period immediately preceding their entry into the world of work.

At the **University of Padua** there is a **research laboratory** on the topic of **orientation and guidance** which aims to support people in their education and career path. The university is involved in research projects on the subject and has established specific partnerships related to the hiring process, promoting initiatives and events aimed at people in particularly vulnerable conditions.

**Er.GO** (the *DSU* Body of Emilia Romagna), on the other hand, **offers students (including refugees)** of the various universities in the region **support** in writing Cvs and cover letters, seminars in English, personalised meetings as part of the active job search, and mock interviews in English. For several

years now, a post-graduate guidance initiative has been promoted where refugee students can have a **(paid) internship while remaining at the university residence where they are hosted.**

**LUISS University** offers an **orientation service** with specialised staff and a tutorship service for students, making a clear distinction between orientation and job placement support services. The **ALUMNI Service** acts as another effective service: former students who are in companies act as a conduit and contact the career service or vice versa for information. This network of relationships is very important, but it necessarily requires dedicated personnel with specific expertise in the field.

At the **University of Bari**, the **CAP** (University Service Centre for Lifelong Learning) has been active since 2016. Since its establishment, it has **supported the academic integration process** of students with migrant backgrounds, especially refugees and

asylum seekers, through the **recognition and use of their prior cultural capital** acquired in formal, non-formal, and informal learning contexts. One of the objectives that the Centre intends to achieve in 2023 is to **increase the connection with Placement Services**, including through shared actions for the **assessment and certification of skills** in synergy with the university's strategic planning, in which a specific series of actions with respect to these issues is envisaged. With the **Dimicome project** (lead partner ISMU Foundation and partner CAP UniBa, <https://www.ismu.org/progetto-dimicome/>) soft skill validation reports were issued by the CAP to 40 refugees and asylum seekers who benefited from this service for the transparency of their cross-cutting skills (resilience, problem solving, communication, aptitude to working in groups) with a view to facilitating placement and support in entering the labour market. Another recent CAP initiative to help refugees with job placement was the implementation



of the **TiRiConoSco Project** (Migrants' qualifications, cultural capital and skills, <https://partecipazione.regione.puglia.it/processes/TiRiConoSco>) of the "Apulia Participates" programme of Apulia (2020-2022), which sought to support the promotion of migrants' qualifications and recognition of their cultural capital and skills, issuing 26 skill portfolios.

All in all, the meetings held by the working group fostered a fruitful exchange of experiences with programmes that in some cases had been implemented only recently, while others had been put in place several years before by the Manifesto's member universities with respect to a particularly relevant topic such as job placement, while promoting active and shared participation.

The points of discussion and reflection that emerged most strongly to facilitate the placement of recent refugee graduates concern:

- The construction of specific **Memoranda of Understanding** with public and private actors in the area.
- The organisation of **structured outgoing guidance initiatives**, also understood as further forms of postgraduate specialisation, bearing in mind that guidance is an integral part of young people's and adults' entry into universities.
- The creation of **internship and work opportunities** throughout the students' time at university.
- The **specialised training of career services staff** with a view to the development of lifelong learning of the individual.
- The creation of **mentorships and traineeships**.
- The organisation of **dedicated services** including accommodation for postgraduate students.

All universities agree that this issue is a fundamental step to ensure that the efforts made up to this point can then **translate into an opportunity for real inclusion** of refugee students, placing value on and allowing to fully use their academic studies and the degree earned.

**Silvana Mariel Sirico, Marianna Colosimo, Fausta Scardigno**

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# Building of a survey of students who are asylum seekers and beneficiaries of protection

## Background, objectives, and methodological aspects

The methodological working group was recently established and involved the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, the Aldo Moro University of Bari, and the Universities of Verona, Bicocca, and Sapienza. Initially it was planned to survey students with migrant backgrounds to find out about their plans and situations but then, during our meetings, we realised that we needed to focus exclusively on students seeking and benefiting from protection as they have specific needs to be observed. Therefore, an initial consideration concerned the need to develop a specially designed but at the same time comprehensible and streamlined tool, a starting point to collect information and make an initial reflection that could also become a systematic survey to **reconstruct pathways** and **grasp trends/changes/ what has had the greatest impact** (with a potentially positive impact also on the broader reflection on the presence of immigrant students in the academic world). On a strictly methodological level, the tool was built on six areas of study:

- **Socio-cultural skills and background** of applicants and beneficiaries of protection

(e.g. languages known, personal and family qualifications, household composition)

- **Situation upon arrival** (both at the university and in terms of accommodation).
- **Support** they receive **at university** (fee waivers, scholarships, integration services, language support) and **knowledge of active opportunities** (if any).
- **University experience** (both in terms of learning and relationships with lecturers and other students).
- **Socio-occupational integration** into the local community.
- Future **expectations**.

The preference was to build a streamlined and longitudinally repeatable tool that could be used to understand **whether and how paths and contexts change**, if used periodically. These are mainly close-ended questions but they also aim to collect the opinions and assessments that students make regarding their future paths.



The data collected will support the work of the groups, and indeed today we would like **to recall the importance of the involvement of all the member universities and the representatives of each** because they are important for the administration of the questionnaire. The Manifesto representatives in each university and the participants in the working groups can act as focal points **to facilitate administration and participation**, in a system of collaborative universities. Specifically, one might also consider the possibility of **combining the survey of the students with a survey through university representatives** who could take charge of the initial exploratory study and the collection of background information useful for reconstructing the statistics and programmes of the various schools.

Finally, the questionnaire is part of this **joint reflection** because it stems from the path we have travelled together in recent years.

It will be administered next year and we reiterate the importance it offers as a tool to be able to have **a national overview with comparable data across various contexts of the situation of students who are applicants and beneficiaries of protection**. Moreover, the way it was conceived makes it possible to collect **not only quantitative data on participation**, which is certainly important to change dominant narratives and still make a person and their potential visible, but also **to gain broader insight** (compared to individual local surveys) **into the experiences, strengths, and weaknesses of placement strategies**. Therefore the aim is to contribute new information, harnessing the strength of this network of universities, and in support of the actions of the Manifesto.

**Rita Bertozzi**

*Unimore*

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*Aldo Moro University of Bari*



# The crucial role of refugee participation

## The testimony of UNIRE (Italian National Union of Refugees and Exiles)

One of the reasons why the UNIRE association was founded about five years ago was to have **an Italian organisation founded and led by refugees in the country** with the aim of reaching out to refugees and strengthening our voices through **collaboration with public and private entities**, both at the national and European levels. The aim is to be able to give concrete meaning to this collaboration, especially at times of social policy formulation, and as far as possible **to contribute to the shaping of policy decisions** that affect us.

It was an honour for us at UNIRE to be able to participate and work with Italian universities that have adopted the Manifesto on an Inclusive University. We found the **dialogue, discussion, and sharing of best practices and strategies** to foster the targeted access and integration of refugees in academia extremely valuable.

Our experience during these meetings, seminars, and discussions organised during the course of the year allowed us to directly experience a real and extraordinary **willingness on the part of university representatives to move forward** in discussions

and in the design of **cutting-edge university programmes** aimed at refugee students.

To cite one example, there has been a wide-ranging and fundamental discussion to find a less complex, quicker, and easier way to facilitate the process of **recognising certificates and previous studies**. Furthermore, the webinars extensively and clearly discussed the **ways and methods of communication** that professionals can apply in their daily dealings with refugee students. In another meeting, the focus was on participation in **calls for application and scholarships**.

A particularly important moment in 2022 was when we had the opportunity to meet in person during the conference in Rome on 6 December. It was a crucial opportunity for some of the refugee students to ask questions to the institutions present and we believe that this opportunity is of great value to them. We were also particularly impressed when, during one of the discussions during the year, the universities shared the strategies they use to support refugee students such as setting up tutors, counselling, etc.



