

GCED and the Italian Migration Paradox

Bridging Macro, Meso, and Micro Integration Challenges

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Italy's Response to Migration: Integration Challenges and Opportunities

Italy's response to migration underscores the complexities and systemic challenges inherent in managing diverse populations. Fragmentation and resource inefficiencies are at the core of these challenges, creating significant barriers to effective integration. The decentralized nature of Italy's reception system, as highlighted by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA, 2016), has exacerbated disparities in service provision across regions. Coordination failures between Prefectures and institutions further hinder the delivery of equitable support. This fragmentation is particularly evident in the System for the Protection of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (SPRAR), which, despite its mandate for integrated assistance, suffers from uneven resource allocation. Overcrowded facilities in southern regions, compounded by insufficient healthcare and housing, reflect stark regional disparities, with northern areas generally better resourced (Amnesty International, 2017).

Adding complexity is Italy's reliance on private non-governmental organizations to manage reception services. These services vary widely in quality, often shaped by local adaptations in tendering processes and the absence of standardized oversight. According to Openpolis (2018), only 30 per cent of reception centers meet national standards, with regions like Calabria and Sicily struggling with inadequate facilities. Financial mismanagement compounds these issues, as the Italian Court of Auditors (2019) has reported instances of fraud, overcharging, and misuse of resources. Public tenders prioritize cost-efficiency over quality, encouraging profit-driven models that compromise hu-

manitarian goals. To address these systemic flaws, Italy must enhance oversight and ensure equitable resource distribution nationwide.

Given these challenges, Global Citizenship Education (GCED) emerges as a transformative framework to foster inclusion and address systemic disparities. GCED promotes social justice by bridging cultural gaps and empowering individuals to navigate an interconnected world. Grounded in principles of human rights, diversity, and sustainability, GCED provides a vital tool for addressing global standards while aligning with local realities.

Italy's fragmented migration approach provides fertile ground for examining GCED's practical applications at multiple levels. At the **macro level**, GCED aligns with EU policies and international agreements, harmonizing national strategies with global commitments. Addressing cross-border challenges through GCED offers a pathway to cohesive migration policies that balance national and international interests.

At the **meso level**, regional and municipal strategies play a pivotal role in integrating GCED principles into local practices. Community-based initiatives, such as Turin's Intercultural Cities Program and Bologna's intercultural centers, exemplify tailored approaches that foster inclusion. These programs promote intercultural dialogue and equip educators and students to navigate diverse social landscapes, reinforcing the importance of localized solutions.

At the **micro level**, grassroots initiatives illuminate the lived experiences of migrants and highlight the transformative power of community engagement. Programs like Rome's »Scuole Aperte« and the Global Schools Project illustrate how education fosters empathy, mutual understanding, and inclusion. Ethnographic studies and personal narratives enrich this discourse, providing nuanced perspectives on migrants' daily challenges and successes.

In fact, a pervasive issue complicating integration is the lack of reciprocal understanding between migrants and host communities. Stereotypes and misinformation, often perpetuated by media narratives, foster mistrust and tension. Migrants are frequently depicted as criminal or economically burdensome, fueling public fears and resistance to integration (Cortes, 2019). A Eurobarometer survey (2018) revealed that only 25 % of Italians view immigration as culturally enriching, reflecting the widespread persistence of negative perceptions.

Such mistrust fosters segregation, with migrants often concentrated in disadvantaged neighborhoods and underfunded schools, limiting opportunities for interaction and mutual understanding (Allievi, 2018). Stereotyping and discrimination restrict migrants' access to employment, perpetuating

cycles of poverty and marginalization (IOM, 2017). These dynamics harm not only migrants but also weaken societal cohesion and economic potential, underscoring the urgent need for policies that foster mutual understanding and inclusion.

In conclusion, these obstacles also present an opportunity to rethink and refine integration strategies. By adopting GCED as a guiding framework, policymakers and educators can address systemic flaws, bridge cultural divides, and foster social justice, creating cohesive and equitable communities.

Macro-Level Analysis: Policy and Regulatory Impact on Migration

Italy's migration policies are influenced by an interplay of national, European, and international regulatory frameworks. Domestically, legislative measures such as the »Salvini Decree« have emphasized stricter controls, reducing protections for asylum seekers and increasing their vulnerability to exclusion and marginalization (Perkowski, 2019). At the European level, the Dublin Regulation imposes a disproportionate burden on frontline countries like Italy, resulting in overcrowded reception centers and protracted asylum procedures (Cassarino, 2018). International conventions, including the 1951 Refugee Convention, establish standards for refugee protection, but Italy often struggles to meet these due to limited resources and political constraints, particularly in managing high influxes of migrants.

