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**UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI CATANIA**  
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Double Master's Degree in  
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**The New EU Commission Action Plan on  
Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027):  
The Italian Case**

Final Thesis

Supervisors:  
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1

## The complexity of the integration process

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<sup>1</sup> Personal reproduction of the author. Source: Brahy, Dumont, *Dialogues sur la Diversité*, Presses Universitaires de Liège, coll. « Maison des Sciences de l'Homme », 2018.

## **Acknowledgements**

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I studied languages because I don't want to have any kind of barrier to communicating with people, and then I studied political sciences because I wanted to dispose of the tools to take action in the political context, spread a good example and convey a specific message to help vulnerable people. This programme was the perfect combination of the two goals of my life till now. I met wonderful people in a city that has a lot to offer in terms of opportunities.

May everyone find their own sense of justice in life and use all the possible means to pursue it in a way that it can be applied to everyone, in the same manner, without distinction.

I wish to show my sincere gratitude to the people who offered their special contribution to the present work. Their availability meant a lot to me.

## **List of abbreviations**

**AMIF** Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund

**ANCI** National Association of Italian Municipalities

**BIP** Beneficiary of International Protection

**CEAS** Common European Asylum System

**DG HOME** European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs

**EAFRD** European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

**EASO** European Asylum Support Office

**ECCP** European Code of Conduct on Partnership

**ECRE** European Council on Refugees and Exiles

**EMFF** European Maritime and Fisheries Fund

**ERDF** European Regional Development Fund

**ESF +** European Social Fund Plus

**ESIF** European Structural and Investment Funds

**EU** European Union

**EUAA** European Union Agency for Asylum

**EUROPOL** European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation

**FEAD** Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived

**IBMF** Integrated Border Management Fund

**IOM** International Organisation for Migration

**LGBTIQ** Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, non-binary, Intersex and Queer

**MFF** Multiannual Financial Framework

**MIPEX** Migrant Integration Policy Index

**MS** Member State

**NGEU** Next Generation EU

**NIEM** National Integration Evaluation Mechanism

**OECD** Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

**PICUM** Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants

**SAI** Reception and Integration System

**SPRAR** Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees

**TCN** Third-Country National

**TFEU** Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

**UNHCR** United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees

## Table of contents

Abstract .....	6
Résumé .....	7
Abstract .....	8
Foreword .....	9
Introduction .....	11
Chapter 1.....	18
<b>The multifaceted Integration and Inclusion Plan.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>1.1. Background and Legal Framework .....</b>	<b>22</b>
1.1.1. Support actions of the EU.....	22
1.1.2. How integration is regulated across the EU .....	24
<b>1.2. Budget, Funds, Expenditures: the Multiannual Financial Framework .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>1.3. Beneficiaries: the shadow of undocumented migrants .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>1.4. Solidarity as a leading principle in the European integration process .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Chapter 2.....	42
Continuity and changes.....	42
2.1. The barriers to integration.....	46
2.2. Lessons learnt .....	49
Chapter 3.....	54
<b>The challenges of integration in Italy .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>3.1. Initiatives to implement the <i>Action Plan</i> .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>3.2. Concrete steps towards integration and inclusion .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>3.3. Actors.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>3.4. Critical issues: Gaps and Deficiencies.....</b>	<b>68</b>
Conclusions .....	72
Bibliography .....	76
Sitography .....	84
Appendices .....	91

## **Abstract**

This paper aims to offer an analysis of the recently released New *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion*, proposed by the European Commission for the year-period 2021-2027.

This research will present an evaluation of the key elements and the main points of the *Action Plan* in a way to compare it with the previous one and to review examples of its implementation in the Italian territory. This study will be then divided into three blocks: investigation, comparison, and implementation.

Moreover, one of the objectives is to understand how the European Union devotes its funds to integration, considering the general framework of the 2021-2027 long-term EU budget, also known as the Multiannual Financial Framework, and Next Generation EU Recovery Plan. They are classified as useful instruments to support new programmes and projects in different areas of interest, one of them being legal migration channels. This will also lead to giving an insight into the immigration policies existing at the European Union level and the legal background taken as a reference point on the matter.

The research's added value is providing a critical lens of the above-mentioned *Plan* to verify whether it can actually be defined as innovative as it has been presented.

**Key words:** Integration, Inclusion, European Commission, Migrants, Migrant Background, Multiannual Financial Framework, Italy, Action Plan.



## Résumé

Ce travail final a pour but de présenter une analyse du Nouveau *Plan d'Action en faveur de l'Intégration et de l'Inclusion* qui a été récemment publié et proposé par la Commission européenne pour la période 2021-2027.

Cette recherche prévoit une évaluation des éléments clés et de principaux points du *Plan d'Action* de manière à le comparer avec le précédent et à passer en revue des exemples de sa mise en œuvre sur le territoire italien. Cette étude sera ensuite divisée en trois blocs: enquête, comparaison et mise en œuvre.

De plus, l'un des objectifs est de comprendre comment l'Union européenne consacre ses fonds à l'intégration, compte tenu du cadre général du budget à long terme de l'UE 2021-2027, également connu sous le nom de cadre financier pluriannuel, et du plan de relance Next Generation UE. Ceux-ci sont classés comme des instruments utiles pour soutenir de nouveaux programmes et projets dans différents domaines d'intérêt, l'un d'entre eux étant le renforcement des canaux légaux de la migration. Cela conduira également à donner un aperçu des politiques d'immigration existant au niveau de l'Union européenne et du contexte juridique pris comme point de référence en la matière.

La valeur ajoutée de la recherche est de fournir un regard critique sur le *Plan* susmentionné afin de vérifier s'il peut effectivement être qualifié d'innovant tel qu'il a été présenté.

**Mots clés:** Intégration, Inclusion, Commission Européenne, Migrants, Citoyens de l'UE Issus de l'Immigration, Cadre Financier Pluriannuel, Italie, Plan d'Action.

## **Abstract**

Obiettivo del presente lavoro è offrire un'analisi del Nuovo *Piano d'Azione per l'Integrazione e l'Inclusione* proposto dalla Commissione Europea per il periodo 2021-2027.

Questa ricerca prevede una valutazione degli elementi chiave del *Piano d'Azione*, in modo da confrontarlo con il precedente (2016), e passare in rassegna esempi della sua attuazione nel territorio italiano. Questo studio sarà quindi suddiviso in tre blocchi: analisi, confronto e attuazione.

Inoltre, uno degli intenti è capire come l'Unione europea dedichi i suoi fondi all'integrazione, considerando il quadro generale del bilancio europeo a lungo termine 2021-2027, noto anche come quadro finanziario pluriennale, e il Piano di ripresa Next Generation EU. Questi ultimi sono classificati come strumenti utili per sostenere nuovi programmi e progetti in diverse aree di interesse, uno dei quali è il potenziamento dei canali legali di migrazione. Il che porterà anche a fornire un prospetto delle politiche di immigrazione esistenti a livello dell'Unione europea e del contesto giuridico preso come punto di riferimento in materia.

Il valore aggiunto della ricerca è quello di dare uno sguardo critico al suddetto *Piano* al fine di verificare se esso possa effettivamente definirsi innovativo così come è stato presentato.

**Parole chiave:** Integrazione, Inclusione, Commissione Europea, Migranti, Background Migratorio, Quadro Finanziario Pluriennale, Italia, Piano D'Azione.

## **Foreword**

The author of the dissertation is perfectly aware of the current extent of the migration crisis following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, considering the space available and the temporary nature of the measures taken on the subject, the issue will not be taken into account in depth since it does not fall within the themes of the chosen work. The *Plan* has not been conceived to confront that unexpected situation.

It is worthy of note that these events will unavoidably affect and impact the scope and the area of applicability of the New *Action Plan* in terms of funds, projects, and policies, as happened with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Priorities are going to be reconsidered in such a hectic moment and a conspicuous part of the funds is being devoted to coping with the emergency.

Such affairs are inevitably exacerbating already existing inequalities and exposing migrants to even more vulnerable conditions.

The work that will be carried out does not claim to be exhaustive and intends to contribute to the research that has recently begun on the topic in question.

## **Caution Note**

After the elections that took place in Italy on the 25<sup>th</sup> of September, a new right-wing political majority in Parliament expressed a new Prime Minister to lead the country and form a new government. This might provoke a change in the policies of reception and integration adopted until the present moment and, as a consequence, alter the results that have been laboriously obtained prior to that event.

## **Disclaimer**

Throughout the present work, it has been preferred the adoption of the terms “destination” and “receiving” country, rather than the frequently used synonym of

“host” country, to refer to the country of arrival of migrants, in order to avoid any allusion to a guest-host relationship that the principle of solidarity should exclude.<sup>2</sup>

**Words are important, let’s use them correctly!**

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<sup>2</sup> For further clarifications, see IOM, I. O., *Glossary on Migration, International Migration Law*. Geneva, Switzerland: Alice Sironi, Céline Bauloz and Milen Emmanuel, 2019, p.93. And ICF Consulting Services, European Commission, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, *Report on the consultation on the integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background, Final report*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, November 2020, p.12.

## Introduction

Migrants' integration in the European Union is still nowadays one of the most debated issues since it encounters the divergent perspectives of the European Member States. The choice of the topic was raised from a passionate willingness of the author of the present document to investigate the reasons why the dynamics of integration at the EU level haven't shown significant results yet.

The launch of the New *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion* may represent a turning point to an extent because it enshrines the relevance of dignified practices of integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background, and the term may concern second/third-generation migrants or third-country nationals who acquired the EU citizenship all over the years.

When migrants leave their country of origin in search of a new life, they carry their heavy luggage with them, made up of memories, dreams, expectations, hopes, and ambitions. They often head out on long journeys and run into many difficulties for which they might need assistance.

Becoming a full part of a new society and an active member of it, without differences being considered an obstacle, requires the double effort of the people concerned and the community involved. Integration and inclusion are both long-way processes that go beyond access to basic services, no matter how essential these ones could be.

Integration: The two-way process of mutual adaptation between migrants and the societies in which they live, whereby migrants are incorporated into the social, economic, cultural, and political life of the receiving community. It entails a set of joint responsibilities for migrants and communities, and incorporates other related notions such as social inclusion and social cohesion ((IOM), 2019).

The author assumes that all the readers know the difference between integration and assimilation as opposite concepts in their contrasting nature. In fact, the former implies a respectful coexistence of various cultural groups' customs (it carries a positive connotation), and the latter refers to the incorporation of minority cultures into the predominant one for the sake of identity preservation (negative connotation). The

meaning that may diverge from the pure definition of integration, and the possible deriving connotations, is not pertinent to the object of the present document.

