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CENTRE OF ADVANCED STUDIES "A.S.CENT."

The Director: Prof. Avv. Antonello MIRANDA

Full prof. of Comparative and European Law



To kind attention of Prof. **ANTONELLO MIRANDA**
Director of A.S.CENT. – Centre of Advanced Studies
University of Palermo
E-mail: advstudies@unipa.it

FINAL REPORT

Proposed area of study: Migration studies

Research Proposed: Migration incorporation policies and practices in migrants' reception and settlement cities in Andalusia and Sicily

Proposed dates of visit: 3 months from 30 March to 1 July 2025

Visiting scholar: Nieves Ortega-Pérez, University of Granada (Spain)

RESEARCH ADVANCES

I would like to begin this report by presenting research advances I have focused on during my stay (March 30 to July 1, 2025), which are also the subject of the conferences and publications referred to in this document.

My analysis begins with an **international perspective to investigate the dual border**, undertaking a comparative study of border externalization and the shifting concept of the border in Andalusia and Sicily as pivotal sites of Fortress Europe.

Andalusia and Sicily represent two of the most critical and symbolic flanks of the European Union's southern border. Both are regions of arrival, transit, and, in many cases, death, but the implementation of migration control policies—particularly through externalization and the physical and political conception of the border—presents profound divergences shaped by geography, history, and political agreements. Comparing both scenarios reveals two complementary yet distinctive models of the European border architecture (Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, & Pickles, 2015).

Externalization, that is, the outsourcing of border control to third countries, is a common pillar, but its implementation differs radically.

In Andalusia, externalization has a clear actor and a more stable geopolitical setting: Morocco. Spain, and by extension the EU, have built a strategic and economically dense relationship with the Alaouite Kingdom, turning it into an effective *border guard* (Aparicio & González, 2022). Bilateral agreements, police cooperation, and economic support conditioned on migration control are systematic. This materializes on two fronts: the surveillance of the Strait's coasts and, more dramatically, containment at the land borders of Ceuta and Melilla. Morocco exercises tight, often brutal, control over flows from Sub-Saharan Africa, preventing them from reaching Spanish territory. The Ceuta crisis of May 2021, where Morocco allowed the massive passage of people as a political pressure tactic, demonstrated that this model, although

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efficient, is profoundly unstable and dependent on diplomatic fluctuations, instrumentalizing migrants as a bargaining chip (Ferrer-Gallardo & Van Houtum, 2021).

In Sicily, externalization is more diffuse, chaotic, and lethal. The main partner, Libya, is not a stable state but a conflict territory with multiple governments and militias. The agreements of Italy (and the EU) with the Libyan Coast Guard involve funding and training entities accused of crimes against humanity to intercept boats in international waters and return them to detention centres notorious for torture and abuse (Cusumano, 2019). Unlike the Spanish-Moroccan case, externalization here not only seeks to prevent departure but actively push back on the high seas, violating international law (Heller & Pezzani, 2017). A similar model to the Moroccan one is repeated with Tunisia, but with a more fragile state. The result is that the Sicilian border has shifted hundreds of kilometres south, towards the Maghreb coasts, creating a legal limbo where human rights are diluted.

This difference in externalization is reflected in the physical and symbolic conception of the border itself.

The Andalusian border is hyper-materialized. In Ceuta and Melilla, it is a complex system of double-layer fences with razor wire, high-tech surveillance systems, and immediate deterrence devices. It is a land border, concrete, designed for deterrence and violent rejection (*pushbacks*). It is the most tangible symbol of the "Fortress Europe": a wall on African soil (De Genova, 2017). In the Strait, control is technological (radars, patrol boats) but the natural barrier is immense. The border here is a high-sea filter, but its icon is the wall.

The Sicilian border, in contrast, is liquid and paradoxical. Sicily is an island; its border is the Mediterranean Sea, turned into a mass grave. There is no physical wall, but an aquatic expanse patrolled by Frontex and the Coast Guard, where the function of control and the obligation to rescue enter into permanent conflict (Stierl, 2019). The conception here is that of a monitored transit space where death is an accepted collateral effect. However, this liquid border has a fundamental counterpart: a port civil society (Palermo, Lampedusa) with mayors and NGOs that have historically challenged policies criminalizing solidarity, redefining the border not only as a place of control but also of reception and rights (Ambrosini, 2021). This tension is less visible in Andalusia, where the militarized land border offers less space for independent humanitarian intervention.

In summary, while Andalusia exemplifies a model of strategic and bilateral externalization with a strong neighbour, translating into a militarized and iconic land border, Sicily represents a model of chaotic and multi-actor externalization with failed or fragile states, generating a delocalized and more lethal maritime border.

