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## EU INTEGRATION: ADDRESSING THE YOUNG GENERATION. THE ITALIAN CASE

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**Abstract:** *In the last years Italy saw its immigrant population growing up to more than 4 millions. Among them, the increased number of children touched deeply the educational system, where nowadays 9 pupils out of 100 are foreigners. To face this rapid change the government developed the Italian way to integration, based on intercultural exchange and dialogue. However, the Peninsula school system proved till now unable to deal properly with foreigner pupils, both at human and bureaucratic level. An analysis of the current trends and a comparison between the Ministry of Education guidelines with their concrete implementation at the local level shows us the deficiencies of the system and indicates where efforts should be concentrated more. Furthermore, the Italian case suggests us to reflect on the bilateral aspect of integration, where commitment and dialogue play a determinant role. Xenophobic feelings are unfortunately still widespread in the Union and the task of integration policies should rather underline how migration and a multicultural environment are important in contemporary world. Immigrants could not only be source of wealth for European societies, but would eventually provide a unique opportunity for the development of human being. And what better starting point than education?*

**Keywords:** *immigration; integration; young generation; education; Italy.*

### 1. Introduction

Migrants in the world reached nowadays 232 millions, 31.3% of which lives in the European Union (IDOR, 2013). Italy, for its geographical position, is the main European door for immigrants, acting both as a transit country and as a final destination. The latter role grew especially in the 2000s, when many migrants decided to set roots in the Peninsula. In the year 2013, foreigners residing officially in Italy were 4.387.721, 334 thousands more if compared with the previous year (+8.2%) (ISTAT, 2013). This number augmented not only due to new arrivals, but also to foreigner babies' births, 80 thousand just in 2012. This incredible growth touched deeply the educational system, which had to face a considerable challenge to welcome and integrate the new comers. School is an essential passage in the construction and sharing of common knowledge, identity and rules, and it sets the roots of common living and

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sense of belonging, with the task to create a new integrated and multicultural generation. Scholars share this idea with members of the government, but legal and political framework as well as immigration ties with criminality and job availability has always been preferred to a deep analysis on cultural integration and especially on the situation of young foreigner. Institutes as Caritas and Migrantes, UNAR and ISTAT developed indicators and wrote report on this issue, but a consistent literature is still lacking, especially when we consider primary school. In fact, if the presence and integration of non Italian pupils touches every step of compulsory schooling, the number of new born and statistics show us how the main weight is on primary school. Nowadays foreigner children attending Italian first part of schooling are few more than 276 thousands (Caritas e Migrantes, 2013). To face this rapid change, the Italian government developed its own model to promote integration in a context of a dynamic development both at the social, cultural and educational level, in a legal framework not always adapt to answer urgent questions as we will see in the second part of the essay. Moreover, often good intentions remain on the paper and the different guidelines, suggestions and action plans do not find a concrete application in everyday life, for a number of reasons as lack of funds, local disinterest or incomprehension and unsuitableness of means. The third part is dedicated to an analysis of the current situation and to the difference between proposals and reality. The aim is to individuate the points where efforts should be concentrated more and especially on which topics dialogue should be deepen. Integration is a process and this means it has to be constantly updated and improved as the Italian case shows us.

## 2. Literature Review

The growing presence of foreigners in European societies lead to a deeper reflection on the significance of this phenomenon, on the effect it could have had at the social and economical level and on the policies needed to deal with it. Many scholars as Joppke and Morawska (2003), Carrera (2005), Van Tubergen (2004), Berry (2001), Castles (1995), Entzinger (2000) and Soysal (1994) analysed the factors influencing immigrant integration and the typologies nation states developed to respond to the immigration flow. However, as Ersanilli and Koopmans (2011) argue, more attention has been given to the socio-economic rather than to socio-cultural integration. It is true that the labour market was at the beginning the main canal of integration, but with the increasing presence of foreign children and the settlement of the second and third generation the concern with socio-cultural aspects of immigrant integration rose. Elements as language skills, interethnic relations, identification with the host society, and the role of religion gained primary attention. As Joppke (2007) and Michalowski (2007) highlight, mandatory civic integration and language courses for recent immigrants became part of the policy innovations of the recent years.