The New *Action Plan* makes a distinction between the two concepts of integration and inclusion – the second as a part of the first one – because, as well as carrying different meanings, they foresee a targeted approach according to the specific situation. So, the *Plan* copes with the need to expand the conceptual framework in this respect.

It would be difficult to have the same integration strategy between these two types of categories and, for this reason, there is a bipartition between integration and inclusion in the New *2021-2027 Action Plan*, because the problems are not the same and therefore the philosophy of intervention should also be adapted precisely to this broader typology of groups (Interview N.3).

Therefore, the act of bringing together smaller groups of people of diverse origins into a unique system that works as one, still taking account of the differences as a positive element, is known as integration. While inclusion refers to the equal access to facilities, activities, experiences, giving people the possibility to be part of a group irrespective of sex, religion, cultural background etc (any factor that could be subjected to discrimination).

Integration poses some problems starting from the early stages, including the identification of undocumented irregular migrants, very long waiting times for the operations to be completed, the attitude of the receiving society – more or less open to newcomers, and the registration steps required to make migrants start new projects in the different domains of education and employment, after they have been distributed in reception centres.

When it comes to inclusion there are many barriers of a different nature, mostly connected to the degree of adaptability of the destination community, but also to the effective communication among the various actors implicated, in addition to the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the local offices in charge of mobilising resources and raising the awareness of the activities available on the territory.

There is another point whose importance has to be stressed: in order for a migrant to be fully integrated and included, he has to be regular. The need for legal status is of

primary interest, the issue of regularisation being still problematic and strongly heterogeneous in the whole European Union.

The present document is built around the following Research Question: Does The New *Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027* recently proposed by the European Commission present some new elements? Is it really new?

The *Plan*, which has been put under the spotlight and brought to the attention of policymakers and stakeholders, lays out some novelties from a theoretical point of view. However, some practical implications are still missing.

First, the *Plan* should also be translated into more lawful alternatives to migrate so that people on the move can be legally recognised. Which could represent a consistent step towards a different and swifter approach on behalf of the destination countries.

The hypothesis of departure would then be: Although the New *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027* displays some changes compared with the *2016 Action Plan*, it still lacks clear instruments aiming at a stronger legal dimension in terms of integration practices. Apparently, it doesn't cover efficiently the gap concerning the preliminary steps that migrants have to face when entering the national territory regarding documentation required in favour of long-term solutions, together with many structural factors that still make the integration process slow and complex. Secondly, a veil of vagueness surrounds the question of undocumented migrants and asylum seekers, may they be people whose permit expired and hasn't been renewed yet, or people who have been waiting for months – sometimes even years – for the final decision of the territorial Commission in charge of analysing their specific situation and their pending status to be officialised as a consequence or to be turned into an irregular situation because of a reject (the author will go back to this aspect later on the dissertation).

So, the alleged innovation promoted by the New *Plan* leaves a certain room for criticism for the fact that it still sticks to the same difficulties for migrants in need of recognition, pushing them to live in a limbo, in-between, condition, rather than facilitating their successful settlement in the destination country.

Despite the efforts to change the general narrative on migration, it emerges that some programmes and projects are unevenly out of reach for asylum seekers or people who filed an appeal for their denial. This is how migration turns out to be a security issue, in the political arena and in terms of expenditures destined for border controls, when

it can be easily perceived as a mutually beneficial solution and a source of stability for the communities involved.

As far as concerns the orientation of the work, the intentions of the author reveal a path following a specific methodology based on a combination of mostly qualitative methods, also known as triangulation.

The Field Research has been thus circumscribed in time and space: the way data has been collected relies on archives, reports, norms, and official documents, such as the *Plan* itself, along with conferences, internet-based research. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out between May and June 2022 to guarantee variety and originality via first-hand sources. ‘People are very resourceful’ (Corbin and Strauss, 1998, p.97), but, at the same time, their vision of the world can be positively or negatively affected by cognitive biases. Nothing must be taken for granted and the answers require to be put in the appropriate context.

The gathered information is analysed by employing time-series observations of the *Plan*, in reverse from the present to 2016, with the aim to do a comparison over time to be concluded with the case study of Italy as a noteworthy example. Instead, the analysis of the interviews is made following a qualitative coding procedure to emphasise the most recurring concepts. The extracted codes are not hierarchised and each of them has its own specificity in relation to the aim of the dissertation. The level of meaning under examination is theory-driven, so it is led by a deductive method with a predetermined set of codes from which some subcategories have been created.

The technique of the interviews allows direct access to certain information and, thanks to its intrinsic dynamic nature, shows how reality is depicted by the main actors concerned. In particular, it studies the construction and evolution of the meaning they attribute to social reality through a wide spectrum of values, beliefs, concepts and ideas. The number of participants has been established according to the availability of the interlocutors whom the author of the present document could get in touch with, as well as following the saturation principle to avoid repetitions, especially considering that the mid-term review of the *Action Plan* is foreseen for the year 2024.

In Chapter 1, the author will dwell on the *Plan* that was launched on 24 November 2020 for the seven years 2021-2027. The focus is on funds, resources, rules, beneficiaries and some controversial aspects, and all the sections will deal with



practical matters whose content is being adjusted in line with the recent changes. The *Action Plan* only partially covers the wide range of situations describing the reality of migration and leaves some unsolved challenges open. The main findings relate to the doubling of the funding instruments, however still redirected to border controls, and the ambivalence underlying the principles of solidarity and shared responsibility. The undetermined question of undocumented migrants is still at the heart of the analysis.

In Chapter 2, the former *Action Plan* will be presented in comparison with the one that has been most recently proposed and put in force.

This comparative perspective is useful to see the progress that has been made in the two different timeframes regarding the elaboration of the *Plans* supported by the MFF strategy. The conclusion is that, unfortunately, only a few novelties can be accounted and the elements of continuity are more than the effective changes. Indeed, the interventions undertaken over the last few years, involving a plurality of actors, funds and themes, have also highlighted a series of critical points, which cannot be ignored in the elaboration of the new intervention strategy for the period after 2020.

On the one hand, the number and diversity of the subjects involved in the actions represented an important opportunity to read and face the problems from various perspectives, as well as to involve the territories in a capillary way. On the other hand, it created significant administrative difficulties in managing numerous partnerships comprised of public and private entities and thus subject to a variety of constraints for the purposes of agreements, reporting, and controls.

The lack of a true national control room on migrants' socio-labour integration, or of articulated and programmed methods of comparison between the numerous actors of integration policies and between these and the bodies operating on the territory, necessitates the promotion of, at the very least, opportunities for structured exchange and comparison.

The synergistic use of different European sources of funding from different National Programs, which, while allowing for the investment of more substantial resources and thus multiplying the effects of the intervention, is a complex exercise due to the various rules governing the methods of management, reporting, monitoring, and control of European funds, as well as the different time horizons in which the interventions can

take place (Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Directorate-General for Immigration and Integration Policy, 2022, and European Commission, 2016).

In Chapter 3, the focal point is on the integration practices of Italy that are put under scrutiny to provide a sample of how it works at the national level, taking into account the degree of discrepancy existing between the EU Member States.

Evidence shows that even if there is still a lot to do to effectively identify integration as a priority in migration and asylum policies due to some reluctant waves, Italy counts on adequate bases, still questionable and insufficient to an extent, for which joint efforts and improvements are needed, especially if considering the recent results of the political elections that might shape the future integration National Plans.

The regulatory changes and significant changes in the migratory framework that have occurred in recent years have resulted in the need to readjust the operational programmes and projects that have already been activated to ensure their consistency with the changed conditions of the reference context in some cases. The need to plan by objectives stems from this criticality, combining the need to plan actions and projects that can be quickly operational, and thus in an advanced stage of development, also to avoid the so-called automatic disengagement of European resources, with the ability to adapt to changes, which is obtained through programming based on modularity and flexibility.

As a result, sufficiently broad objectives must be defined within which different interventions can be activated, capable of responding to new needs and emergency situations, such as those caused by the Covid-19 epidemic spreading in waves (Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Directorate-General for Immigration and Integration Policy, 2022).

The general conclusions are that behind the *façade* of the *New Action Plan* there is an old building of unanswered questions that can be handled thanks to a better coordination between the EU and the MSs on the subject of migration.

The responsibilities for heavy irregular migration must be shared at the European level for some questions that halt its decision-making system, which are also owed to Member States. Even when Member States have the option, they do not always act on a national level, because migration has become a kind of political ‘punching ball’, with

immigrants being blamed for various phenomena for which they cannot be considered the authors. Many times, irregular migrants, or even migrants *tout court*, are used as a scapegoat, in the sense they are even attributed the faults they do not have.

This, sometimes, also happens in Italy (Interview N. 3).

Notwithstanding the general will to integrate and include migrants and people with a migrant background on the side of many stakeholders who launched a series of meaningful projects, strong efforts is still needed for the safeguard of migrants' rights. The role of the Regions is essential for a bottom-up approach that can zoom in on specific needs and shape the direction of the guidelines proposed at the EU level.

They have been the primary interlocutor for the planning of interventions aimed at the social and labor integration of migrants, as they make it possible to take into account the peculiarities of the migratory phenomenon, of the different communities and of the local labor market. In this perspective, via specific public notices, the Regions have been entrusted with the creation of regional intervention plans, in which the beneficiary Administrations have involved, by means of co-planning procedures, local authorities, schools and the third sector (Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Directorate-General for Immigration and Integration Policy, 2022).

As it came out from the interviews, the whole picture is fragmented, and it varies a lot according to the area. This demands an analysis showing the different layers of society who should commit to the drafting and implementation in the integration and inclusion measures. The related practices should not be relegated to specific time-framed projects and should move beyond that logic, allowing migrants to be assisted during all the steps of their integration in a society, even when they lose the conditions under which reception is granted or their experience comes to an end.

## Chapter 1

### The multifaceted Integration and Inclusion Plan

The *Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027* is built around four main pillars: education, employment, healthcare and housing. They lay the groundwork for the accomplishment of the practices related to the integration and inclusion of third-country nationals as well as people with a migrant background. They are also identified as the biggest sectors in which migrants constantly face many challenges and, supposedly, the easiest ones for EU institutions and EU Member States to negotiate and reach an agreement on.

[...] The *Action Plan* participates in this focus of European integration on economic and social integration. However, it makes sense that precisely these areas are those ones that interest us most because they contribute to the socio-economic integration of migrants and people with a migrant background. [...] Especially on the issues that could be linguistic and cultural, related to citizenship and so on, there is resistance on the part of Member countries to accept action by the European institutions in these areas which are extremely delicate from a political point of view, as we know that not all countries have a certain model of integration of newcomers, whether they are migrants or refugees or whatever, related to a certain political or cultural model, which varies a lot between Member countries.

