

migration
and university.
towards
a charter
of *officia*

—For over a decade now, a historical phase has been under way that is characterised worldwide by the contraction of the fundamental rights and freedoms of human beings, the first consequence of which has been the denial of the equality of migrant persons. At the same time, and from many quarters, a narrative has advanced which identifies the migration phenomenon as one of the causes, if not the primary cause, of the crisis and decline affecting the societies of the so-called West.

—Italian Universities have long been aware that the phenomenon of contemporary migrations also concerns – and rightfully so – the academic world, since it involves the three missions that characterise the University as an institution: research, teaching and interaction with civil society. And this in step with the conviction that the fundamental role of Universities is to contribute towards the construction of strong knowledge eschewing slogans and simplifications and grounded on scientific methods and on a debate based on reliable data.

—Knowledge is the only tool to ensure right choices regarding migration policies, favouring an approach that will take into account the complexity of the phenomena and lift the veil of hate speech and fear that obscure understanding.



—what it is
right to do—

Universities felt that they had to respond to the need for knowledge and transmission of knowledge, moving along four lines:

- 1 the intensification of research on the causes and effects of migratory movements;
- 2 the establishment of specific modules, bachelor's, master's and doctorate courses;
- 3 the activation of relations with public and private institutions called to manage the various aspects of migratory phenomena, offering high-level technical and scientific knowledge;
- 4 the creation of services aimed at ensuring a good and effective connection between research and action and at promoting social justice, equal access to rights, the fight against discrimination. From such collaborations, Universities have gained a better understanding of the different issues regarding the migration phenomenon. And, on the other hand, the choice to work along these lines has enabled Universities to stand side by side with all the subjects who claim the full recognition of the

fundamental rights of people with a migration background. Coherently with the commitment of Italian Universities, the Migration Centre of the University of Palermo intends to promote a reflection process that goes beyond the usual appeals to other institutions and that might rather produce a Charter of the official of the academic world, aimed at highlighting what it is right to do and how to achieve what it is right to do, with the firm belief that the goals of this process cannot be disjoined from the ways through which it should be accomplished.

—research

Most Italian Universities have long intensified their studies on migration, with the awareness that such a complex topic requires an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach. This has allowed in-depth studies on the environmental, economic, political, social and cultural causes of migration, also prompting a critical rethinking of the different legal status assigned by law to migrant people.

The contribution of Universities to the public debate is multifaceted: Universities disseminate knowledge of a complex reality, in spite of simplifications; they criticize the rigidity of fences and foster awareness of the historicity of certain categories used to understand this reality; they make explicit the mechanisms of construction of imaginaries which are always culturally determined and ideologically oriented.

Our research is also committed to stemming the continuous attempts to introduce into the public debate terms and

concepts that contribute to the criminalisation of people in migration (just think of the term hotspot and the expression weaponisation of migrants, both of direct war derivation).

—teaching

In most Italian Universities, the number of modules, degree courses and – in some cases – doctorates focusing on migration has sensibly increased. A recurring characteristic in these experiences is the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary scope, required by the very features of the phenomena examined. Other Universities have launched important courses on related themes, such as Peace studies and intercultural dialogue.

—internationalisation

Only recently has the internationalisation of the Italian University world begun to look to the South of the planet. Indicative of this evolution is the growing number of projects, especially of European scope, involving African and Asian Universities. The number of double degrees, as well as scholarships and prizes for students from disadvantaged areas is growing at the same pace.

**—right to
university
study and job
placement
for refugees**

Italian Universities are committed to the protection of refugees and asylum seekers. In this context, a leading role has been played by the UNHCR university corridors project which since 2019 has allowed refugee students to pursue a master's degree in Italy.

To date, there are thirty-eight Universities involved and about one hundred and forty students enter Italy each year. Equally significant is the attention devoted to the issue of the recognition of foreign qualifications, even in the absence of adequate documentation due to the sudden departure from the country of origin and the latter's lack of cooperation. In this sense, of particular importance is the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) project of the Council of Europe, in application of the Lisbon Convention of 11 April 1997.