Emergency Responses versus Structural Reforms

Italy's migration strategy has historically focused on reactive, short-term measures rather than structural solutions. Emergency responses, such as the establishment of temporary reception centers, address immediate humanitarian needs but frequently lack the resources to support long-term integration. Operations like Mare Nostrum (2013) prioritized rescue efforts, while its successor, Triton (2014), shifted toward border security, reflecting a pivot in priorities. Similarly, the »Security Decrees« of 2018 curtailed asylum protections and integration services, undermining both migrant rights and social cohesion.

In contrast, structural approaches such as the 2017 National Integration Plan and the SPRAR (Protection System for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) framework illustrate a more holistic vision. These initiatives integrate educa-

tion, housing, employment, and personalized support to promote sustainable social and economic inclusion. However, the ongoing tension between migration control and integration remains evident in legislative milestones such as the Bossi-Fini and Turco-Napolitano laws.

Short-term measures often stigmatize migrants as security threats, perpetuating inefficiencies and fostering public distrust. Overreliance on emergency reception centers without adequate investment in integration deepens divisions and reinforces xenophobic attitudes. Such rhetoric polarizes the public and obstructs the development of inclusive policies.

Achieving sustainable integration requires transitioning from emergency-driven policies to long-term strategies that address migrants' needs while fostering societal cohesion. Key pathways may include fostering community engagement, enhancing education and skills development, improving labor market access, establishing robust legal protections, and ensuring sustainable investment in reception centers, housing, healthcare, and governance collectively reduce prejudice, promote integration, and support long-term inclusion of migrants.

While Italy has begun transitioning toward comprehensive migration reforms, challenges persist. Promoting inclusive policies through education, labor market access, and community engagement is essential to leveraging migrants' potential and fostering a cohesive, equitable society.

Meso-Level Analysis: Local and Municipal Approaches to Migration

Local and municipal approaches play a critical role in addressing the challenges of migration in Italy, operating at the intersection of national directives and community realities. While national policies like the »Salvini Decree« emphasized restrictive controls and security, the implementation of integration efforts often depends on the capacity and initiative of local authorities and stakeholders. Municipalities and private entities bear the responsibility for managing reception facilities, providing essential services, and fostering integration, making them pivotal actors in migration governance.

Italy's reliance on emergency responses, particularly during high migration flows, has placed significant pressure on local systems. Temporary reception centers, established during crises such as the 2015 refugee influx, often suffer from overcrowding, insufficient resources, and inadequate infrastructure (Laforgia, 2017). These centers address immediate needs but lack the ca-

capacity for fostering long-term integration. The disparity between the quality of services across regions further exacerbates inequalities, with northern municipalities often offering better facilities compared to the underfunded southern regions.

Transitioning from reactive measures to sustainable strategies requires comprehensive investment in local-level integration programs. Initiatives such as the »National Integration Plan for Beneficiaries of International Protection« represent a shift toward structural reforms, emphasizing coordinated support in education, employment, and social services (Italian Ministry of the Interior, 2017). Local governments are integral to this process, as they are best positioned to tailor programs to the specific needs of their communities.

Successful local strategies involve upgrading reception infrastructure to ensure humane conditions and access to basic services, fostering social inclusion through initiatives that connect migrants with local communities via cultural exchanges and dialogue, enhancing legal support by providing guidance on legal status and pathways to citizenship, and strengthening partnerships with NGOs, civil society, and the private sector to bolster integration efforts.

Empowering municipalities with resources and policy autonomy is essential to fostering effective and equitable migration integration.

Micro-Level Analysis: Local and Municipal Approaches to Migration

Local and municipal authorities in Italy play a pivotal role in addressing migration challenges, often leading innovative practices to foster integration and inclusion. Their proximity to communities enables them to implement tailored programs that address specific local needs, leveraging partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society, and community groups. This micro-level approach highlights promising models for migrant integration and underscores the critical role of local governance in fostering cohesive, inclusive societies.

Several municipalities in Italy exemplify successful migrant integration through autonomous and innovative practices:

1. Riace's Inclusive Approach

The small town of Riace in Calabria is internationally recognized for its pioneering integration model. Under former mayor Domenico Lucano, Riace

transformed abandoned buildings into homes for migrants and created jobs by reviving traditional crafts and services (Grillo & Pratt, 2019). This initiative revitalized the local economy and fostered social cohesion, demonstrating the potential of small communities to lead integration efforts.