Our *Action Plan* takes into consideration these areas because they are those ones in which there is more consensus linked to the results of European integration. This differs from the variability that instead exists in other areas of integration that could have been under the scope of this *Action Plan*, but on which there is not sufficient consensus on the part of the Member States to allow action by the European institutions at the European level (Interview N.3).

The European Union is a mosaic of communities whose miscellaneous population with diverse origins and nationalities enriches the European cultural heritage.

As a matter of fact, migration has always been part of the process of evolution of European societies. The European Union promotes its European way of life

disseminating the EU's fundamental values aimed at fighting against discrimination and protecting multilingualism and multiculturalism. The European Commission, disposing of the right of initiative, fulfils its functions by elaborating a series of documents, including action plans in the form of communications, that outline the activities it envisages to undertake in relation to a certain issue or a given policy area. Nevertheless, it is clear that disparities between Member States may blur the comprehensive approach enhanced by the EU Commission in collaboration with the other EU institutions, due to the lack of legally binding rules *stricto sensu* in the area of integration, dictated by the division of competences between the European Union and its Member States concerning immigration, revealing a soft power of the EU (Parliament, 2011).

Indeed, it has been confirmed by some actors that there are few areas of convergence in terms of what the 'land result' should be (Interview N.3), which is the arrival point of the integration process, because national governments' integration models are not identical to each other and even regional models may often differ from the former, resulting in a wide range of desirable effects from a political and social standpoint.

This phenomenon – which has already been observed and made manifest in Italy,<sup>3</sup> for example – is known as fragmentation, implying that the translation of general principles into local programmes led by municipalities is far from being homogeneous. Still, community-level interventions are indispensable when talking about integration because of the localities' direct interaction with newcomers whose needs have an immediate impact on the small-scale districts (OECD, 2018).

Moreover, it comes out that, in some Member States, integration policies are currently absent or very weak because they have drastically scaled back their efforts, or have adopted an opposing viewpoint, despite the fact that many political parties in Europe prioritise integration in their immigration and refugee policies (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, 2020, p.3).

So, the *Plan* is founded on the premise that integration and inclusion should be the final outcomes of migration and these baseline elements need to be addressed.

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<sup>3</sup> 'Refugee Integration Webinar: Linking NIEM results to the EU Action Plan': <https://www.migpolgroup.com/index.php/2021/09/20/refugee-integration-webinar/?fbclid=IwAR18I2faEmDHo2G4sAku0V8HZCUt8F2IXPdaPcInMq-01XpiwSFkRXJAv-E>.

A growing concern for the European Commission is that, since it doesn't have the legislative power to impose anything on the Member States, it cannot apply coercive provisions, including threats of infringement in case of the incorrect implementation of some norms. Then, its primary mechanism adopted for integration is funding, underpinned by various forms of assistance, such as the exchange of best practices and the organisation of events. Additionally, some horizontal issues (strong partnership with local authorities), having an impact on every pillar, are difficult to fulfil because they are strictly dependent on the Member States' different attitudes, interests, financial profiles, and social structures. The number of migrants per country, the structure of the state, along with the functioning of – and access to – the healthcare system (as one of the most challenging sectors) are sufficient factors to prove that there is no universal response to migrants' integration all over the EU as a strategy to support migrants' instances.<sup>4</sup>

It emerges that responsibility relies mostly on MSs, or it is at least ascribed to them. It is out of the question that MSs play a key role because they deal with the transposition of EU Directives nationwide, but it will also become evident that in terms of funds there's a substantial part whose use is left up to Member State's discretion rather than being devoted to specific projects. This indeterminateness sheds out on some contradictions related to the management of the phenomenon of migration inside – and at the borders of – the European Union. In addition, the lack of clarity and the absence of a common line of conduct poses a threat to migrants, exposing them to the concrete risks of marginalisation and exclusion.

To check this aspect, a numerous set of integration indicators has been taken as a reference point (OECD, NIEM, MIPEX)<sup>5</sup> with respect to some dimensions, such as legal, civic, socio-economic, socio-cultural, working, educational, skills-led, inclusion and cohesion-related, aimed at measuring all-round the degree of efficacy of the responses to migrants integration and assessing the efforts made by governments in this regard. The indexes serve as tools to ensure that every piece composing the big puzzle of integration is covered in a way to foster communication and build bridges

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<sup>4</sup> Re-elaborated version of the information acquired through the interview N. 2.

<sup>5</sup> OECD: <https://www.oecd.org/els/mig/indicatorsofimmigrantintegration.htm>.

NIEM: <http://www.forintegration.eu/>.

MIPEX: <https://migrationresearch.com/item/mipex-migrant-integration-policy-index/474311>,

between the receiving societies and the people on the move encouraging migrants' active participation in the community they live, together with the communities' same active involvement in return.

In view of forward-looking and solid strategies, the EU Commission and the European Union at large foresee strict present and future cooperation with the other relevant actors concerned. Thence, the *Plan* takes into account the *Report on the consultation on the integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background* underlining the importance of the adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach, which has been identified as the primary objective of the latest *Action Plan* as well as its main novelty. This *Report* is nothing but a preparatory document including the results of both public and organised targeted consultations with a variety of stakeholders, such as the Assembly of European Regions, the Committee of the Regions, Oxfam, the UNHCR, the IOM Europe, and civil society organisations, with the surprising direct participation of migrants<sup>6</sup>, as it has been highlighted in the *Action Plan* itself.

Another initiative sponsored under the direction of the DG HOME is the *Urban Agenda For The Eu Partnership On Inclusion Of Migrants And Refugees*, mentioned in section 5, point I, of the *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2017* (Commission, 2020, p.15). The City of Amsterdam, co-leader of the project, witnessed the participation of other Cities, Governments and Institutions, with whom it drew up and implemented a two-year strategic *Action Plan* as a 'result of a participatory process' (Urban Agenda for the EU, 2021, p.11). This emphasises how goals can be achieved collaboratively and constructively rather than in antagonism or competition. One more reason to strengthen the necessity for the harmonisation of the integration measures in the 27 EU countries.

The four thematic areas corresponding to section four of the *Plan*, namely education, employment, healthcare and housing, are also depicted as the major demanding tasks to confront when a migrant comes across a new culture, language, lifestyle, and social system. Some of the gathered huge difficulties are connected to illegal employment, covid-19 responses, mental health issues, lack of instruments to attain services, recognition of skills, overqualification, mismatches between job supply and demand,

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<sup>6</sup> Migrant-led organisations have been invited to a round-table on 29 September 2020, by the ECRE and the PICUM, which saw as its main interlocutor the DG Home.

houses unattainability, segregation, polarisation and systemic discrimination in the housing market.

In the end, the EU Commission intends to make use of its *Action Plan* to try to level off the practices of integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background in the whole European Union, despite the reluctance this purpose may encounter in the interests of the Member States. The idea is to tackle politically significant concerns but, at the same time, issues whose relevance hasn't drawn the policymakers' attention yet to dominate their political agendas (Urban Agenda for the EU, 2021, p.13), so as to act promptly in the name of long-term commitments (Commission, 2020, p.7).

Although the limited space of the EU intervention in the sphere of integration, the *Action Plan* put under analysis is supported by other measures of the EU that are going to be explored in the next paragraph.

## **1.1. Background and Legal Framework**

### **1.1.1. Support actions of the EU**

The New EU Commission *Action Plan* is not an isolate in the general backdrop of the road maps towards the successful integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background. It is complementary to other EU strategies that are all guided by the leading principle of 'inclusion for all' (Commission, 2020, p.5) and the European Pillars of Social Rights. They can be listed as follows: the *EU's anti-racism action plan (2020-2025)* that foresees the spread of some instructions for Member States to fight against racism and racial discrimination. This document is in line with the *General Policy Recommendations* of the *European Commission against Racism and Intolerance*, accompanied by the *EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation (2020-2030)* addressed to a large ethnic minority in Europe, together with the *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025* to promote the same opportunities regardless of gender identity, and the *LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025* to preserve the freedom of sexual orientation and expression. Synergies have been built with the *Strategy for the Rights of persons with Disabilities 2021-2030*, as well as the first-ever *EU*



*Strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life (2021-2030)*, the *EU Comprehensive Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021-2024)* and the *EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) 2019-2024*, standing up against any form of violence and exclusion from social active participation.

Furthermore, the *Radicalisation Awareness Report* framed by the *EU Agenda on Counter-Terrorism*, the *2021-2025 EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling*, and the *EU citizenship report* point out the goal of striving for migrants' rights, including the ones who naturalised as EU citizens, ensuring their protection against any sort of threat and exploitation.

Another important aspect, also underlined in the *2021-2027 Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion*, is related to digitalisation services and their adoption in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: the launch of the *Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027* and a programme for the digital empowerment destined to migrant women are meant for reaching inclusion by the means of technological tools. The idea is to allow access to IT devices and platforms to all social groups, leaving no one behind, and minimise differences – rather than increase inequalities – due to individual affordability.

Some groups face further hurdles that worsen their already vulnerable situation. Migrants with disabilities, LGBTIQ migrants, women and children – especially if unaccompanied minors – may need differentiated interventions proportionate to the shortcomings they may run into, relative to their condition.

The necessity to involve youth people in mobility projects, within the *Inclusion and Diversity Strategy 2021-2027*, is manifested through the additional funding designed for the Erasmus + exchange programmes.

All these actions of the EU (more than fifty) deal with cross-cutting issues, concerning strictly interrelated dimensions, and cover entirely or partially the same length period of the *Action Plan* under examination. They represent an integral part of the overall blueprint for the safeguarding of people's dignity and integrity upholding the founding values of the European Union.

### 1.1.2. How integration is regulated across the EU

In light of what has been previously introduced, it can be reaffirmed that there is no EU legal provision to standardise the integration plans of the EU Member States, nor their laws or regulations on the subject (European Parliament, 2022).<sup>7</sup> Notably, the EU has no exclusive competence to legislate in the area of migration. Its shared competence is made known via Chapter 2 of the TFEU that, especially in Articles 78, 79 and 80,<sup>8</sup> clarifies the conditions of entry, reception and residence of TCNs, in the framework of a Common European Asylum System whose improvement has been proposed in the *New Pact on Migration and Asylum* (European Commission, September 2020). The latter contains a precise section entitled “Supporting integration for more inclusive societies”, already announcing the launch of the *Action Plan* the author of the present document is analysing. In fact, the EU can incentivise national governments by means of funds, counselling and assistance (e.g., to oppose social exclusion and poverty), even if they keep having direct responsibility for the creation and the implementation of social policies. ‘Yet to a large extent, migrant and refugee inclusion remains an eminently local issue’ (Urban Agenda for the EU, 2021, p.6).

