

*Intercultural teaching practices in Italian
as L2 for refugees and language policy*
PhD Research Project

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What is the Italian reception system like?

In 2017, according to UNHCR* and IOM** data, of the more than 172,000 forced migrants who arrived in Europe by sea, 64% had landed in Italy.

In 2017 the number of migrant landings in Italy was 119,000 (62,000 less than in 2016): the *surge* of refugees **ended** in 2017 after four years in which a total of about 625,000 refugees arrived in our country.

Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS & Centro Studi Confronti, *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione 2018*, pp. 11-14

*United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees

**International Organization for Migration

What is the Italian reception system like?

Of the overall foreign population residing in Italy, less than 20% (239,000) is a holder of an asylum application permit or a protection permit (refugee status, subsidiary or humanitarian protection).

The international protection applications were 130,119 of which 41.6% was accepted.

At the end of the year, 187,000 immigrants were hosted in reception centres: 80.95% in CAS (extraordinary reception centres) and 13.15% in SPRAR (national refugee and asylum-seeker protection system).

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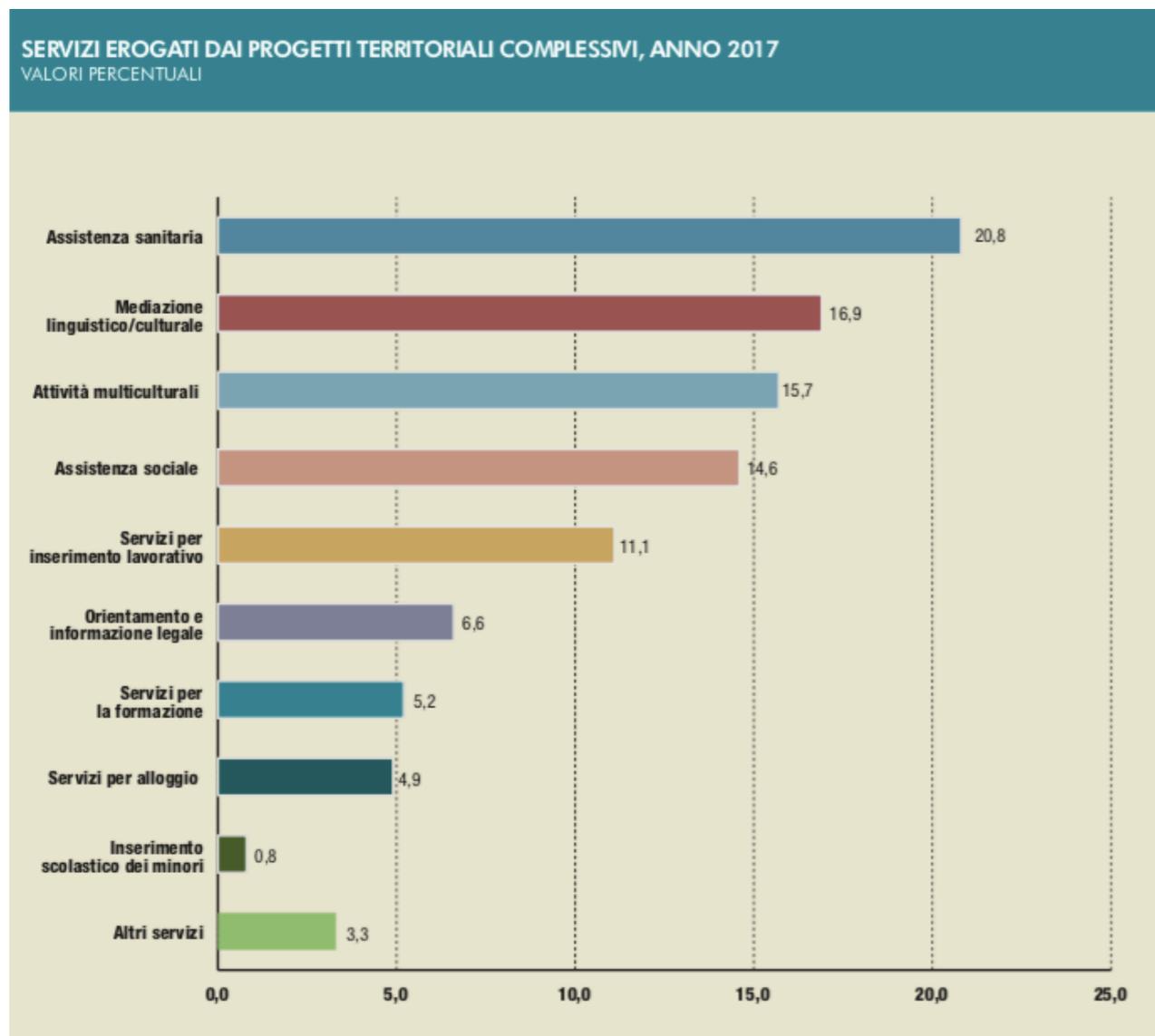
What is the Italian reception system like?