However, the several theoretical perspectives on how integration policy approaches may affect immigrants' ethnic and religious retention and host culture adoption lead to disagreement among scholars. The first point of view (e.g. Kymlicka 1995; Parekh 2002) considers policies that accommodate diversity as stimulating participation in the institutions of the host society - by allowing expressions of particularistic identities in

the public sphere – and creating a sense of belonging to the adoptive country. The second opinion (Barry 2001; Koopmans 2002; Meyer 2002) believes that the creation of a platform for ethnic cultural and religious life where immigrants can have access to services in their mother tongue will incentivize them less to learn the host country language and to seek interethnic contacts with host country natives.

Considering the Italian experience, the debate on the unsuitable legal framework promoted different analysis on the history of migration in Italy and the development of immigration policies (Rusconi 2010; Zincone 2006; Triandafyllidou 2003 and others). Among them, also policies of integration at school where an increasing majority of foreign pupils takes part to everyday classes. Unfortunately, still few studies consider deeply the effect multinational classes have on the society and the effectiveness of the policies implemented by the government. Catarsi (2013) in his recent essay reflects on how a higher number of immigrant students offer a greater number and a wider variety of intercultural initiatives. Moreover, he highlights how intercultural education is adopted mainly on behalf of teachers rather than of head teachers and other school personnel, an important aspect of our analysis. Other important data and reflections come from Caritas and Migrantes, IDOR and UNAR reports, which are constantly monitoring the evolving of immigrants' situation in the country. The same Minister of Education established a special observatory on scholastic integration, which is producing reports and guidelines. However, while the most difficult task relapse on primary school - as we will see later – studies and reports concentrates more on secondary education (Mussino and Strozza 2012) and on the need to help parents and pupil choosing the suitable school rather than dedicate more efforts to the first part of compulsory schooling.

### 3. Legal Framework

Since 1999, the European Union has been seeking to manage immigration in a coordinated manner under the auspices of the Treaty establishing the European Community and now under the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU. However, the Commission believes that achievements reached till now have not been sufficient and a Europe-wide common policy is needed to provide a framework for coherent action. A vision for this policy was presented within the Commission communication “Towards a Common Immigration Policy” on 5 December 2007 and in 2008 the Commission presented 10 principles on which the common policy will be built upon and the necessary actions for implementing them. Nevertheless, a joint regulation is still missing, and each member state regulates immigration with internal laws.

In Italy the situation was more complicated if compared to other countries as France, Switzerland or Germany. In fact, till the end of the 1970s Italy has been a source of emigration rather than immigration and, consequently, lacked a proper legal framework to regulate it. The number of foreign residents increased from 143,800 in 1970 to about 300,000 in 1980 and by 1985 it reached half a million (Rusconi, 2010). However, the first attempt to design a comprehensive migration policy was only in 1986 with the Act 943 and the first immigration law, *Legge Martelli*, was approved in 1990. This law was firstly an attempt to adapt to the membership requirements and to assure other

European members that Italy was able to prevent the entry of unwanted immigrants into the *Schengen* space, but it is important also because for the first time some aspects of the Italian asylum-seeking procedure was reformed, making it possible for non-Europeans to seek asylum in the country.

Nevertheless, soon this law showed its deficiencies, especially with the wave of migrations following the collapse of the USSR and Yugoslavia and in 1998 the first systematic Italian migration law, the *Legge Turco-Napolitano* was passed. This legislation considered new repressive measures and more effective repatriations to make clandestine entries more difficult, authorizing also the opening of the *Centres for Temporary Detention*, but also equated legal immigrants to Italians with regard to all social rights. Moreover, it guaranteed access to education and to the National Health System for all immigrants, included irregular immigrants, and instituted a *Found for Migration Policies* to finance integration and multicultural initiatives.

Unfortunately, this open policy was not destined to last, and the central-right coalition tightened measures both for illegal and legal migration. The first measure was the *Bossi-Fini* law in 2002, followed by the so-called “Security Package” (*Pacchetto Sicurezza*) of the Interior Minister Maroni in 2008. This period was characterized by a strong xenophobic campaign by the *North League* party – to whom both Bossi and Maroni belong to – which spread the visions of immigrants as cause of crime and security problems, creating concern and worrying among the population. The law of the Security package implied such a substantial reduction of foreigners’ rights that they practically clashed with the same fundamental rights guaranteed by the Italian constitution. Moreover, efforts have been concentrated mainly on the repression of irregular immigration – the crime of illegal entry was introduced in the Penal Code and the *Centres for Temporary Detention* have been meaningfully renamed *Centres of Identification and Expulsion* – and barely any consideration has been given to the integration of foreigners (L. 30 luglio 2002, n.189). Regarding education, some deputies proposed to introduce differentiated classes for immigrant children, raising harsh debates in civil society, but the proposal has not passed. This law is still valid but the previous and the new governments are considering a substantial review of its main points, especially the crime of illegal entry and the rejection policy.