The European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, may establish measures to provide incentives and support for the action of Member States with a view to promoting the integration of third-country nationals residing legally in their territories, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States (Article 79(4) TFEU).

Further mention of integration is made in Paragraph 1(h) of Article 153 of the TFEU<sup>9</sup> also referring to the integration of people who have been precluded from

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<sup>7</sup> European Parliament, Immigration policy: [Immigration policy | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europa.eu/european-parliament/fact-sheets/immigration-policy).

<sup>8</sup> Full text in Appendix A.

<sup>9</sup> Idem.

the access to the labour market, in alignment with Article 166,<sup>10</sup> granting Member States the exercise of their competences in the field.

Nevertheless, it has been equally observed that in spite of dealing with a traditionally intergovernmental policy area mainly focused on national sovereignty, the supranational governance increased in the aftermath of the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009 (Kaunert Christian, 2012) .

According to a NIEM report, it seems, in fact, that the EU countries are more reluctant to enforce the rules rather than to develop a legal structure, which results in dissatisfactory nonuniform integration policies (Sinem, 2021, p.2). Accordingly, the conditions under which the last ones are provided by each MS should rather be made explicit (EPRS, 2021, p.98).

The general willingness of the EU Member States is even clearer if looking at the “advancements” achieved by the Council of the European Union, together with the European Council, until June 2022 as a response to the flows of migrants putting under pressure the EU migration policy: these programmes include the reinforcement of the controls at the external border of the EU, along with the reform of the monitoring and identification system (Eurodac and Screening Regulations, respectively) and the ratification of the declaration of solidarity, mostly centred on financial contributions.<sup>11</sup> This securitisation wave can change its narrative and the issues of integration and inclusion can gain political prominence with a full implementation of the EU *Action Plan* thanks to the joint efforts of the Council of the EU, acting as a representative of the Member States, and make a significant step to go beyond the competences of the EU as a whole.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, following recent violations of migrants’ rights trying to reach the EU by crossing its borders, it is of primary importance to bear in mind some Council of Europe Conventions, such as the *European Convention on Human*

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<sup>10</sup> Idem.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Council approves negotiating mandates on Eurodac and screening regulations’: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-migration-policy/migration-timeline/> and ‘The EU and its member states are working on concrete measures to safeguard Europe’s security and reinforce the EU’s external borders’: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/strengthening-external-borders/>.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Op-ed: The new Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion: Promising Elements, Rising Expectations’: <https://ecre.org/op-ed-the-new-action-plan-on-integration-and-inclusion-promising-elements-rising-expectations/>.

*Rights* (1953) and the *European Social Charter* (1961), as well as the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* (2000) and the *Geneva Convention* (1951) shedding light to the international-law principle of *non-refoulement* and to the protection of human rights indiscriminately (ICF Consulting Services, 2020, pp.11-12).

Two monumental cornerstones in the domain of integration at the EU level are, first of all, the Justice and Home Affairs Council *Common Basic Principles for Immigrant Integration Policy in the EU* (November 2004)<sup>13</sup>, and the *European Code of Conduct on Partnership* (ECCP). They can be summarised in migrants' equal access to education, job opportunities, democratic life, the extensive exercise of their rights in favour of intercultural dialogue and communication between all the relevant actors, fostering solid cooperation taking into account the essential role of civil society.

In any case, in the absence of common legislation, other valuable references to make recourse to are the *Employers Sanctions Directive (2009/52/EC)*, the *Seasonal Workers Directive (2014/36/EU)*, the *Temporary Protection Directive 2001/55/EC*, the *Revised Blue Card Directive (2021/1883/EU)*, the *Revised Single Permit Directive (2011/98/EU)*, the *Revised Long Term Residents Directive (2003/109/EC)*, and the *Family Reunification Directive (2003/86/EC)*. They constitute in their entirety the benchmark in the intricate process of integration, being part of a recent EU Commission package<sup>14</sup> structured for migrants' workplace safety, highly skilled migrants, and already resident migrants, towards a possible future simplification of the linked procedures (admission, permanence, responses for the long period). Nonetheless, it is less probable that the target group of these actions will go through substantial changes. Those possibilities are even more discouraged if the attention is turned to people who do not benefit from these schemes and who are practically the same who do not have the opportunity to opt

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<sup>13</sup> Introduced in the above-mentioned report on page 3. The complete set of principles can be found in the Appendices (Appendix A).

<sup>14</sup> 'Legal migration: Attracting skills and talent to the EU':

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_22\\_2654](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_2654) Document taken as a reference point: European Commission, *Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions, Attracting skills and talent to the EU*, Brussels, 2022.

for a legal solution to move. Thus, such an impact is not certain and will maybe be unaltered (Interview N.2).

The fact remains that these recast proposals (e.g., Talent Pool)<sup>15</sup> have been drafted under a logic of emergency after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the consequent mass flows of refugees knocking at the doors of the European Union. The huge number of Ukrainians asking for asylum or complementary protection, corresponded with an escalation in the needs of integration of a different typology from the one that has been initially conceived under the scope of the New *Action Plan* (Interview N.3).

## **1.2. Budget, Funds, Expenditures: the Multiannual Financial Framework**

Since the social and economic integration-related decisions are decentralised among the EU Member States, it may be difficult to speed up the integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background. The EU has a big responsibility for supplementing the *Action Plan* with appropriate support in terms of funds and initiatives sponsorship. This is planned to be done in the context of the Multiannual Financial Framework (IOM, 2020, p.5) which, as well as enlisting the spending priorities, also reflects the political prerogatives of the Union as a whole. It has to be reminded that the EU does not always manage directly the expenditures in the area of migration at the national level, but it mainly shares their implementation with the Member States, under the shared management principle (Blas, 2016, p.3). Efforts have been made to raise awareness of the pre-eminence of long-term investments in the integration and inclusion of migrants and refugees in view of the present and future fulfilment of political goals, such as the Covid-19 recovery. Devoted funds – below the title of the Next Generation EU temporary instruments – are going to be channelled to contain the effects of the health emergency. The changing urgencies and the contending policy objectives that erupted continue to pose a threat to the integration of newcomers and the inclusion of migrant descendants, in danger of losing weight in

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<sup>15</sup> ‘The European Commission launched a new online job search tool, the EU Talent Pool pilot initiative, to help those fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine with securing employment in the European Union’: [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/european-commission-launches-eu-talent-pool-pilot-initiative\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/european-commission-launches-eu-talent-pool-pilot-initiative_en).

the priorities of decision-makers in the private and public spheres (Urban Agenda of the EU, 2021, p.10). During the preparatory stages, the commitments expressed in the *Action Plan* were in line with the budgetary figures foreseen for the years to come. However, another shocking scenario outbroke after the traumatic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, namely the Russian attack on Ukraine and its severe consequences all over the EU territory. As a matter of fact, a redefinition of the annual budget – that has to abide by the MFF – has been required and some adjustments for the year 2023 have already been published (Commission, Technical adjustment of the multiannual financial framework for 2023 in accordance with Article 4 of Council Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2020/2093 laying down the multiannual financial framework for the years 2021 to 2027, 2022), together with a series of decisions that have been taken to adapt to the circumstances.<sup>16</sup>

However, I see no other solution than to adapt to the problems that are arising, as, for example, all the issues related to Covid have impacted both on the implementation, but also on the vision of this *Action Plan* in the first months of its adoption. [...] I do not think it was possible to foresee it but, unfortunately, we already see that the capacities, the budget, and the resources made available for this *Action Plan* are not sufficient. [...]

What we already notice is that the Member States are reorienting what they had initially proposed under the integration frame to respond to the emergency. Now, of course, even if the entire AMIF funds were used for this aim, they would not be enough for the basic reception. [...]

But, in addition to the funds that are actually dedicated to integration, 400 million euros will be distributed according to the number of people who have been granted temporary protection (Interview N.3).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The ceilings for the area of Migration and Border Management are equivalent to 151 million euros in current prices (p.5).

<sup>17</sup> 'Furthermore, with a modification to the General Budget for 2022, the Commission made available 400 million euros for AMIF and the Border Monitoring and Visa Instrument (BMVI) from the 2021-2027 budget, to be disbursed in the form of Emergency Assistance (EMAS)' (ECRE and PICUM, 2022, p.3).

To better understand the variety of the funds that the MFF embraces and assigns to migration – as well as the ones that have been allocated in the second instance – a first focus will be on the process that underlies the drafting of the EU long-term budget, to move after to a scrutiny of the peculiar features of the funding instruments.

The EU Commission prepares a multiannual budget for a minimum period of five years, as stated in Article 312 of the TFEU,<sup>18</sup> whose legal basis has been provided with the Treaty of Lisbon. The new MFF regulates EU funds for the ongoing seven-year period from 2021 to 2027, and it is the outcome of the proposals of the EU Commission, started in 2018, and the subsequent approval from the two institutions in charge of the adoption of the EU budget, namely the EU Parliament and Council, in 2020.<sup>19</sup> Although the new MFF entered into force in 2021, the remaining finances, where present,<sup>20</sup> are still effective while waiting for the progress on MSs' writing of their national programmes, which has already begun.<sup>21</sup> Regardless of the delay of their actual adoption, those funds are going to be used retroactively (with reference to the past two years 2021-2022) and a part of them will probably be allocated to Ukrainians' reception and basic needs by the neighbouring countries (Interview N.3).<sup>22</sup> This reprogramming has been validated by a newly released policy note, published by ECRE and PICUM, declaring that some legislative changes have been brought to the Cohesion Policy and Home Affairs Funds via advanced payments and recourse to unspent money from the past seven-year budget (ECRE and PICUM, 2022).

If compared to its predecessor, the 2021-2027 MFF displays some innovative elements, but it also carries some old schemes. It is substantially based on the flexibility, complementarity and conditionality clauses, to allow the EU Member States to get prepared for potential crises or emergencies and the evolving needs, to

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<sup>18</sup> Full text in Appendix A.

<sup>19</sup> The Parliament is entitled to give its consent, and then the Council acts following a special legislative procedure, with some exceptions foreseeing the participation of the European Council despite not having legislative power (Parliament, The European Council and the Multiannual Financial Framework, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Some countries, like Germany, declared that no fund from the previous financial framework is left. Source: 'European Union financial response to support displaced people from Ukraine inside the EU': <https://ecre.org/ecre-picum-policy-note-displacement-from-ukraine-the-eus-financial-response/>.