According to the Legislative Decree No. 142/2015, following the policy lines set out by the European Directive 2013/33/EU, the Italian reception system is divided into three main segments:

1. **First aid and assistance** (*hotspots*): identification (I), fingerprinting, basic health support
2. **First reception** (CARA - CAS): identification (II), legal status definition, asylum application procedure starts
3. **Second reception** (SPRAR - network for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers): reception and integration projects

G. Campesi, 2018, *Between containment, confinement and dispersal: the evolution of the Italian reception system before and after the "refugee crisis"*, in "Journal of Modern Italian Studies", 23:4, 494

Within the third phase (second reception), reception and integration projects are designed and implemented in order to foster the integration process of migrants with the host communities through several interventions such as:



Health assistance: 20.8%

Linguistic and cultural mediation: 16.9%

Multicultural activities: 15.7%

Social assistance: 14.6%

Job placement: 11.1%

Legal advisory: 6.6%

Training: 5.2%

Housing: 4.9%

Minors school guidance: 0.8%

Other: 3.3%

SPRAR Network, 2017 Annual Report

In recent years, the "migrant emergency" has been deemed to undermine social cohesion of the countries most affected by migratory flows because of:

- poor resources in terms of funds, operators and professionals
- negative representations of migration widespread among European host societies
- **ineffective integration policies**

Many integration policies owe their ineffectiveness to misleading conceptions about what integration itself is. For this paper we choose to adopt the definition given by the Council of Europe (2008) in the *White paper on intercultural dialogue*:

Integration (social integration, inclusion) is understood as a two-sided process and as the capacity of people to live together with full respect for the dignity of each individual, the common good, pluralism and diversity, non-violence and solidarity, as well as their ability to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life.

Council of Europe, *White paper on intercultural dialogue*, 2008, p. 11

In order to ensure global participation, policy-makers should always include “two-sided” **linguistic integration** among the main objectives of their language policies in order to ensure effective communication between host communities and refugees because:

- for migrants, speaking the language(s) of the host country “[...] is a precondition for participation” (Krumm & Pultzer, 2008, p. 72) in the host societies’ public life and a necessary tool to improve their socio-economic and professional status
- for members of the host societies, knowing migrants’ cultural and linguistic background can help the former avert to consider the latter as “speechless” or “faceless”

Consequently, it is essential for both groups to develop language abilities because

“Participation in public life relies on **language abilities** to express opinion, progress economically, prevent exploitation or abuse, explore identity and make connections.” (Lo Bianco, 2010, p. 149)

The lack of language abilities **on both sides** may arise from issues connected to the education system, deriving from “the choices government authorities make regarding language and social life. Classically these choices involve identification of a language or communication problem, the formulation of alternative ways of resolving this problem, deciding the norm to be promoted, and implementing it via the education system: a language problem leads to a language policy [...].” (Lo Bianco, 2010, p. 144)

Hence, teaching the language of the host society alone, considering it as the only way for integration, is not enough to ensure linguistic integration.