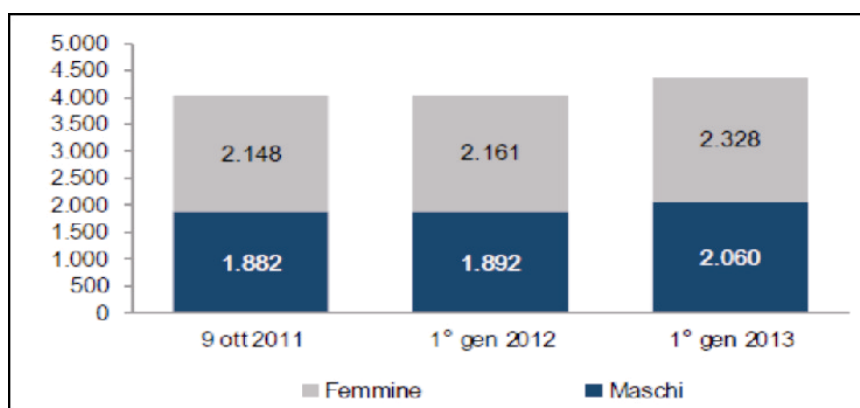
Nevertheless, education of immigrants’ children seems to have followed a different path. From the very beginning it has been regulated according to ONU Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Italy in 1991 and included in the internal norms of that period. In 1998 the article 38 of Decreto Legislativo n. 286 officially stated that foreigner minors are subjected to compulsory schooling and the following year the *Regulation on immigration* included that they have the right to receive education independently from their legal or illegal status. However, the increasing number of non-Italian pupils and students posed new challenges to their integration. The Cultural Committee of the Chamber of Deputies is frequently undertaking cognitive surveys to monitor the evolving of the situation, also compared to the educational policies of other EU member states. These reports resulted in the developing of the Italian way to integration and in a series of guidelines and proposals for teachers, professors and school heads and on the establishment of a watch unit for the integration of foreigner

students (Osservatorio Nazionale per l'Integrazione degli alunni stranieri) inside the Ministry of Education.

#### 4. The Italian way to integration: intercultural exchange

At the beginning, the incorporation of immigrants in Italian society took place through the labour market but in an unregulated framework. The *Turco-Napolitano* law was the first to consider the necessity of a policy of integration, and together with the National Commission for the Policies of Integration of Immigrants set the first outlines for its development. The outcome was called “reasonable integration” and was based on the rejection of the assimilation model and on the recognition of cultural pluralism, fostering an intercultural approach to promote the exchange between immigrants and Italian society. However, the funds and efforts allocated to develop effective projects, also in collaboration with local NGOs, have been noticeably reduced by the centre-right coalition, which considered immigration only from the perspective of public order and economy, and which returned to the assimilation model.