<sup>21</sup> '19 programmes have been adopted': [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/home-affairs-funds-adoption-member-states-programmes-2021-27-period-2022-09-28\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/home-affairs-funds-adoption-member-states-programmes-2021-27-period-2022-09-28_en).

<sup>22</sup> 'As of June 2022, only 1 billion euros of cohesion funds was indicatively re-programmed by 10 Member States as a result of the CARE initiatives' (ECRE and PICUM, 2022).

make recourse to supplementary external funds, and to be subjected to financial cuts in case of misconduct, human rights violations or rule of law breaches.

The overall amount has been significantly augmented and added to a bigger package (the largest ever financed through the EU budget)<sup>23</sup> of €2.018 trillion in current prices, made up of the MFF and the previously mentioned Next Generation EU recovery instrument, composed likewise of the Recovery and Resilience Facility and additional funds destined to other projects – such as the INVESTEU and the REACT-EU, which are revealing themselves to be particularly relevant in this context.

The funds are then differentiated in relation to the tailored actions and objectives to fulfil, and their extensive use is explained through toolkits, guides,<sup>24</sup> and webinars, since every fund is subjected to its own regulation.

Section 5, point II, of the *Action Plan* (Commission, 2020, pp.17-19) presents the new funds' allocation conceived for precise measures under distinct headlines. So, each spending category is grouped by different names according to the policy area of intervention. It has been devoted, for the first time, a specific heading to Migration and Border Management (Heading IV) and to some transversal issues, such as Security and Defence (Heading V) and Neighbourhood and the World (Heading VI), which was not present in the previous multiannual package. Each heading is in turn divided into subgroups with dedicated funding tools. Most notably, heading IV – which keeps being the smallest one since the beginning of the negotiations – displays a sum total of € 25.7 billion (current prices) aimed at allocating endowments to the AMIF and IMBF respectively. The AMIF represents the main funding instrument in the field of integration, as well as the European Social Fund +. The former has as its primary target pre-integration measures (first-level integration)<sup>25</sup> and it covers four macro areas, namely asylum policy, legal migration and integration, irregular migration and returns,<sup>26</sup> solidarity and responsibility sharing between the Member States. A

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<sup>23</sup> 'The main novelties of the EU's long-term budget, its revenue and spending areas and the NextGenerationEU recovery instrument': [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/2021-2027/whats-new\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/2021-2027/whats-new_en).

<sup>24</sup> *Toolkit on the use of EU funds for the integration of people with a migrant background* (European Commission, 2018) and *Guide to EU Funding on Migration and Asylum* (Blas, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Interview N. 5.

<sup>26</sup> 'Return policies are mainly supported by EU funding (75% of the costs are carried by the EU and the rest is remitted to national budgets). In particular, a huge amount of funds comes from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund AMIF set up on the basis of multi-annual programmes then



percentage of 15% for every integration-related point should be respected. This tool is mainly managed at the local level by means of EU countries' national programmes and a small part is destined to regional authorities to boost their integration practices (structural funds).<sup>27</sup> Its general amount is much higher than the 2014-2020 one and corresponds to € 9.9 billion (current prunes), but it is still not enough if compared to the € 14.4 billion allocations for border management under the IBMF. The latter is made up of two instruments devoted to border management and visas (86 % of IBMF resources) and customs control equipment (14 %), together with a conspicuous financial contribution addressed to the decentralised agencies like the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex).

Among the Cohesion Policy Funds, the above-mentioned ESF+ plays a key role because it widens its sphere of work to second-level integration touching all the pillars listed in the *Action Plan* (€99.3 billion for the 2021-2027 period). For example, its employment would also be useful to combat the discrimination in the housing market, still posing enormous difficulties for migrants looking for a place where to live.

So, the EU intends to provide additional funding to the expanded scope of the *Action Plan*, in support of integration and inclusion, such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), the Erasmus+, and the European Solidarity Corps (ESC).

Instead, the headings V and VI deal with internal security, fight against terrorism and radicalisation, humanitarian aid and external action, stressing once again that the primary interest is pointed towards the outer dimension of the EU migration policy.

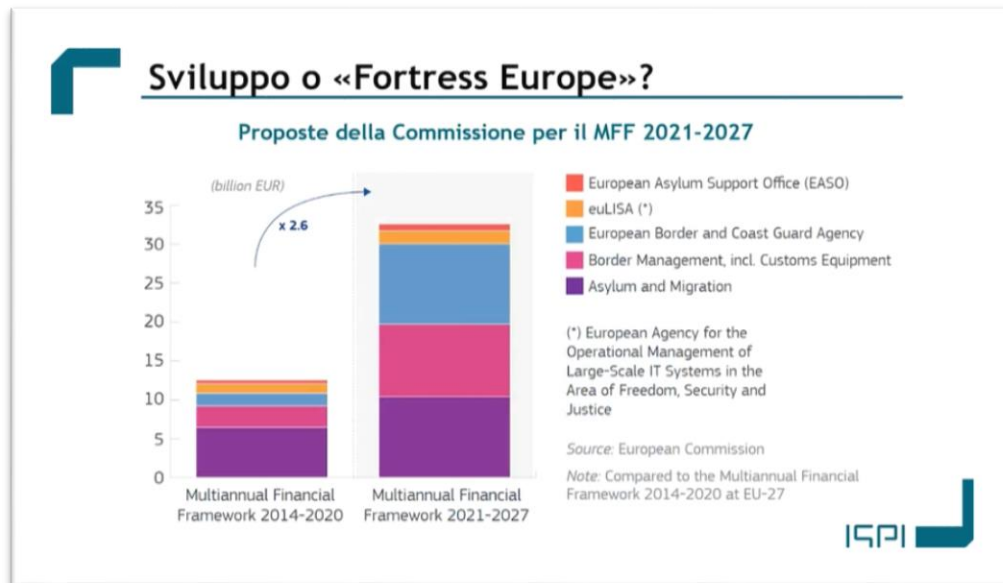
The EU wants to make access to those funds easier with a delivery system mostly based on the number of migrants per country, as well as countries' GDP. Notably, the EU Commission seeks to standardise integration and inclusion through a variety of funding instruments reflecting the "multidimensional nature" of the processes (Urban Agenda of the EU, 2021, p.10).

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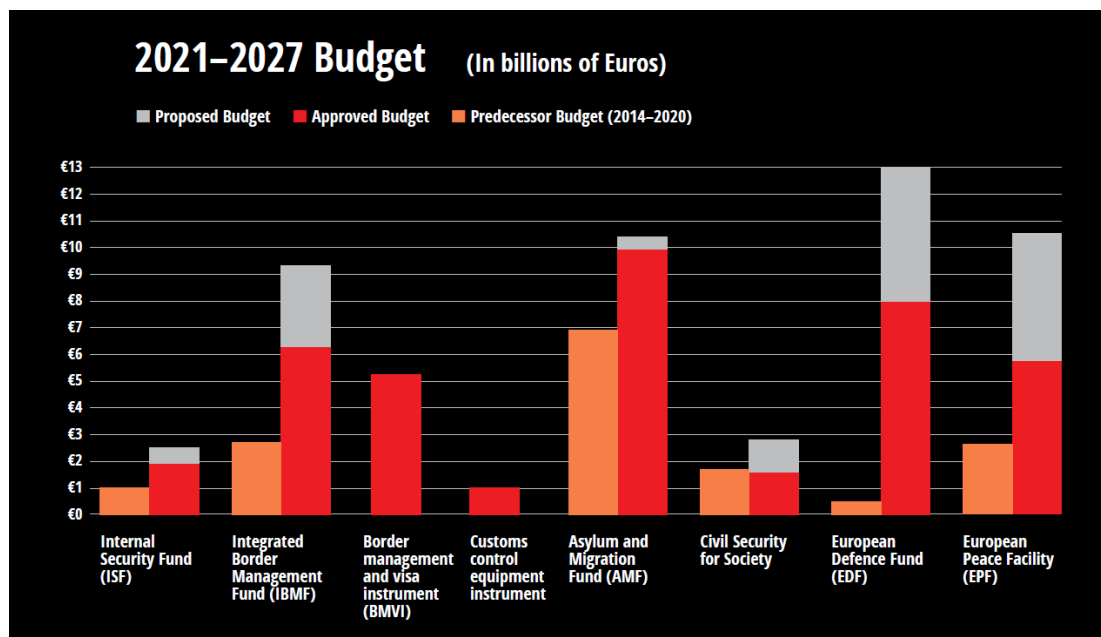
implemented at the national level.' (Amato Valentina in Maurizio Malogioglio et als., 2022, pp.152-153).

<sup>27</sup> 'EU funds for migrant integration 2021-2027': [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/funding/eu-funds-2021-2027-period\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/funding/eu-funds-2021-2027-period_en) and 'Home affairs funds: Council adopts €18 billion funds for 2021-2027': [https://www.europa-nu.nl/id/vljnhgiw4kz2/nieuws/home\\_affairs\\_funds\\_council\\_adopts\\_18](https://www.europa-nu.nl/id/vljnhgiw4kz2/nieuws/home_affairs_funds_council_adopts_18).

For an overview of the new multiannual budget (the initial EU Commission’s proposal underwent some cuts on the Council’s side):



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<sup>28</sup> From the on-demand course *The Geopolitics of Migrations*, ISPI, The Italian Institute for International Political Studies <https://school.ispionline.it/course/geopolitica-delle-migrazioni#/home>. Please, note that the EASO has been replaced by the EUAA since January 2022, changing its status into an EU agency for all intents and purposes.

<sup>29</sup> A prospect of the approved budget after the consultations and negotiations with the EU Parliament and Council (Chris Jones, 2022, p.23).

Some considerations are required. Concerns have been raised in relation to some aspects of the new multiannual budget. The length-period is maybe too large and general and there's a risk that the funds may be dispersed and redirected to other priorities.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the criteria of distribution of funds appear not to be directly proportionate to the number of asylum requests per country (especially, if thinking about frontline countries)<sup>31</sup> and civil society is not often included among the beneficiaries of those funding instruments (Lang, 2019).

More precisely, the ECCP, that is in charge of the partnership rules for the Cohesion Policy, doesn't leave much space for the AMIF, whose common conduct on funds' adoption has not been agreed by Member States, more eager to a voluntary partnership, differently from the provisions associated to the ESF+. This compromises the involvement of NGOs and their fundamental engagement in various programmes in the field of integration and inclusion, taking into account the fact that they play an essential role in decreasing existing gaps between the different categories of migrants' and they don't often dispose of sufficient funds for that.