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Another aspect of our work that enriched us greatly was the opportunity to participate in working groups, where **together with other professionals** we tried to think about **ways to overcome the difficulties** that universities face in reaching potential recipients – applicants and beneficiaries of protection – of the opportunities they offer.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the universities that have invited us to their public and educational meetings, seminars, webinars, etc. On these occasions, we have witnessed discussions and debates aimed at **making Italian universities a public and accessible place** for all citizens, including refugees. At the same time we thank UNHCR, with which we have worked together to seize the opportunities for dialogue

and debate offered by the universities, thus offering our own small contribution. We will never take this possibility for granted, because we really felt engaged, listened to, and that our input was truly valued. This is a valuable professional development experience for us and an important social recognition for an association led by refugees.

Lastly, we would also like to take this opportunity to ask the other institutions to engage with us, because at UNIRE we are open to continuing and **advancing our cooperation with the institutions** that in various capacities are committed each day to **making Italy a country at the forefront of the world, where no one is left behind or abandoned.**

We are refugees, but Italy is us too.

**Pedro Apollos**

*UNIRE (Italian National Union of Refugees and Exiles)*

# UNICORE



## University Corridors for Refugees

The UNI.CO.RE. project (University Corridors for Refugees) stems from the strong focus that the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants dated November 2016 <sup>5</sup> and the subsequent **Global Compact on Refugees** place on the need to expand opportunities for refugees and people in need of international protection to enter a third country through **safe and legal channels of entry**, participating in resettlement programmes and promoting **complementary pathways to entry and protection**.

The first edition of the UNICORE project was launched in **February 2019** thanks to a protocol

signed by the University of Bologna, the UNHCR, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Caritas Italiana organisation, the Archdiocese of Bologna, ER.GO (Regional *DSU* body), Federmanager and Manager Italia, Gandhi Charity, and Next Generation. **In the first edition, five refugee students** were admitted from Ethiopia

5 Sources:

- New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, 20w6 <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/declaration>;
- Global Compact on Refugees, 2018, <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/refugees-compact>;
- Education 2030: A Strategy for Refugee Education – UNHCR, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/education/5d651da88d7/education-2030-strategy-refugee-education.html>;
- Three-Year Strategy (2019-2021) on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/5d15db254.pdf>
- Coming Together For Refugee Education. Education Report 2020 <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/education/5f4f9a2b4/coming-together-refugee-education-education-report-2020.html>
- Third Country Solutions for Refugees: Roadmap 2030 <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/Third%20Country%20Solutions%20for%20Refugees%20-%20Roadmap%202030.pdf>

to Italy, then a sixth student was later added thanks to a scholarship offered by Luiss University of Rome. The project was immediately so successful in the academic world that **in 2020 11 universities offered 20 scholarships**, while in **2021** the number of participating universities rose to **22 with 45 scholarships**. For the latest edition, **UNICORE 4.0, 33 universities** joined the project providing **71 scholarships**, effectively doubling the number of scholarships offered in the first three editions of the project.

In **four years**, therefore, **38 Italian universities** have joined the project providing **140 scholarships** for refugee students.

The UNICORE project aims to consolidate and strengthen a **safe and legal entry model** for refugees who have completed a first academic course of study in the country of first asylum<sup>6</sup> and who intend to pursue a university diploma (master's degree) in Italy.

