



Manifesto on an Inclusive University

Facilitating refugees' access to tertiary education and university research, and promoting their social integration and active participation to academic life

The **Manifesto on an Inclusive University** focuses on the condition of young refugees who intend to continue their studies and research in the country of asylum, and move from the awareness that cultural, technical and intellectual experiences, developed by refugees in various parts of the world, represent a valuable asset for host communities. Furthermore, by subscribing to the *Manifesto*, Universities contribute to the fulfillment of the "Third mission", promoting the dissemination of knowledge to enhance the society's social, cultural and economic development.

Currently, over 70 million people in the world are forcibly displaced due to conflicts, violence and persecutions. Among them, 25.9 million are refugees, of whom over 20 million fall under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)¹. The 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees (hereinafter the Geneva Convention) sets basic minimum standards regarding the treatment of refugees in asylum countries, including housing, public relief and public education. However, beneficiaries of international protection face greater difficulties compared to both the resident population and other foreign citizens, when it comes to accessing these services, including access to education, particularly Universities².

In 2018, there was an increase in the number of refugees going on to higher education, from 1 to 3 per cent. However, considering the global figure of 37%, the gap in secondary education opportunities for refugees continues to be dramatic and it is still a long way off UNHCR's target of seeing 15 per cent of the eligible refugee population in higher education by 2030³.

Refugees' access to higher and university education is an integral part of UNHCR's protection mandate, and a strategic operational priority⁴. The **Global Compact on Refugees** foresees among its aims to strengthen the access to education. In this regard the Global Compact calls upon States and institutions to facilitate refugees' admission to the national education systems, by securing adequate resources, simplifying the mutual recognition of academic titles and professional qualifications⁵ and offering safe legal pathways enabling refugee students to pursue their studies in third countries⁶.

¹ UNHCR, Global Trends. 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/5d08d7ee7/unhcr-global-trends-2018.html>

² UNHCR, Tertiary Education, <https://www.unhcr.org/tertiary-education.html>

³ UNHCR, *Stepping up. Refugee Education in Crisis*, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/wp-content/uploads/sites/76/2019/08/Education-Report-2019-Final-web-3.pdf>; UNHCR, *Refugee Education 2030. A Strategy for Refugee Inclusion*, 2019, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/71213>.

⁴ UNHCR *strategic direction 2017-2021*, <https://www.unhcr.org/excom/announce/5894558d4/unhcrs-strategic-directions-2017-2021.html>

⁵ Particular attention should be given to the initiatives of the *European qualification passport for refugees* (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/recognition-of-refugees-qualifications>), and the *UNESCO Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants project* (<https://en.unesco.org/news/passport4education-unescos-commitment-ensure-right-higher-education-most-vulnerable-ones>)

⁶ UNHCR, *The three years (2019-2021) Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways*, June 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/protection/resettlement/5d15db254/three-year-strategy-resettlement-complementary-pathways.html>

In the Italian context, the right to education for beneficiaries of international protection is regulated by **Art. 26 of Legislative Decree 251/2007**, which provides the right for children to access schools on equal footing as Italian citizens, and the right for adults to access the general education system within the limits and rules envisaged for third country nationals legally residing in Italy. The law foresees also that refugees are entitled to the validation and accreditation of titles and qualifications obtained abroad, even in the absence of the original certification. Furthermore, the **National Integration Plan**⁷, approved by the Ministry of the Interior in 2017, identifies access to education and qualifications' recognition as programmatic priorities.

General principles

By subscribing to the Manifesto, universities and research institutes acknowledge the following general principles, and commit to promoting and disseminating them in their respective academic and work environments.