As far as the health crisis is concerned, it has been remarked that no NGEU funds have been destined to migration in an exclusive way, paying less attention to the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on migrants, which generated as a consequence a limited response.<sup>32</sup> It resulted that health hasn't been sufficiently prioritised.

Another aspect to be underlined is the major focus on the external dimension of the EU, which is unfavourable for the effective and successful integration and inclusion's deep-rooted actions. Short-term migration measures and security issues are going to prevail over development cooperation objectives.

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<sup>30</sup> 'Op-ed: The new Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion: Promising Elements, Rising Expectations': <https://ecre.org/op-ed-the-new-action-plan-on-integration-and-inclusion-promising-elements-rising-expectations/>.

<sup>31</sup> The *Dublin Regulation* has to be taken as a reference point in this respect: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/country-responsible-asylum-application-dublin-regulation\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/common-european-asylum-system/country-responsible-asylum-application-dublin-regulation_en).

<sup>32</sup> Even the Recommendations on EU funding for the Recovery Plan are not enough accurate on the matter. Source: <https://ecre.org/op-ed-the-new-action-plan-on-integration-and-inclusion-promising-elements-rising-expectations/#>.

The European Anti-Fraud Office (French: OLAF) published its last report in 2022, where Frontex's conduct has been put under scrutiny because of its violent border policy mainly based on illegal pushbacks and consequent human rights abuses and violations, through an extension of surveillance via Europol's assistance.<sup>33</sup> This caused the astonishment of the European Commission and drove the Parliament Control Committee to reject the approval of the budget which is supposed to finance the European Agency.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, a Press Release by the EU Parliament (2019) shows its previous commitment to strengthening the support for the Agency into question – with an increase in the staff members until 2027 – and the agreements with third countries to manage the flows. The repercussions of stricter border policies undermine the human dimension of migration and jeopardise migrants' integrity by opening more doors to irregular migration and smuggling as a reaction, as well as putting the EU at risk of blackmail by non-EU countries asking for more funding (Lang, 2019, p.24) . To conclude, as previously disclosed, Cohesion Policy and Home Affairs Funds have been subjected to some changes under the umbrella of the new MFF. The introduction of the Flexible Assistance to Territories (FAST-CARE), as a prompt answer to the Russian attack on Ukrainian territories, intensifies the aid to cope with the refugees' crisis, in the domains enlisted in the *Action Plan*. Member States are supposed to receive pre-financing payments – up to €3.5 billion – between 2022 and 2023. The fostering of integration and inclusion is even more supported by co-financing on the EU's side and cross-financing to divert the funds' use according to the necessities. The ESF and the ERDF can be employed in an interchangeable way and national plans can be modified in order to update the actions to carry out in alignment with the integration and inclusion policies. Last but not least, Member States are allowed to revise and adapt the Regulation on the FEAD, without a formal EU Commission's verdict.

These contingent resolutions are going to be implemented to the detriment of other policy areas: the EU Commission had to revoke some calls from the agenda on

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<sup>33</sup> Including the collection of sensitive data by means of new digital instruments (PICUM, 2022).

<sup>34</sup> 'Frontex: MEPs Vote to Refuse Approval of Budget, Commission "Shocked" by OLAF Report but Confident in Management Board as Agency Calls Misconduct "Practices of the Past" NGOs Finds No Difference': <https://ecre.org/frontex-meps-vote-to-refuse-approval-of-budget-commission-shocked-by-olaf-report-but-confident-in-management-board-as-agency-calls-misconduct-practices-of-the-past/>.

inclusion to provide immediate funding to countries tackling the emergency (ECRE and PICUM, 2022, p. 8).

### 1.3. Beneficiaries: the shadow of undocumented migrants

‘Migrants are “us”, not “them”.’<sup>35</sup>

This paragraph aims at investigating who actually are the recipient groups of the *New Action Plan*. As its title may suggest, migrants and people with a migrant background are the biggest categories under the scope of the *2021-2027 Plan*.

The author is wondering whether the *Plan* offers, as a matter of fact, to all migrants the possibility to be integrated in the receiving society and to EU foreign-born citizens – or with foreign-born parents – the opportunity to feel included in the reality they decided to live in. The widened target coverage of the *Action Plan* would be confirmed by the declared intentions of the EU Commission to switch to a uniquely human-centred approach. However, some of the interviews already provided proof that the extension of the scope to asylum seekers and undocumented migrants cannot be guaranteed, because the *Plan* is only addressed to migrants who are legally resident in the territory or whose status has more possibilities to be recognised (Interview N.2 and 3).<sup>36</sup> ‘People in irregular situations are rather the object of measures of both voluntary and forced return’ (Interview N.3) and when their situation is pending they cannot work, nor be involved in long-lasting projects, with a consequent significant and traumatic impact on their mental health (Interview N.2). They cannot even go back to their country of origin until the formal recognition of their status, in order not to lose it (Interview N.3).

Actually, already at a first glance of the incipit of the *Action Plan*, it is possible to read that the EU Commission assures the integration of the people ‘who have the right to stay’ (European Commission, 2020). This prominently controversial issue raises a

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<sup>35</sup> Extract from the speech of the Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, presenting the *New Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027*: <https://www.pubaffairsbruxelles.eu/eu-institution-news/inclusion-for-all-commission-presents-action-plan-on-integration-and-inclusion-2021-2027/>.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Provide adapted and autonomous housing solutions as early as possible for refugees and asylum seekers who are likely to be granted international protection, and enable a smooth transition for asylum seekers to independent living once they have been granted international protection’ (European Commission, 2020, p.15).

series of questions on the nature of the value of the terminology adopted. The umbrella term employed does not take into account the whole spectrum of realities linked to migration, e.g., the precariousness of displaced people which is very frequent, as well as economic and environmental migrants whose status is not even recognised by the international community, for which there are many knowledge gaps.

It has also been remarked that even the Eurobarometer – in the form of an opinion survey conducted by the EU Commission to collect the EU citizens’ perspectives on certain phenomena – when it comes to integration, makes a specific focus on migrants who are legally present on the territory (Interview N.3).<sup>37</sup>

The choice of such a circumscribed target is apparently due to the lack of political will of many MSs to conceive a positive narrative around migration rather than a distorted factual basis (Interview N.3). Moreover, it happens very often that migrants wait many years for the Territorial Commissions to analyse their situation and declare the typology of protection they can be granted, including no protection at all. In case of denial, the migrant can file an appeal with the help of a lawyer, launching a very long procedure that may last years.<sup>38</sup> Thus, it should be taken into account how long it takes for a migrant to have “the right to stay”. Otherwise, this expression risks being perceived as nothing but an empty name to be filled according to the national rules and leading ideologies. Too much room for interpretation is left at the Member States’ discretion<sup>39</sup> and the matter still remains unclear. In the opinion of some organisations, a possible solution to avoid marginalisation and exclusion is to provide clear instructions to the managing authorities responsible for the EU funds.<sup>40</sup> What can emerge from some interlocutors is that it lacks the willingness to invest in people, namely the asylum seekers, whose future is totally uncertain and unpredictable (Interviews N.4 and N.5).

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<sup>37</sup> This tool will be explored in the next Chapter in relation to the monitoring instruments.

<sup>38</sup> For example, the author has been told about some experiences in the Italian territory concerning unaccompanied minors who first need a guardian *ad litem* whose appointment makes the process even slower. As a consequence, the Territorial Commission cannot exercise its function until this bureaucratic step is fulfilled (Interview N.1).

<sup>39</sup> The common answers provided by some actors at the local level in the Italian context will be explored later on.

<sup>40</sup> See: <https://ecre.org/op-ed-the-new-action-plan-on-integration-and-inclusion-promising-elements-rising-expectations/>.

Asylum seekers are excluded from the integration path until their status is defined and therefore, they are essentially “parked” in the reception centers. [...] Their residence permit allows them to work, but, for example, you cannot invest money to activate a job grant/internship or use the SPRAR<sup>41</sup> funding to do a training course, because this is not expected. So, when you already make this distinction, you are automatically expelling, let's say ghettoizing, a part of migrants, because there are many more asylum seekers than those who have defined statuses (Interview N.5).

There are many misconceptions regarding migration and, contrary to any common thought, it is very easy for a migrant to turn into an irregular situation when the conditions for his stay are not suitable. The possibilities of irregularity are many and they may follow different patterns: starting from people on the move who crossed the border irregularly and are not able to regularise their status, children born from irregular migrants who are not entitled to citizenship by the right of soil (*Jus soli*).<sup>42</sup> In other cases, they are unaccompanied minors who entered irregularly and who cannot benefit anymore from tailored assistance (foreseen for undocumented children) once they turn 18 years old. Furthermore, people who are temporary resident with tourist visas and started an irregular working experience, migrants who are registered under a false identity, seasonal workers who overstay exceeding the terms of their contract. The list goes on with people who have been denied protection from the competent authority, people who don't meet anymore the criteria to be legally resident (e.g., loss of their job, inability to prove an employee contract, end of the course of study), people who have been ordered to return to their country of origin but cannot do that because there isn't agreement with the third country they come from or just pass through. These are all circumstances that can even go beyond the migrants' control. Besides, irregular migrants are more exposed to illegal recruitment of workforce (Peter Scholten et al., 2022). This also marks the ‘failure of labour migration policy to respond to locally unmet labour market needs’ if considering that employment could be a source of regularisation (OECD, 2020). Thence, the implementation of legal channels appears

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<sup>41</sup> Second reception system according to the Italian administration.

<sup>42</sup> Opposite from the *Jus sanguinis*, concerning children acquiring the same citizenship of their parents irrespective of birthplace.

to be the best option to confront all these deficiencies that put together the complexity of the fragmented governance of the migration framework. Regularisation can reduce the probability of migrants' overstay that can be due to 'strict regulations regarding status changes, unannounced or retroactive changes in eligibility, or administrative delays in renewals or changes in status' (OECD, 2020, p. 4) even when the intentions of leaving the destination country – to go back to the country of origin or to move to another one – are present.