**—tutela
dei diritti**

Universities have put their knowledge at the service of concrete interventions, developing the protection of rights particularly in the fields of law, health and language.

**—a
legal clinics**

Roughly one third of Italian legal clinics deal precisely with migration, anti-discrimination law and asylum law: they work to ensure that migrant people have access to rights and justice. And this in a context characterised by a succession of normative interventions often taken on the tide of proclaimed emergencies, but with repercussions which are opposite to the declared aims of promoting legality and security, as well as fighting the exploitation and trafficking of human beings.

**—b
healthcare
clinics**

Universities have followed two main paths: on the one hand, they have undertaken training activities in the field of health promotion for migrants and people with a migration background; on the other hand, they have organised healthcare clinics aimed at making the right to health effective, often in collaboration with associations working in the world of social inclusion.

**—c
naming
the dead**

Of autonomous importance are some pioneering projects developed in the field of forensic medicine to ensure

the identification of the victims of the shipwrecks in the Mediterranean. The scholars working on them – filling institutional voids – do not merely fulfil a moral requirement, but also aim to ensure respect for the human right to learn about the fate of one's family members.

—d
italian
language
teaching

The continuous increase of foreign students has made it necessary to set up structures and training courses devoted to teaching Italian as a second language. Universities – not only the ones for foreigners – have developed a vast range of training realities, also specifically addressed to the migrant population. The construction of such training courses responds to the need to the right of active participation in the social, political and cultural life of the Country.

—construction
of urban
spaces

The city is the place where the paths of people with a migration background increasingly cross. Universities play an active role in the rethinking of urban spaces, with the belief that an extended inclusive concept of citizenship

appropriate to contemporary times requires a reflection on the city starting from the city and those who inhabit it.

A high-angle, red-tinted photograph of a sandy beach. The sand is covered with numerous footprints of various sizes and depths, suggesting a large group of people has walked across it. The footprints are scattered across the frame, with some appearing more distinct than others. The overall tone is a deep, vibrant red, which gives the image a dramatic and somewhat somber feel.

—**how** it
should be done—

—participation
of migrant
people

All the activities described above require respect for certain ethical and scientific principles.

As Sherry Arnstein already stated in 1969, participation is universally recognised as a positive element, but this does not mean that it is used everywhere and to the same extent.

Similarly, although the rights of participation in decision-making processes are in principle generally affirmed, in reality not everyone has equal access to them. The participation of people with a migrant background in decision-making processes, starting from the urban scale, is a right that should be universally claimed and protected.

With this in mind, Universities contribute to building a culture of mutual listening and dialogue, helping all participants to understand the different points of view that characterise each social actor. For instance, the promotion of open space technology and world cafés fosters mutual understanding and the empowerment of those who too often have no voice.

The active participation of students with a migration

background then acquires particular importance in the field of teaching. Giving voice directly to the experiences of migrant students defuses commonplaces that poison the debate and allows for a non-dogmatic reflection on cultures and their alleged incommensurability.