*Figure 1: Foreigners living in Italy in the years 2011, 2012, 2013. ISTAT*

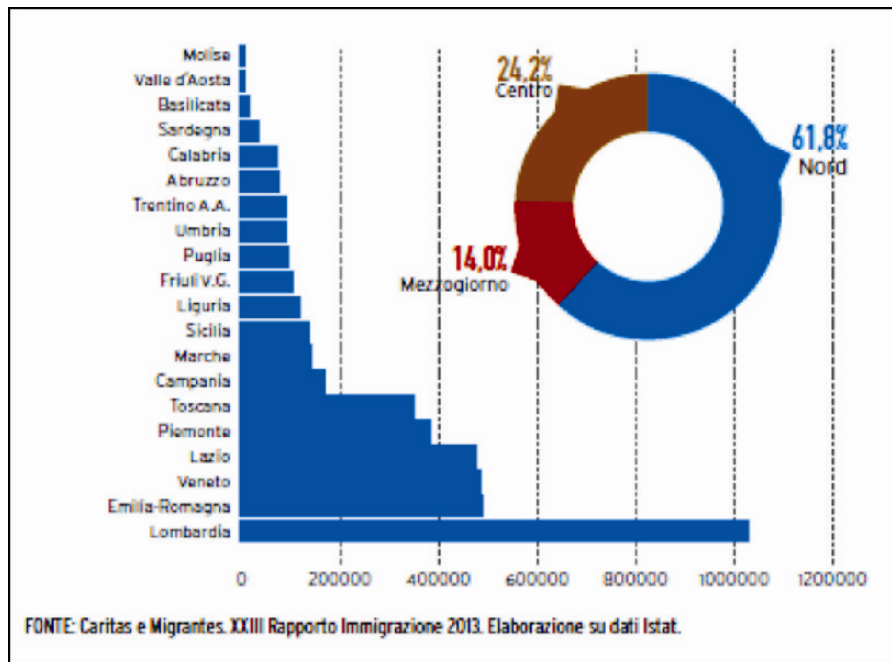


Subsequently, the essential aspect of education of young immigrants or sons of immigrants has been neglected. Through the 2000s the presence of foreign pupils in the classes became a permanent figure of compulsory schooling but often teachers lacked the essential training to deal with them or had insufficient tools as specific educational materials or translators. It is true that, from the very beginning, the Italian law considered the presence of foreign students in an integration perspective and developed around principles as universalism, common school, intercultural exchange and centrality of the individual in interpersonal relations, but unfortunately these beautiful words often have not been applied to everyday reality.

When we talk about immigrants in Italy, we have to consider that the change in the Peninsula has been extremely rapid (Figure 1), and that the distribution of foreigners is

not homogenous at all, consequently influencing the distribution of pupils in the schools. Figure 2 shows us how a great majority of foreigners is concentrated in the North of Italy (61.8%) while only 14% lives in the Southern part of the country. Moreover, according to the National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) the number of new born from foreigners is augmenting while new Italians are diminishing as figure 3 explains. So, at school the number of foreign students grows and in the academic year 2012/2013 they reached 786.650 peoples (8, 8% of the total), 30.691 more than the previous year. On this point, it is useful to remind that in Italy is in force the *ius sanguinis*, which means that a child acquires Italian citizenship only if one of the parents is Italian, independently from the place of birth. This aspect can create some misunderstandings in the count of non-Italian minors, who sometimes are foreigners only on the paper: in fact, of the current foreigner students 47, 2% was born in Italy.

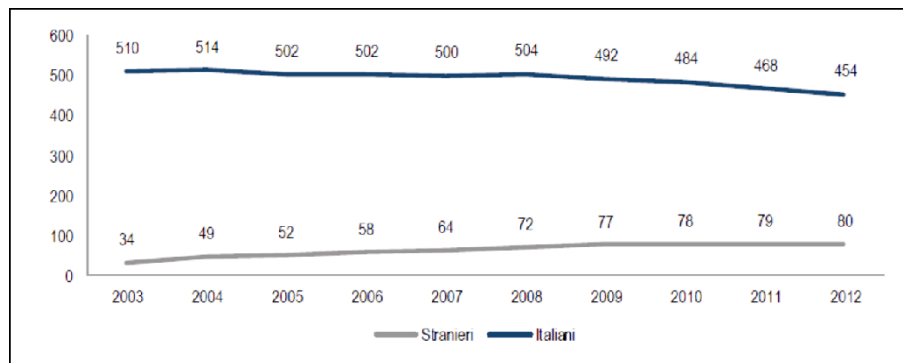
*Figure 2. Foreigners living per region*



If the *ius soli* should be preferred to the *ius sanguis* goes beyond the aim of this paper, but what we can consider is if the born in Italy are more integrated that the pupils arriving directly from abroad at the school age. Few official data are available on this point, but everyday experience and confrontation with teachers, professors and students from different part of Italy can partially supply. For instance, one of the growing minorities in Italy is the Chinese, who work in different sectors from

foodservice to textile. However, their children often are born in Italy, but then spend their childhood with grandparents in China, coming back to Italy at the age of 9 or 10. These pupils not only didn't grow up in Italy, but they do not even speak the language, a serious threat to their integration with Italians. Facing the lack of personal contact is even more difficult due to the inability to understand and to interact both with the teacher and with the classmates, obliging the pupils to live separately from the others. Moreover, if the family speaks only its mother tongue, the only occasions for the pupil to learn Italian are everyday classes and the activities eventually organized by the school.