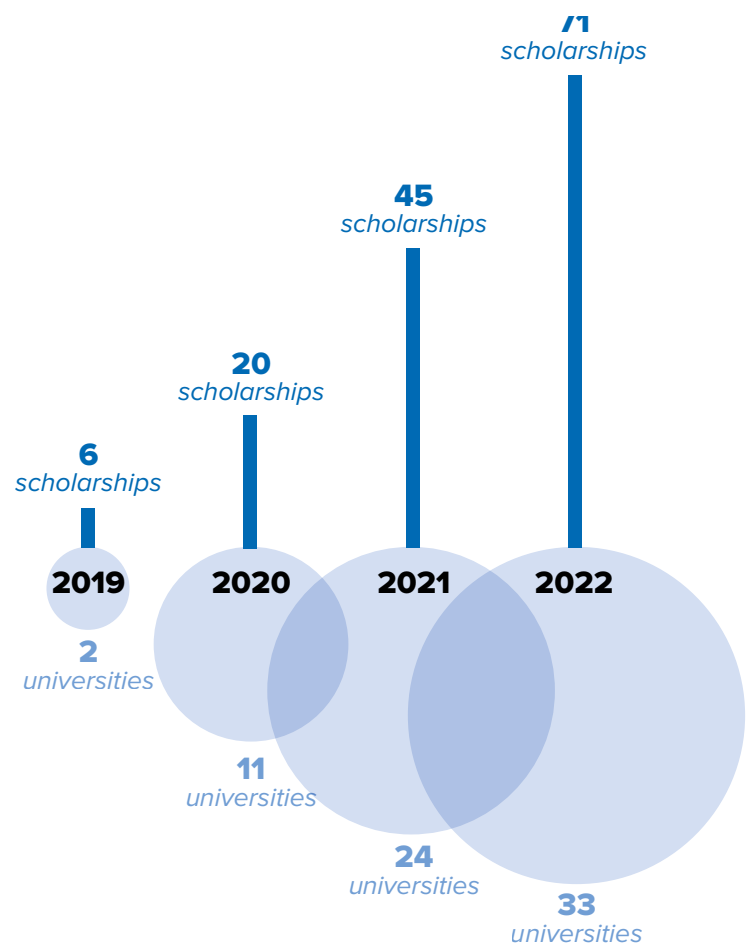
The project partners agree not only to allow the students' entry into Italy and to provide them with a **scholarship and primary services** (food, accommodations, etc.) during their stay but also to **accompany them in their studies and social inclusion in Italy** in order to contribute to the creation of an inclusive, welcoming society.

Beneficiaries of the project are **students who are recognised refugees in the identified countries of asylum** and who have completed the first three-year cycle of academic studies with a grade point average of 3.0 or higher and who are strongly motivated to continue their studies in Italy. In addition to the participating universities and UNHCR, national partners of the UNICORE project include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Caritas Italiana organisation, the Waldensian Deaconry, the Astalli Refugee Centre (Italian branch of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)), and the Gandhi Charity organisation.

In 2022 Banca Etica signed an agreement to provide support to admitted students both by facilitating the opening of current accounts and by offering scholarships or internships during undergraduate or postgraduate studies to students in the UNICORE project.

Alongside national partners, **each university identifies local partners** to offer specific student support services.

National and local partners (which include municipalities, NGOs, volunteer associations, banking foundations, etc.) therefore offer each student a range of services and benefits<sup>7</sup> aimed not only at ensuring their entry into Italy but also a **positive, gradual pathway to inclusion** in the country.



<sup>6</sup> Ethiopia for the first three editions of UNICORE, and Cameroon, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe for the current edition.

<sup>7</sup> Visa application support (internal movements, stay in the capital); travel to Italy and any internal travel; scholarships; tuition waivers; welcoming, inclusion, and guidance initiatives for integration into the local community; accompanying service for bureaucratic, legal, and health matters; catering/canteen and accommodation services; Italian courses both from abroad (thanks to the courses offered by the University for Foreigners of Siena) and in Italy; social/health, legal, and psychological assistance; registration with the National Health Service; issue and renewal of residence permits; pocket money; passes for mass transport (in the absence of specially-negotiated discounts) or other means of transport (e.g. bicycle); social/health support; purchase/supply of PCs/books/stationery; clothing (if necessary).

The UNICORE project was **presented** by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation during the **Global Refugee Forum in December 2019** and **the Italian experience has led or is leading to the emergence of similar programmes in France,<sup>8</sup> Belgium, and Ireland.**

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8 <https://help.unhcr.org/kenya/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2022/03/211012-UNIVR-project-summary.pdf>



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**Weldegabriel Video**

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**Infographic Video**

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**Saber Video**

- ITA
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**Yohannes Video**

- ITA
- ENG

**UNICORE website**

<https://www.unhcr.org/it/manifesto-on-an-inclusive-university/>



[www.unhcr.org/it](http://www.unhcr.org/it)