1. **Equality and non-discrimination.** Promoting the full respect for the human being, without any distinction of age, gender, nationality, and with respect for diversity, avoiding all forms of discrimination and exclusion, and guaranteeing equal access to services and equal career opportunities for refugee students, researchers and teachers, particularly refugee women and girls⁸.
2. **Hospitality.** Promoting a welcoming academic culture focusing on hospitality, supporting the integration of teachers, researchers and students of different backgrounds and facilitating their introduction to the academic institution and the local territory, with particular regard to refugees.
3. **Knowledge.** Promoting and enhancing the scientific knowledge of issues relating to forced migration, international protection and asylum, in order to raise awareness of the situation in the countries of origin, the root causes of migration and refugees' fundamental rights. In addition to favouring a better understanding of forced migration, such knowledge can foster and facilitate dialogue between students, researchers and teachers of different nationalities, fostering the inclusion of refugees.
4. **Integration.** Promoting integration as a dynamic and articulated process involves not only foreign professors, researchers and students, who shall be ready to integrate without renouncing their cultural identity, but also local communities and educational institutions, entrusted to develop policies and programmes attentive to a multicultural environment, and, in particular, to the specific condition of refugees.
5. **Appreciation of diversity.** Facilitating opportunities for mutual knowledge between students, researchers and professors, locals and refugees, with a view to promoting a climate of exchange, inclusion and a shared sense of belonging, enhancing different cultural heritages as an element of inspiration and enrichment for the University.
6. **Participation.** Encouraging the active participation of refugees in academic life, facilitating the establishment of associations by refugee students and researchers, and involving them in public debates and other institutional events.

⁷ The Italian Ministry of Interior, *National Integration Plan for Persons Entitled to International Protection*, October 2017, http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/piano_nazionale_integrazione_eng.pdf

⁸ UNHCR, *Policy on Gender, Age and Diversity*. "Women and girls have equal access to economic opportunities, including decent work and quality education" (*Gender Equality and Commitments to Women and Girls*).

Action points

The universities signatories to this Manifesto, in light of the general principles set out above and with the aim of promoting and facilitating the inclusion of refugee students, researchers and teachers, are committed to adopt some of the following suggested measures⁹.

1. Support to refugee students

- Universities and research institutes promote access to information, by ensuring that their administrative staff, in particular the offices in charge of international relations and student registration, have all up-to-date information regarding the entitlements connected to the recognition of international protection, and the implications of such legal status with regard to access to courses and exams, as well as information on the recognition procedures for titles and qualifications obtained abroad. Universities and research institutes also promote the exchange of know-how and good practices with other signatory institutions.
- Universities and research institutes provide information and assistance to refugees in the registration process. Furthermore they will provide information on scholarships available for refugees, through specific brochures and other printed and digital information material which is available at the university's information desks, easy accessible and user friendly.
- Universities and research institutes provide guidance and tutoring services for refugee students and researchers, in order to assist and support them in the registration as well as during their studies and research, including support with regard to Italian language courses, considered as a priority for the education pathway as well as for social integration.
- Universities and research institutes facilitate refugee students in accessing internships, traineeships and stages, in Italy and abroad, in order to help them entering in the world of work.

2. Support for recognition of titles and qualifications

- In accordance with Art. 7 of the Lisbon Convention (ratified through Law 148/2002), Universities and research institutes commit to adopt all necessary measures for the establishment of a fair, transparent and effective mechanism for the recognition of diplomas, certificates and other qualifications obtained abroad by beneficiaries of international protection, even in the absence of original certification by the State where the title or degree was obtained.
- Universities and research institutes make available to the public information on the procedures for the recognition of titles and qualifications obtained abroad. In accordance with Art. 25 of the Geneva Convention, refugees shall not be subject to any requirements involving contact with the authorities of their countries of origin (Embassies and Consulates).

⁹ See also the final recommendations elaborated by the institutions participating in the *inHERE project*, <https://www.inhereproject.eu/outputs/recommendations>

3. Scholarships and other incentives

- Universities and research institutes, within the limits of available resources, provide scholarships for refugee students and researchers as well as other incentives aimed, *inter alia*, at supporting board and lodging, study and urban mobility. Universities and research institutes promote, also through the involvement of the local community, private sponsorship initiatives aimed at supporting refugee students and researchers.
- Universities and research institutes promote tutoring activities, including through the involvement of students and local associations, to support refugees in their academic and local integration, and contribute to disseminate information on scholarships and other incentives.

4. Humanitarian corridors for refugee teachers, students and researchers

- Universities and research institutes support, in accordance with their internal rules, the registration of refugee students residing in third countries as a way to favour complementary legal entry pathways for refugees, and to facilitate their integration in the academic environment and local community.
- Universities and research institutes commit to offer financial support, within the limits of the available resources, to refugee students, in order to cover university fees and additional costs, and provide tailored information, support and guidance services.

5. Participation

- Universities and research institutes promote the participation of refugee students and researchers in academic life and support the establishment of refugee associations.
- Universities and research institutes involve refugee associations in debates and public events organized by academia, including public discussions on international protection.