*Figure 3. Italian and foreigner birth rate*



Two points rise from the above consideration. Firstly, that integration is a bilateral process. Without the will of both parties to move towards mutual understanding and rapprochement, state policies are ineffective. At the same time, and this is the second point, the government needs to make its actions comprehensive – for instance not generating a fear of assimilation through the destruction of the culture of origin – and effective, dedicating concrete and continuous efforts to promote integration. It is true that projects and activities have a considerable weight on the budget, but it is also true that education has often been considered a secondary question by different governments.

The question of the mastery of the local language is an essential point in the development of the pattern of integration. European countries have found several ways of organizing life at school for immigrant children resident on their territory, but we can summarize them in two main models. The first one is an **integrated model**, in which immigrant children are allocated to classes consisting of children of the same age (or younger depending on circumstances) in mainstream education. There are no differentiated classes for them, but they should benefit of measures for support, essentially linguistic in nature, implemented on an individual basis for each pupil during normal school hours. The second is a **separate model**, implemented or through transitional arrangements where immigrant children are grouped together separately from other children for a limited period or through long-term measures when special

classes are formed within the school for one or several school years, and often group immigrant children together in accordance with their competence in the language of instruction (Eurydice, 2004).

Italy chose the integrated model adopting an intercultural perspective to promote differences, to free pupils from stereotypes, to move towards understanding of the other and to promote dialogue. However, beyond initiative and good intentions, a consistent and systematic commitment to sustain initiatives at the national level is strictly necessary. Too much has been left to local decision and implementation, resulting in a dispersion of funds, efforts and time while lacking a common concrete guideline from the centre. Italian as a second language is essential, and official documents frequently highlight it, but ‘the creation of organizational models’, ‘the definition of the role of internal and external linguistic mediators’, ‘the development of materials and resources’ (MIUR, 2007:12-13) are at the same time too abstract in concept and too narrow in application. It is always on the shoulder of the teaching body, which has not only to examine each case, but also to apply for state resources, organizing meeting and eventual courses following the long timing of bureaucracy. Moreover, to have a language course started, a minimal number of students are required, and the same linguistic and cultural mediators can dedicate few hours for each case. As Catarsi (2013) explains, a high number of foreign pupils not only help them to feel less threatened and more followed, but increase also the level of acceptance in the Italian part of the class. These kind of studies are really important as they help understanding the situation and developing the appropriate means to address this young generation in a continuous and necessary dialogue of professors, scholars, politicians and families.

The role of cultural mediators is important not only to establish a dialogue between the pupil and the teacher, but also between the teacher and the parents. His figure not only can help overcoming the linguistic gap, but also identifying and explaining behaviours or attitudes which can create incomprehension or even cultural clash. In fact, if government’s guidelines for actions consider the adequate training of professors and school heads, we cannot pretend that the teaching body can quickly and easily adapt to multicultural classes. This issue reflects an endemic problem of Italian school: the age of professors. Despite the recent hiring, they have an average of 50 years old and with the age of retirement raised up to 67 years current professors have still many years of teaching ahead. The Ministry organizes conventions and seminars to make a balance of the achieved results, to exchange materials and researches on intercultural exchange, but these common moments cannot substitute an entire life of living and working. People who are now 50 and even more those who are 60 grew up in a complete different environment. Their generation was the first who decided to stay in the country and to build a life there. It was a period of stabilization, with lowering emigration and practically no immigration, with a consequent lack of intercultural confrontation, together with a minimal international mobility and a few knowledge of foreign languages. Of course education, openness and personal efforts could have helped to overcome the initial gap, and it would not be fair to include all Italians professors and teachers in a generalization, but sometimes it is helpful to generalize to individuate where our efforts should be concentrated more. Furthermore, many of them were almost at the age of retirement when the last pension reform obliged them



to be active workers for quite some years more, considerably undermining their enthusiasm and efforts for a system disappointing them once again. It is undoubtedly that a teacher of 60, 65 years old encounters difficulties to deal with the exuberance of a 6 years old child and that he can understand less and less the references to the latter's environment – from cartoons, to games, to all the electronic devices children now use – imagine the ones of a foreign pupil! And here again the language is a determinant point. Empathy can help establishing a good relation, but it cannot be enough for one or more school years. In many cities there are groups of motivated volunteers which teach Italian language for free after mainstream classes – and we should be really grateful to them – but the educational system cannot rely only on their efforts.