2. Bologna's Comprehensive Programs

Bologna's »Piano di Accoglienza« (Reception Plan) provides a holistic framework for integration, including language courses, vocational training, and cultural mediation services. By collaborating with public institutions and civil society, Bologna effectively addresses migrants' needs across education, employment, and social services (Municipality of Bologna, 2018).

3. Milan's »Fare Insieme« Initiative

Milan's »Fare Insieme« (Doing Together) promotes social inclusion through community-based projects such as intercultural workshops and joint community service projects. These initiatives create opportunities for meaningful exchanges and mutual understanding, reducing social tensions (Città di Milano, 2020).

4. Portomaggiore's Tailored Initiatives

In Portomaggiore, where migrants make up 13 per cent of the population, the municipality implements integration projects under »PortoAmico.« These include bespoke language programs, employment assistance, and cultural exchange events, fostering a welcoming community environment and assisting with bureaucratic processes.

Mayors and municipal leaders have been instrumental in driving grass-roots initiatives. For example, Leoluca Orlando, mayor of Palermo, has implemented progressive policies to protect migrant rights and combat exploitation (Terlizzi, 2019). Such leadership fosters inclusive environments and builds partnerships with NGOs and civil society to expand integration efforts.

However, relying on local authorities for integration reveals challenges such as stable funding, streamlined partnerships, and consistent political support are essential. Investments in infrastructure and inclusive policies addressing education, employment, and housing are critical for long-term success. By tailoring strategies to their communities, local authorities foster

harmonious coexistence, revitalize economies, and model inclusive governance.

Migration and integration are multifaceted phenomena that require an intersectional framework capable of addressing complexities at various levels. A comprehensive understanding necessitates examining these processes through macro, meso, and micro levels, enabling a nuanced exploration of how overarching policies, localized initiatives, and individual experiences intersect and influence each other. This multilevel approach highlights the interconnectedness of policies, practices, and personal realities in shaping migration outcomes.

Macro-Level Analysis: Policy Frameworks and Global Norms

At the macro level, the migration landscape is defined by broad policies, international agreements, and global norms. The European Union's (EU) migration policies, such as the Common European Asylum System (CEAS), establish overarching frameworks that significantly influence national approaches to migration. These policies guide member states in managing asylum procedures and reception conditions, ensuring consistency across borders while addressing regional disparities (Geddes & Scholten, 2016). However, the implementation of these policies often reveals challenges, such as disproportionate responsibilities for frontline states like Italy under the Dublin Regulation.

International organizations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), also play pivotal roles in shaping migration governance. These entities set global standards for refugee protection and migrant rights, influencing national policies and practices. A theoretical perspective such as neo-institutionalism offers valuable insights into how states internalize international norms, adopting policies perceived as legitimate within the global community.

Meso-Level Analysis: Local and Regional Integration Strategies

The meso level focuses on the regional and municipal dimensions of migration management. Local authorities and community organizations are instrumental in implementing integration programs tailored to the specific needs of migrants. Caponio (2010) highlights that localized approaches, such as language

training, employment support, and housing assistance, often achieve greater effectiveness compared to centralized efforts. Cities such as Bologna and Milan exemplify this, with innovative initiatives fostering social inclusion and intercultural dialogue.

The concept of multi-level governance further elucidates the interplay between national, regional, and local authorities in migration management. This framework underscores the collaborative nature of migration policy, where responsibilities are shared among different levels of government and supported by civil society. Empirical evidence from cities like Berlin and Toronto demonstrates how meso-level interventions can effectively bridge gaps in national policies, creating inclusive environments for migrants through practical and community-driven solutions.

Micro-Level Analysis: Individual Experiences and Social Networks

At the micro level, the focus shifts to the personal experiences of migrants and their interactions within host societies. Ethnographic studies and personal narratives provide invaluable insights into the challenges and opportunities encountered by migrants. These accounts highlight the socio-cultural dimensions of integration, revealing how migrants navigate new environments, establish identities, and contribute to their communities.

Theoretical frameworks such as social capital theory and acculturation theory are particularly relevant at this level. Social capital theory emphasizes the role of social networks in facilitating access to resources, employment, and support systems, while acculturation theory explores how migrants adapt to and integrate with host cultures. Studies consistently show that strong social networks enhance integration outcomes, reducing barriers to employment and fostering a sense of belonging.

Integrating Multilevel Perspectives for Holistic Policy Development

The interplay between macro, meso, and micro levels underscores the need for migration policies that are both comprehensive and empathetic. Macro-level policies provide the structural framework for migration management, but their success depends on effective meso-level implementation and responsiveness to micro-level realities. For instance, national asylum procedures may

set guidelines, but their outcomes hinge on the quality of local reception facilities and the lived experiences of migrants.