—interdisci
plinary
and multi
disciplinary
knowledge

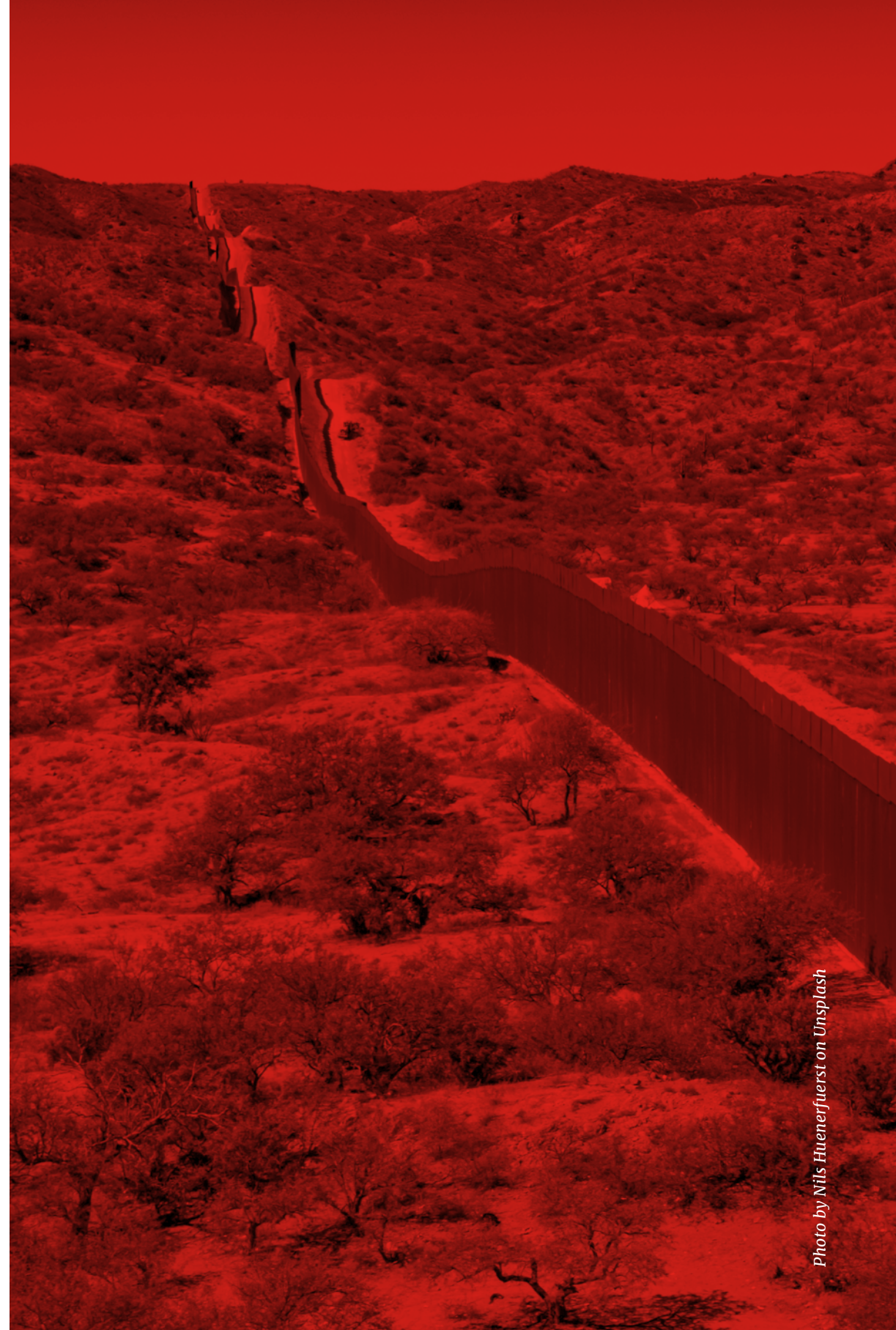
It is now an established fact that Migration studies cannot be confined within single disciplinary perimeters. Research and teaching require the contribution of multiple areas of knowledge and should favour multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. If multidisciplinaryity is essential for a full awareness of the complexity of migration, interdisciplinarity – a more complex approach indeed – is nevertheless the key to identifying novel knowledge paths and find innovative solutions.

Thus, the direction already taken by many Universities with the creation of Degree courses and Doctorates in the field of migrations – all characterised by a multidisciplinary and, in some cases, interdisciplinary approach – should be favoured.

One should think, in particular, of the provision of curricula with modular courses that bring together different areas of knowledge.

—critical approach

The critical approach must regard both theoretical elaboration and concrete interventions. An intersectional perspective is particularly useful, one that can capture the different levels of discrimination determined by the intersection of elements such as gender identity, citizenship, skin colour, sexual orientation, social origins, physical and psychological health conditions. It is important to be equipped with tools meant to grasp the extent to which the interaction of these characteristics with different factors (environmental, cultural, legal, economic, social ones, etc.) of the societies of departure, transit and arrival produces specific positions of vulnerability that favour multiple discriminations, violations of fundamental rights and phenomena such as severe exploitation and trafficking.





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—**what** it is
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