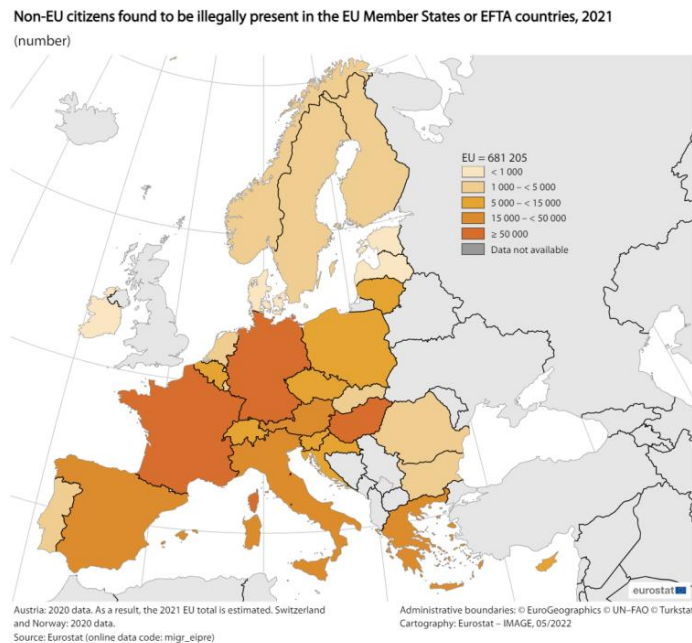
The process should go at the same pace as the procurement of the documentation required to enrol in classes, get a job, access to healthcare, in order to avoid semi-legal statuses and create a direct nexus between legal pathways and integration, as esteemed in the *Report on the consultation on the integration and inclusion of migrants and people with a migrant background* (p. 6), which constitutes, for now, an unfulfilled goal. The *Report* (p. 12) also manifests a preference for 'an intersectional approach to integration' because a homogenous strategy – revealing limited support – risks not to be effective, considering the disparate profiles of migrants. Adding more regular alternatives for people to move without falling into irregularity, could be recommended, in a way to envisages the specific needs (e.g., economic migrants applying for asylum in absence of other channels and burdening asylum corridors).

Another important consideration concerns more broadly the beneficiaries of international protection who face additional challenges (dehumanisation, abuse, exclusion, disparities), being a more vulnerable category. The NIEM published a series of policy briefs enhancing the importance of BIPs' participation to the decision-making process to represent their rights and necessities. E.g., the difficulties they encounter in the housing market are practically absent in the policymakers' agenda of most MSs, or refugees' mental health is not perceived as a priority because of their status (Sinem, 2021).

In the end, the scope of the *Action Plan* extended to people with a migrant background won't probably be fully ensured at the moment, due to the contingency of the Ukrainian refugees crisis (Interview N.3). Nevertheless, the ECRE put an accent on the fact that an excessive focus on this target can be detrimental for people who are already fully-fledged EU citizens and increase differences and discrimination undermining their self-perception, sense of belonging and identity, because they should not be seen as foreigners.



To conclude, from the conceptual point of view, the message conveyed by the EU Commission would be ideal and perfect if entering the EU legally was easier. Ambiguity, uncertainty, along with the lack of stability and regularity, prevent migrants from fully engaging in the life of the community even when there's a strong will to be integrated and included (Caritas Europa, 2021).



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#### 1.4. Solidarity as a leading principle in the European integration process

As declared in the same document, the *Action Plan* is complementary to the *New Pact on Migration and Asylum* (Commission, 2020, p. 2) that shed light on the principles of solidarity and shared responsibility. The *Pact* already announced the forthcoming *New Action Plan*,<sup>44</sup> stressing the importance of integration and inclusion of TCNs as

<sup>43</sup> For further details, 'Third country nationals found to be illegally present - annual data (rounded)': [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr\\_eipre/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/migr_eipre/default/table?lang=en).

It is noteworthy to say that it is difficult to detect irregular migration. This is the reason why the effective number of irregular migrants can slip away from the official statistics.

<sup>44</sup> The negotiations for the 2021-2027 MFF ended in parallel with the proposal of the *New Pact* and put once again the accent on how difficult it is to find consensus among the MSs on matters related to migration.

integral part of a comprehensive strategy to the management of asylum and migration at the EU level.<sup>45</sup>

The author of the dissertation intends to focus on the principle of solidarity that is enshrined in the Treaties with various occurrences, but related to different contexts. In our case, the most relevant are Articles 67 (2)<sup>46</sup> and 80 of the TFEU.

In terms of funds, a part of the AMIF is devoted to solidarity, as one of its main priority areas with a minimum allocation of the 20% in the Member States' programmes.

However, it emerges that this principle, supposedly a cornerstone in the process of European integration (Schumann Declaration, 1950), is mainly forged in the heat of crises and assumes different meanings in relation to the specific issue (D'Alfonso, 2019, p. 47). The externalisation of migration in the EU<sup>47</sup> put solidarity at stake and some Member States complained the absence of solid bases for this principle to be well-grounded.

Italy's [former]<sup>48</sup> Deputy Prime Minister for instance, "threatened to veto the EU's seven-year budget plan if the bloc did not do more to share the burden of migrant arrivals" (Zalan 2018).<sup>49</sup>

This asymmetry is even more evident if thinking about how the principle could be turned into action, namely via return sponsorship, relocation and financial support, shifting the burden of entry measures at the expense of frontline countries. Apparently, it is not 'structurally integrated into the system' differently from what has been agreed in the TFEU (D'Alfonso, 2019). Some NGOs all over the EU also experienced the criminalisation of solidarity for the help and assistance offered to migrants embarked on long journeys along the sea routes, under the accusation of facilitating migrants' smuggling and irregular migration. Thus, a more uniform and humane approach aiming at reshaping solidarity, as an instrument for cohesion in the EU, could be desirable (Porschlegel, 2021).

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<sup>45</sup> 'Migrant integration statistics introduced': [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant\\_integration\\_statistics\\_introduced#Measuring\\_migrant\\_integration](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migrant_integration_statistics_introduced#Measuring_migrant_integration).

<sup>46</sup> Full text in Appendix A.

<sup>47</sup> Confirming the "Fortress Europe approach".

<sup>48</sup> Added by the author of the present dissertation, taking into account the recent results of the elections.

<sup>49</sup> In Knoll A. and Veron P., *Migration and the next EU long-term budget: key choices for external action*, edcpm, making policies work, discussion paper No. 250, March 2019, p. 1.

The EU Commission launched a Solidarity Platform in support of Ukrainians fleeing from the war, as a hub to collect on-topic information. Developments will be checked to understand whether this initiative is going to be implemented on a regular basis or is going to be restricted to precise circumstances.

The rationale of the solidarity mechanism should go beyond the reasoning of need and should constitute a source of mutual trust between the Member States in the spirit of the EU fundamental values. These contradictions risk to overturn the message conveyed through the *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion*.

## Chapter 2

### Continuity and changes

Societies and their economies can be prosperous only if every member can fully benefit from the rights that have been given to every citizen. Support should be provided to everyone without any form of distinction, especially when it comes to people living in very fragile conditions, and integration should be a moral duty for all receiving communities.

The *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion* is the follow-up of the *Action Plan on the Integration of Third Country Nationals* that, passing the baton to its substitute, delivers some hopeful prospects, with the assumption that some aspects still need improvement.

Conceived as a response to the 2015 refugee crisis, the *2016 Action Plan* intended to fuel integration measures within a common policy framework. The basic concept was to develop a set of actions around five priorities, namely pre-departure/pre-arrival operations, education, labour market integration and access to Vocational Training, access to basic services, and active participation and social inclusion, promoted under the 2014-2020 MFF (Commission, 2016). The progress registered after the implementation of the *Plan* has been made available on the *European Website on Integration* and the same is supposed to be done in relation to the *New Action Plan* even if it hasn't been put into practice yet (via an interactive tool). The collected headways proved that the first commitment devoted to pre-departure and pre-arrival measures hasn't gathered any satisfactory results until now.<sup>50</sup> As a matter of fact, this objective covers a very small part of the *2021-2027 Action Plan*, to remind MSs to support migrants in every stage of integration. An evaluation carried out by the ECRE pointed out that the attempts in the priority of pre-departure and pre-arrival operations have been minimal hitherto, and these areas of intervention have been disregarded taking a back seat in relation to other overriding concerns.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> To see the progress in the implementation of the Action Plan: [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/eu-grid/implementation-2016-action-plan-integration\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/eu-grid/implementation-2016-action-plan-integration_en). 'Outputs are listed alongside the Action Plan point that they fulfil and categorised by thematic area.'

<sup>51</sup> 'Op-ed: The new Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion: Promising Elements, Rising Expectations': <https://ecre.org/op-ed-the-new-action-plan-on-integration-and-inclusion-promising-elements-rising-expectations/>.

Section 4 of both *Action Plans* deals with the imperatives of the EU Commission in the field of integration and inclusion, which also constitute the main obstacles migrants currently face to leading a promising and satisfying lifestyle in a given country. The only difference is that the New *Plan* presents them more extensively, devoting definite paragraphs to all features of integration, explaining that the same difficulties can be encountered by people with a migrant background. So, it is possible to affirm that the 2016 *Action Plan* laid down an immediate basis for the integration of TCNs, since it equipped MSs to launch integration national plans even where absent (Ruiz Diaz Lucas J., 2021). In this perspective, the 2021 *Action Plan* is an updated version of the former because it takes into account the present situation, even if it has been conceived before the new refugee wave and it has to be shaped once again in accord with the current challenges (Interview N.2).

Despite the absence of substantial variations in the structure of the two *Action Plans*, some points can be remarked as slight dissimilarities that will be analysed all along the present work: the introduction of inclusion as an objective of the *Plan* – with a subsequent expansion of the target groups – as well as the strengthening of the tools at the EU Commission’s disposal to mainstream integration and inclusion, namely policy coordination and funding. A series of initiatives and projects have been realised and many others are being planned for the years to come, with the intention of involving actors from all levels (multilevel governance), such as social and economic partners, institutions, organisations, national and regional governments, and expert groups, including migrants whose contribution had already been given in the occasion of the first meeting to draft the 2021-2027 *Action Plan* (November the 13<sup>th</sup> 2020).