Both models pursue the same objective: to remove the political and humanitarian cost of irregular migration from the sight of the European citizenry. Both produce violence, suffering, and death. But if the Andalusian model shows the risks of geopolitical dependence and the harshness of physical rejection, the Sicilian one reveals the absolute impunity generated by outsourcing control to criminal actors at sea (Andersson, 2014). Together, Andalusia and Sicily are not just geographical peripheries of Europe; they are the laboratories where, with different methods but identical purpose, the ethical and legal limits of the European border project are tested. The comparison tells us that "Fortress Europe" does not have a uniform design: it adapts, in a hybrid and brutal manner, to the geopolitical realities of each border, while always maintaining its exclusionary essence (Vaughan-Williams, 2015).

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As case study, this research stay has allowed me to understand **the administrative model of the Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione (SAI) of the Municipality of Palermo** as a paradigmatic case of hybrid governance in migration policies. Using a qualitative approach based on document analysis and theoretical review, and the fieldwork carried out, I have identified it as a model that combines elements of network governance, co-production, bureaucratic persistence, and the managerial logics of New Public Management (NPM). My study reveals that the Palermo SAI operates as a laboratory of institutional innovation that navigates fundamental tensions between local innovation and national standardization, inclusive rhetoric and chronic budgetary constraints, and between a rights-based approach and the function of migration control. Despite structural limitations such as underfunding, the coexistence with a parallel emergency system (CAS), and demographic pressure, the model has generated documented achievements in socio-labour integration and the building of social capital. I conclude that the case illustrates the viability and challenges of adaptive hybrid models for managing complex social policies in multilevel contexts, offering valuable lessons for the design of integration policies in contemporary Europe.

From a **comparative point of view**, I am currently working on an article that explores the operational concept of "reception" (*accoglienza*) within public social services in two Mediterranean urban contexts: **Seville (Spain) and Palermo (Italy)**. The investigation focuses on how national regulatory frameworks, local administrative cultures, and associational networks shape distinct models for taking charge of migrants. The comparative analysis aims to deconstruct the often-generic term "reception" to identify its concrete operational dimensions in territories that, while sharing a peripheral position within the European Union and a long history of migration, present different institutional histories and governance approaches (Ambrosini, 2018; Calvaruso, 2020).

The research adopted a qualitative methodology, based on the documentary analysis of municipal social plans, protocols, and projects, complemented by semi-structured interviews with public social service professionals. Data was collected during my research stay at the A.S.Cent. (UNIPA) and analyzed through a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with coding focused on organizational models and local definitions of "good reception."

The study reveals two distinct models. In Palermo, a "model of reception as proximity and hybridization" emerges, where the historic third sector, in close relation with the local authority, plays a supplementary and advocacy role, creating informal networks that bypass bureaucratic rigidities (Campomori & Caponio, 2021). The emphasis is placed on cultural mediation and urban integration. In Seville, a "model of reception as specialization and pathway" takes shape, more markedly structured into time-bound public programs, with a clearer functional division between actors and a strong emphasis on socio-labor integration as a measure of autonomy (Garcés-Mascreñas, 2022).

The research offers crucial insights for the social work profession. In Palermo, the challenge is to institutionalize the third sector's good practices without distorting their flexibility, while strengthening the public authority's steering role. In Seville, there is a need to humanize the standardized pathways by introducing a greater capacity to listen to individual needs. For both contexts, the study highlights the necessity for specific training of social workers on migration legislation and transcultural approaches (Fargion, 2018).

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Defining reception means recognizing that it is not a universal concept, but a situated social and professional practice. The comparison between Seville and Palermo demonstrates that models depend on an interplay of historical, political, and relational factors. Although both cities show resilience and innovation, the sustainability of their reception systems requires greater public investment and a vision that goes beyond emergency management, recognizing migration as a structural element of contemporary society.

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ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES DURING THE RESEARCH STAY

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The UNIPA and the A.S.Cent. offer an unparalleled, dynamic environment for academic activity and for establishing scientific collaborations. Below, I include a selection of activities I attended that were particularly significant during my research stay:

1. 5 April 2025 "Conoscere per decidere" - edizione 2025, Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Relazioni Internazionali, Università di Palermo. Presentation book *Potere e mutamento*, Franco Angeli.
2. 7-10 April 2025, Spring School "Migrazioni, Genere, Diritti", Dottorati in Studi di Genere e in Migrazioni, Differenze, Giustizia Sociale dell'Unipa.
3. 8 May 2025, Attendance to the seminar with M. Ambrosini, University of Palermo, Agrigento.
4. 16 May 2025, Attendance to the seminar *Il femminicidio in Italia. La società, le storie, le leggi*. Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Relazioni Internazionali, Università di Palermo.
5. 20-22 May 2025 I Edizione del festival SUD (Spazi Utopie Derive) Cantieri Culturali Culturali alla Zisa, Palermo.
6. 27 May 2025 Attendance to *Note migranti. Espressioni artistiche come forme di partecipazione*, Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Relazioni Internazionali, Università di Palermo.
7. 28.5.2025 Attendance to *Continuità e trasformazione. Il pluralismo culturale nella comunità cinese*, Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Relazioni Internazionali, Università di Palermo.
8. 7 June 2025 Attendance to the book presentation *Esplorare la felicità*. Una marina di libri, Cantieri Culturali Culturali alla Zisa, Palermo.
9. 10 June 2025, Participation in the Seminar *Minori stranieri non accompagnati in fuoriuscita dal sistema di accoglienza e abitare*, Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Relazioni Internazionali, Università di Palermo.
10. 11-15 June 2025 Attendance to the activities at the Settimana di memoria, lotta e Giustizia, AlarmPhone, EuroMed rights and Sea Watch.
11. 23 June 2025 (palazzo Ferrovie, via Roma, 19) meeting "L'ecosistema Sai. La Rete, la governance, il territorio".
12. 24 June 2025 Participation in the meeting *Percorsi di dialogo*. Moschea di Palermo.
13. 25 June 2025, CRE.ZI. PLUS ai Cantieri culturali, workshop sul tema Il lavoro tra diritto, competenze e desideri.

Among these activities, I participated as a speaker in items 9 and 12, thanks to the kind invitation of Prof. Tumminelli.

ACADEMIC CONTACTS

My starting point was my collaboration with colleagues at the Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Relazioni Internazionali and Cultura e Società of the Università di Palermo. From there, the vibrant research activity on migration at UNIPA provided an unparalleled environment for exchanging knowledge and experiences.

The possibility of getting in touch with the **research group MIGRARE** at the University of Palermo and its activities offered me an additional critical study of migration, asylum, and human rights law within socio-political and European contexts. The group brings together scholars, PhD candidates, and practitioners to analyze legal frameworks, policies, and their impact on migrants' lives. Their work often emphasizes a rights-based approach, exploring

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topics such as border regimes, integration, citizenship, and the intersection of migration with other areas of law.

On the other hand, I renewed contact with the **CLEDU - Clinical Legal Education for Human Rights**, through my colleague Ms. Marica Romano, and it was also a unique chance to see how it operates. It provides free legal aid to refugees, asylum seekers, and vulnerable migrants while offering law students practical, hands-on training in human rights and immigration law. Under the supervision of professors and practicing lawyers, students engage directly with cases, learning through an "emancipatory clinical methodology." CLEDU is renowned for its grassroots activism, strategic litigation, and advocacy work aimed at protecting and advancing migrants' rights in Italy and Europe.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND NGO CONTACTS

The academic activities listed above gave me the opportunity to engage with the most relevant associations working on migration in Palermo. This also required a selective process, given the complex and extensive landscape of NGOs collaborating to support migrant communities in their settlement.

- Cooperativa Social Badia Grande — A social cooperative managing SAI-Palermo "Ordinari" shelters, supporting migrant reception and integration with accommodation and social support.
- Centro Astalli Palermo — Provides first-reception, legal aid, health support and integration services for asylum seekers and refugees arriving to Palermo.
- Consorzio Sol.Co — A consortium of social enterprises participating in the SAI network to offer reception and integration services for migrants under SAI Palermo.
- Cresm (Centro Ricerche Economiche e Sociali per il Meridione) — Listed among SAI-Palermo implementing bodies, contributing in research-based support, integration and migrant reception programmes.
- Sale della Terra — A civil-economy network cooperating with SAI to integrate vulnerable people (migrants, disabled, minors) through social inclusion, work and community-based welfare.
- Centro Diaconale "La Noce" - Istituto Valdese — A historic Waldensian social centre providing shelter, reception and social-educational support for migrants, including unaccompanied minors under SAI Palermo.
- Fondazione Don Calabria per il Sociale — Manages SAI-Palermo sites (especially for minors, MSNA) offering shelter, social integration, education and reception services.
- Idee in Movimento — A cooperative active in the SAI-Palermo network providing reception and integration services, including for unaccompanied minors.
- Libera...mente — Social cooperative participating in SAI-Palermo's minor-migrant reception network, offering accommodation and integration services.
- Novi Familia — Cooperativa sociale engaged in SAI-Palermo for hosting and integrating unaccompanied minors and other migrants, managing dedicated reception facilities.
- Sviluppo Solidale — Social cooperative founded in 1996, working under SAI-Palermo to promote social inclusion of migrants, minors, disabled and vulnerable people, evolving previous reception services into the current SAI framework.
- Umana Solidarietà — A consortium engaged in SAI-Palermo to provide reception services and integration support for migrants, including unaccompanied minors.