Teaching the language for integration purposes cannot disregard intercultural practices since “teachers, teaching and classroom interaction [can be seen] as activities of language change as much as delivering or implementing language decisions taken by policy makers.” (Lo Bianco, 2010, p. 145)

Broadly speaking, intercultural teaching practices:

- rely on reflections about ethnic and cultural differences and their impact on educational and learning processes;
- refer to the possibility of respecting diversity and integrating differences between refugees and host community members without annihilating them

Language teachers are then inescapably engaged in language policy and planning activity and each choice they make can affect their learners' as much as the host community's integration process.

That is why it is advisable for L2 teachers for refugees to be adequately trained to perform intercultural teaching practices.

Italian as L2 training, that is part of the general training category, is entrusted to CPIA (state centres for adult education) and to internal courses designed and held by teachers selected directly by the NGOs in charge of the projects.

“This is a mixed (public-social private) teaching system [...] that presents **advantages**, but also a number of **critical points**, such as the lack of parameters and criteria for volunteering bodies quality assessment.” (Minuz, 2012, p. 10, my translation)

F. Minuz, 2012, *Insegnare L2 ad adulti immigrati, in Italia, oggi*, in “Italiano L2 in classe - Rivista quadrimestrale per l’insegnamento dell’italiano come lingua seconda/straniera”, a. 2012, n. 1, pp. 7-11

Most of the teachers/trainers working with refugees are voluntary citizens, retired Italian as L1 teachers or young volunteers.

The problem here could be that an inadequately trained teacher may tend to convey visions of the Italian language and culture (teaching) and its relationship with the integration of newcomers, soaked with old-fashioned teaching principles and techniques.

This tendency may result in teaching practices which would not serve the integration cause but, to an extreme extent, increase the gap between refugees and Italian citizens.

Therefore, this research project mainly aims at:

- gaining knowledge about the reality of internal Italian as L2 courses, implemented by NGOs in Italy within the SPRAR network, since they can be a chance for integration for refugees and host communities if they are designed by taking intercultural issues into proper account
- understand the profile and attitudes of teachers working with refugees and their impact on teaching practices
- investigate the deliberate choices made by the project managers about training activities for beneficiaries, that may affect the refugees' integration process

In particular, we want to evaluate teacher's beliefs and practices in order to understand, among other:

- whether teachers are favourably or unfavourably disposed (beliefs) towards the integration of intercultural competence teaching in Italian as L2 teaching
- whether and how teachers' disposition towards intercultural competence teaching affects their teaching practices
- whether teachers think that engaging local communities is useful and promote cross-community contact activities
- whether teachers support the view that learners' mother tongues can be used to promote intercultural competence acquisition and integration and how this is turned into practice

The methodology

In order to collect the necessary data, the following research tools are used:

- questionnaire for Italian as L2 teachers: to outline teachers' profile in terms of education and training, teaching practices, ideology and beliefs towards intercultural issues and migration
- Italian as L2 classes observation and video recording: to collect data on classroom interactions, refugees' attitude to teachers' input, presence of refugees' languages and teacher's attitude to their use by refugees, and so on

The methodology

- semi-structured interview to project managers: to understand the principles and ideologies underpinning the design, implementation and management of integration projects
- group semi-structured interviews with refugees: on topics related to their learning needs in specific domains (such as family life, employment, relationship with host community members) and their grade of fulfillment in the teaching practices which they benefit from

The methodology

All the data collected will be combined using the LPP analysis model designed and implemented by Lo Bianco (2010) in order to outline the language policy (in terms of “authorizations”, “participation” and “goals”) in place in each integration project and the role and impact of Italian as L2 teaching on it.

Some of the reception and integration project cities included in this research project





Thanks for your attention!

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