By adopting a multilevel analytical approach, policymakers can ensure that migration strategies are grounded in theory while being attuned to practical realities. This holistic perspective enables the development of robust, inclusive policies that not only address systemic challenges but also empower migrants to thrive within their new communities. Such an approach is essential in fostering equitable and sustainable migration systems in an increasingly globalized world.

This study highlights the importance of adopting a multilevel approach – spanning macro, meso, and micro levels – for effective migrant integration. Existing policies often focus disproportionately on macro-level frameworks, neglecting the practical insights and implementation challenges faced at regional and local levels. Research underscores the necessity of coordinated, inclusive strategies that bridge these gaps (Vertovec, 2007; Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2013).

Migration policies in Italy fail to consider regional disparities, exacerbating challenges in southern areas like Sicily and Calabria, which handle most migrant arrivals. Overcrowded reception facilities and limited secondary services drive many migrants to northern regions, only to face integration barriers and, in some cases, forced returns to the south (Pastore & Ponzio, 2016; Campomori & Caponio, 2017). These inefficiencies highlight the need for tailored, region-specific solutions such as:

1. **Bottom-Up Policy Development:** Start at the meso level to address local dynamics before scaling to macro frameworks, ensuring grounded and responsive strategies (Scholten, 2013).
2. **Local Knowledge and Resources:** Enhance understanding of regional migration patterns and resource distribution to craft effective policies (Bonifazi et al., 2009).
3. **Collaborative Consultations:** Involve local institutions in policymaking to align national policies with local realities (Triandafyllidou, 2012).

Innovative projects like Emilia Romagna's »Dialogues of Good Living« demonstrate the value of co-designed solutions involving both migrants and locals. These initiatives address housing discrimination, promote cultural exchange, and build mutual respect (Morris, Vokes, & Chang, 2014). Research shows that

intercultural dialogue fosters social cohesion and reduces tensions (Kymlicka, 2012).

GCED offers a powerful framework for dismantling stereotypes and promoting equity. By fostering empathy and critical thinking, GCED equips individual-migrants and hosts alike – to embrace cultural diversity and collaborate for inclusive communities. Integrating GCED into schools and community programs can strengthen social cohesion and advance UNESCO's vision for sustainable, inclusive societies (UNESCO, 2015).

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the necessity of a multi-level approach to migrant integration, addressing key challenges and opportunities at the macro, meso, and micro levels. It reveals that top-down policies often fail to account for the complexities of local contexts, underscoring the crucial role of regional and local institutions in adapting and implementing integration strategies. The integration of Global Citizenship Education (GCED) into socio-educational initiatives, such as the project in Portomaggiore, demonstrates how targeted programs can enhance the inclusion of foreign students while simultaneously fostering intercultural competence among teachers and municipal staff.

Despite these successes, challenges remain. Skepticism and mistrust within host communities persist, compounded by political climates and societal fractures that hinder inclusive dialogue. These barriers highlight the ongoing need for sustained efforts to foster mutual understanding and trust among diverse populations.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Policymakers must prioritize a bottom-up approach that incorporates local and regional insight into the design of national integration policies. Strengthening the capacity of local institutions and engaging stakeholders in policy development can bridge the gap between high-level frameworks and on-the-ground realities. Programs fostering intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding should remain central to these efforts, as they are pivotal in reducing social tensions and promoting cohesive communities.

Synthesis Across Levels of Analysis

At the macro level, migration policies often lack the specificity required for effective local implementation, leading to inefficiencies and regional disparities (Papademetriou & Somerville, 2014). Regional and local institutions at the meso level play a vital role in adapting these broad policies to address specific challenges but frequently face resource constraints and misaligned priorities (Caponio & Borkert, 2010). The micro level, where integration unfolds within communities and personal interactions, demands tailored support, including localized housing projects and education initiatives such as mobile school help desks (Azzolini, Schnell, & Palmer, 2012).

Future studies should explore the long-term impacts of integration policies, particularly through comparative analyses across diverse national models. The role of digital technologies and social media in facilitating integration warrants further investigation, offering potential avenues for innovative and scalable solutions.

The integration of migrants presents a transformative opportunity to build inclusive, diverse, and peaceful societies. By adopting holistic strategies, fostering mutual understanding, and leveraging GCED principles, societies can overcome barriers and embrace the potential of migration. Projects like the ones mentioned demonstrate the profound impact of simple, well-designed interventions in bridging cultural divides and fostering active citizenship. Moving forward, expanding such initiatives and deepening trust among all members of society will be pivotal to creating cohesive communities that thrive on collaboration and shared goals.

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