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- ISIDE Scs — One of the entities accredited under SAI-Palermo (for DM/DS projects) offering reception and integration services for asylum seekers and refugees.
- L' Arca Scs — Social cooperative listed as a SAI-Palermo implementing body — providing reception and support services for migrants under the SAI scheme.

FIELDWORK ACTIVITIES

In the framework of the national project *Migration Incorporation Policies and Practices in Migrants' Reception and Settlement Cities in Andalusia and Sicily* (MigrantCities) (PID2022-138122OB-I00)—funded under the State Plan for Scientific, Technical, and Innovation Research 2021–2023—and during this research stay at A.S.Cent., I had the opportunity to conduct **three interviews** with key figures from the SAI in Palermo: Ms. Angela Errore, Ms. Laura Nocilla, and the external consultant Mr. Vincenzo D'Amico. These semi-structured interviews provided me with a comprehensive understanding of how this complex system operates and added a tangible, grounded dimension to the information gathered during the fieldwork.

I also had the opportunity to participate as an external observer in **two focus groups** held on 20 May and 10 June 2025, at the Casa dei Diritti and the Centro Diaconale La Noce – Istituto Valdese, respectively. The first focus group brought together social workers and legal consultants to discuss the migrants' Welcome Kit promoted by the SAI, while the second focused on labour rights with minor migrants. Both meetings were extremely productive for observing how the SAI and its agents operate, and they provided invaluable insights into the work of street-level professionals.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH STAY

Participation in national and international conferences

Ortega Pérez, N. & Saidani, I. Populist Discourse and the Brexit Migration Debate: British MEPs and the Undermining of the 'European Project' (2009–2019). 2025 FOM_Play 2-5 sept., University of Granada.

Ortega Pérez, N. Regímenes migratorios en España e Italia: las fórmulas de externalización de fronteras y su ajuste a los contextos nacionales / Nieves Ortega Pérez (Universidad de Granada), XI Congreso de Migraciones, Murcia, 15-17 October 2025

Ortega Pérez, N. Gobernanza colaborativa y políticas de incorporación de la población migrante: explorando el modelo de la ciudad de Palermo / Nieves Ortega Pérez (Universidad de Granada), XI Congreso de Migraciones, Murcia, 15-17 October 2025

Ortega Pérez, N. Refugiados en Europa: reto para la integración y la solidaridad en la Unión Europea III Congreso PESG. Población, crisis y conflictos armados. 11 y 12 November 2025, Universidad de Granada.

Forthcoming conferences

De la Peña, A. & Ortega Pérez, N. The Emotional Weight of Bureaucracy: Street-Level Discretion and the Immigrant concern and grievance in Madrid and Mexico City. IMISCOE 2025

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Ortega Pérez, N. Prossimità e Percorso. Scomporre l'accoglienza migranti: il modello ibrido di Palermo e quello specializzato di Siviglia. V Conferenza Italiana di Servizio Sociale, Università di Catania, 4-6 June 2025

Forthcoming publications

Ortega Pérez, N. 2025. La gobernanza híbrida en las políticas de acogida: Un análisis del Sistema di Accoglienza e Integrazione (SAI) de Palermo, en Geopolítica de las migraciones (ed.) Dykinson, Madrid.

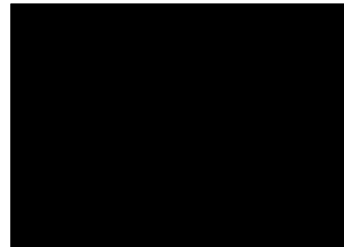
Other publications are scheduled for 2006 with Palgrave and Springer, in collaboration with colleagues from the University of Palermo, including Prof. Tumminelli, Prof. Pera, Prof. Macaluso and Prof. Di Rosa.

I firmly believe that this stay has consolidated the preexisting relations between the University of Palermo and the University of Granada, and has opened up new opportunities to strengthen the academic exchanges and scientific collaborations already taking place.

Professor Miranda, I wish to express my most sincere gratitude to you and A.S.Cent. for this wonderful opportunity, which has been invaluable on both a personal and professional level. I would also like to extend my particular thanks to Professor Tumminelli, Professor Di Rosa, Professor Marcenò, and Ms. Annalisa Lorito for their invaluable help and support.

I remain at your disposal for any further information you may require.

Granada, 8 December 2025



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