A younger generation of teachers will probably be more open, sensitive to cultures and adaptable both to answer the needs of foreigner children and to rethink the teaching method, moving towards a critical understanding and the inclusion of multicultural perspective in normal school subjects as history or geography. The creation of courses of intercultural pedagogy at university, after a fruitful confrontation between teachers and the Minister of Education, would provide future educators with the necessary tools to promote an effective integration among Italian and future Italians pupils. The same European Union should encourage and support meetings and exchange among teachers facing the same threats in different member states, or forums where old immigration countries can give concrete hints to their colleagues of compulsory schooling in difficulty. Mobility and exchange should concern also – and especially – primary school teachers, which should do a training period abroad. I consider that this should be really helpful for them, also to open their mind to diversity.

The last aspect I think we should consider deeper is the involvement of the pupils' family in a different range of activities. Considering Italian's government guidelines, but also Eurydice (2004) report, it seems that the main issue is to help pupils and parents in the choice of a suitable school. I am not denying it is an important step in the life of the children, but I argue that before facing the option of high school, there are many years of primary and, in Italy, of middle school<sup>1</sup> and especially reminding that the majority of foreign pupils in Italy attend primary school. The task given to teachers is, once again, not an easy one: sometimes families not only do not speak Italian, but they also live in their own environment, not willing to interact with locals and in this way not facilitating the integration of their children. However, it is also true that Italian families may not want a cultural exchange with these peoples 'coming who knows from where'. It is undeniable that a fear of the other shackled Italian society in the past years and it is still present in many milieus, also as a consequence of the xenophobic campaign of the centre-right coalition. Worries about a possible loss of quality in the Italian schools rose both from parents and teachers when classes started to count more than one or two foreign pupils. This is another sign of the ineffectiveness of government's actions and effectiveness of parties' campaign, showing once again the growing mistrust among Italians towards central institutions. Guidelines should be more than lines on a paper, and a concrete conjunct action with cultural mediators to develop a proper set of after school initiatives should be on the top of the agenda to promote the encounter between pupils and families in an informal and intuitive way. Activities as games, movies,

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<sup>1</sup> Middle school comprehends three years between primary and high school.

cooking lesson and at the end – why not – setting a theatre performance would help to create a relaxed and friendly ambiance and to overcome stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue.

I am aware funds are lacking, this is why a close cooperation between ministries, private NGOs and the European Union as well as a direct and conscious engagement both of the families – foreigner and local – and of the schools is necessary to start the creation of a various, rich and multicultural society.

## 5. Conclusions

The way to integration, especially that of children is a path paved with good intentions, but as we saw they often remain only this: ideas. In a country where every 100 pupils 9 are foreigners, the development of tools for a concrete intercultural exchange should be a primary concern both for the government and for local entities. On the contrary, Italian school system appears negatively characterized by a lack of economic and professional resources, with old and untrained teachers; high bureaucratic obstacles lowering the effectiveness of figures as cultural mediators; few courses of Italian as a second language, both for new comers and residents; unsatisfactory results from foreigner pupils, also due to the linguistic gap and, probably related to this, a higher choice among them of technical and professional high schools (80,7 % according to UNAR, 2013); low communication and involvement with foreign families in extracurricular activities.

If it is easy to individuate the deficiencies of the system, it is less easy to implement a suitable action plan. However, participation, commitment and believe, both at the local, national as well as European level – preferably in the framework of a common law on migration – should provide the ideas, cooperation and, especially, funds to help Italy developing its reasonable integration model through intercultural exchange and understanding of the other. Addressing migrants' integration as always been a process, a constantly evolving system of decisions and policies, and this is even truer for the young generation. The EU should play a more significant role in verifying the allocation of the funds it accords to each state – 37 millions was the amount destined to Italy – as well as the effectiveness of the policies implemented. The Union has also an important role in fighting and preventing xenophobic feelings among the population, which are unfortunately still present as the European parliamentary elections campaign shows. Actually, the same elections can demonstrate how migration and integration can be sources of wealth for the European society, from the economical to the cultural point of view, and how foreigners offer a unique opportunity for the development of the human being.

## Acronyms

EU – European Union

IDOS – Immigrazione Dossier Statistico

ISTAT – Istituto Nazionale di Statistica

MIUR – Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca

NGO – Non Governmental Organization

UNAR – Ufficio Nazionale anti-discriminazioni Razziali

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