With regard to funds, the 2014-2020 MFF package has been more than doubled and many instruments to smooth social cohesion have been adopted: it has to be understood and constantly verified where this funding support will be channelled.<sup>52</sup> However, this keeps having the form of recommendation and soft power of the EU towards Member States for which neither a recourse to Article 352 of the TFEU can provide for.<sup>53</sup>

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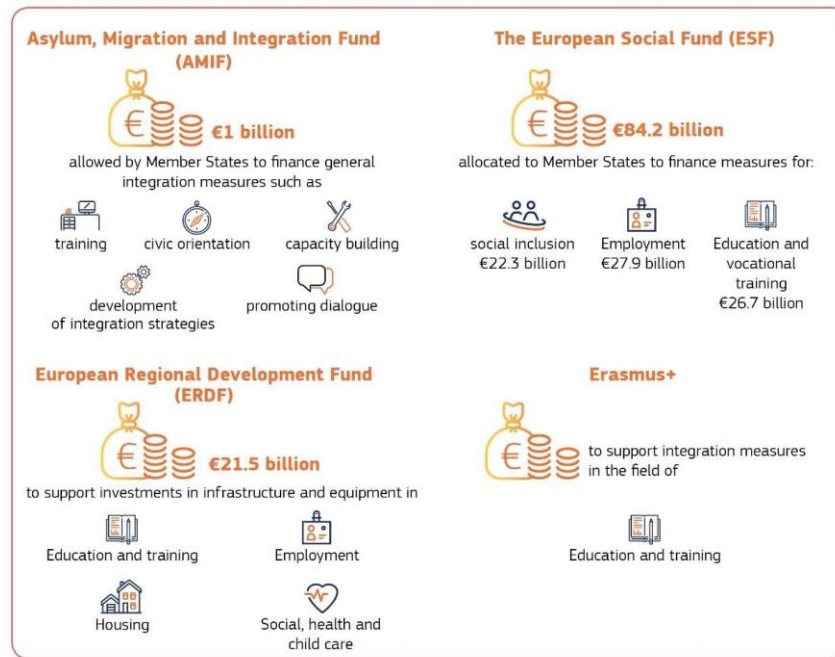
<sup>52</sup> ‘The Commission proposed a significant reinforcement of the EU budget in the areas of migration, borders and security’:

[https://www.euopanu.nl/id/vljnhgiw4kz2/nieuws/home\\_affairs\\_funds\\_council\\_adopts\\_18](https://www.euopanu.nl/id/vljnhgiw4kz2/nieuws/home_affairs_funds_council_adopts_18).

<sup>53</sup> As it ‘again excludes harmonisation of Member States’ laws or regulations’:

<https://eumigrationlawblog.eu/integration-in-the-new-pact-a-difficult-compromise-between-the-lack-of-competence-and-the-importance-of-integration-for-a-successful-migration-policy/>.

This embodies further evidence of the lack of homogeneous strategies in favour of integration and inclusion, especially if taking into account the persistence of such problems in the same sectors (Ruiz Diaz Lucas J., 2021). The claim to a ‘recast of the migration legislation’ should be then considered.<sup>54</sup>



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A significant change concerns ‘the shift from a “status-based” approach to a “need-based” approach’ (ECRE, 2020)<sup>56</sup>: the New *Action Plan* does not seem to make much reference to migrants’ residence status, so as to guarantee basic assistance irrespective of this factor. Nevertheless, it has already been made notice of the fact that their regularity from a legal point of view has been stressed on many occasions in both *Plans*.

Criticism has also been addressed to various aspects of the New *Action Plan*, in its attempts to consolidate and at the same time expand the purposes presented through

<sup>54</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Main EU funds contributing to integration and inclusion under the 2014-2020 period’ in European Commission, *Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions, Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027*, Brussels, 24 November 2020 COM(2020) 758 final, p.18.

<sup>56</sup> <https://ecre.org/op-ed-the-new-action-plan-on-integration-and-inclusion-promising-elements-rising-expectations/>.

its previous commitments. It would rather be characterised by more features of prolongation of already expressed ambitions than surprising innovations.

For example, the definition of integration is missing in the two *Plans*, the same goes for inclusion in the most recent one. There is neither a clear discernment between the rights migrants are entitled to according to international law and the measures that fall on the national law because strictly related to the fulfilment of direct means that make integration and inclusion possible, nor to extra actions taken by Member States on a voluntary basis ('unstructured reference').<sup>57</sup>

Some scholars complain about the logic of need existing behind migrants' integration and inclusion. The impacts of 'non-integration' (Commission, 2016, p.4) may compromise the economy of EU Member States by engendering additional costs on the societies concerned. The Commission stated unequivocally that failing to integrate migrants on time would be a waste of resources on both sides.<sup>58</sup> This underlying rationale is pursued even in the new *Action Plan*, as well as in its presentations and Q&A meetings,<sup>59</sup> where the human sphere is sometimes put aside for the sake of the receiving communities' benefits. Migrants contribute to the growth of societies, and they can also be helpful in essential sectors, particularly in light of the last health crisis: an urgency to go beyond this standpoint is required to develop a more humane approach, based on migrants' recognition regardless of any cognitive bias. Because no justification to welcome and integrate them is needed.

In addition, the New *Action Plan* creates a link between migration and the prevention of radicalisation, implying once again a nexus between migration and security (Ruiz Diaz Lucas J., 2021). So, integration appears to be a means to deter extremism and terrorism, with the tacit assumption that certain ideologies find fertile land among definite groups of people, falling back into the stereotypes connected to foreigners.

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<sup>57</sup> 'Integration in the New Pact: A difficult compromise between a limited EU competence and a successful policy': <https://eumigrationlawblog.eu/integration-in-the-new-pact-a-difficult-compromise-between-the-lack-of-competence-and-the-importance-of-integration-for-a-successful-migration-policy/>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>59</sup> 'Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021 2027. EU debates inclusion for all': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCKHy6YLVCQ>.

Moreover, neither of the two *Plans* cite the UN *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, having among its priority goals integration and inclusion, which is perfectly in line with the declared intentions of the *Action Plans*.<sup>60</sup>

So, except for a few modifications and the changing landscape, ‘the content of the 2016 plan is similar to the 2020 one’.<sup>61</sup>

## 2.1. The barriers to integration

The preparatory phase of the New *Action Plan* led policymakers to reunite themselves – together with all the stakeholders directly involved in the process of integration and inclusion – and collect a series of obstacles that stop this process from fully completing itself. Language is for sure one of the first hurdles posing an enormous threat to migrants’ integration: it happens that classes are not so well-equipped or not differentiated by levels, which can discourage migrants from participating (Interview N. 2). This is the reason why an intersectional approach in the domain of integration would be preferred, rather than a homogeneous one, as it also emerged during the consultations that took place before the final drafting of the *2021-2027 Action Plan* launched on 23 November 2020 (ICF Consulting Services, 2020). The *Report* produced at the end of these public and targeted debates, as well as the *Staff Working Document Accompanying the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027*, provided essential proof of the hindrances that are still problematic. The issue of the language touches, for example, different spheres of integration, undermining all the pillars classified as priorities in the New *Action Plan*. Teachers are not often ready to manage multicultural and multilingual groups and they do not receive adequate support to improve the quality of the education system. The EU Commission is working on incentives for schools or other bodies that succeed in the integration goals, such as awards, to stimulate the community as a whole to create inclusive

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<sup>60</sup> ‘Objective 16 of the GCM aims to increase the empowerment of migrants and societies to realize full inclusion and social cohesion.’: <https://eumigrationlawblog.eu/integration-in-the-new-pact-a-difficult-compromise-between-the-lack-of-competence-and-the-importance-of-integration-for-a-successful-migration-policy/>.

<sup>61</sup> The source considers the year when the *Plan* was conceived: ‘The Action plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027: what implications for migrants?’: <https://pathforeurope.eu/the-action-plan-on-integration-and-inclusion-2021-2027-what-implications-for-migrants/>.



environments (European Commission A. P., 2021). However, looking at the other side of the medal, integration should also be normalised irrespective of the concession of prizes.

Sometimes, the planned initiatives are out of reach because of barriers presented by the mandatory knowledge of a European language and/or the use of digital devices. Digitalisation is another prerogative of the New *Action Plan*, whose relevance increased after the outbreak of the pandemic, and its importance should go at the same pace as the possibility to provide equal access to those services.

Similar challenges are constantly encountered in the area of healthcare: people who work in the field should be trained on the potential cultural diversity of the patients and their related needs. This rarely occurs, and yet it is a fundamental factor considering that migrants may suffer from mental health problems due to traumatic events (and necessitate getting psychological support) or may have delicate situations. Each position should be flanked by an intercultural and linguistic mediator who plays a pivotal role in guaranteeing effective communication and acting as a bridge between the involved cultures. Civic orientation programmes, to help migrants understand the reality surrounding them, have recently been recommended.

Other consistent barriers concern access to justice that requires facilitation (e.g., migrants should be informed and made aware of their rights even thanks to the assistance of a good lawyer in charge of their specific status), the political participation of migrants standing for their instances – which is frequently restricted – and the recognition of their skills. Structural lacks – sometimes due to the local organisation, or to the ineffective administration *per se* – may cause delays in the enacting of those procedures. The UNHCR stresses how even family reunification can be problematic at times: families are obliged to wait a long time before having the opportunity to reunite and this ineluctably impedes the integration of people wishing their family unit to be back together. Many face legal, financial and practical challenges, such as high fees to pay, short application timelines, long waiting times and operations, or requirements for family members abroad to travel to a distant embassy.

Governments should make family reunification a priority for refugees who have it as the only possible solution and they should make advancements in the removal of these obstacles.

It is also very frequent that migrants are overqualified for the job they do in the receiving society, and they maybe decided to adapt themselves to the circumstances due to the urgencies they face: ‘many are prioritising any job over the right job’.<sup>62</sup> On this subject, a ‘reverse thinking’ approach has been suggested, that is to say, to evaluate what they would be able to offer without zooming in on the perfect knowledge of the local language (ICF Consulting Services, 2020, p.8).

It seems that migrants always have to demonstrate something more to fight against common stereotypes concerning their backgrounds, habits, and prospects: society indirectly imposes them to show that they are worthy and capable of deserving certain positions so as not to fall under judgments, and that they should even feel lucky if they have determinate rights.

A remaining set of widespread impediments to integration may be divided into two categories, if referred to newcomers, refugees and/or BIPs and asylum seekers, and to migrants who are already resident along with people with a migrant background. In the first case, the problems are linked to their detention at the moment of the arrival (hotspot approach),<sup>63</sup> their placement in camps or in structures that are very far from the city centre, and their ‘hard-obtain-documentation, excessive waiting periods or discretionary decisions’ about their status (Sinem, 2021), which can intensify the risks of marginalisation, polarisation and exclusion. For this reason, the EU Commission has been asked to move towards long-term projects (also in terms of funding support) rather than focusing mainly on emergencies revealing a short-term strategy.

As far as education is concerned, there is, therefore, this problem that we must absolutely cope with: the closest centre<sup>64</sup> is in P., a town not far from O., around 13 kilometres away. Regarding the means of transport, the beneficiaries don’t have the opportunity to travel by train. The only regional train that travels in the afternoon does not coincide with the classes’ schedule. As there is no scheduled train that covers the route, we had to find a coach hire with a driver

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<sup>62</sup> ‘Promoting Evidence-Informed Immigrant Integration Policymaking’: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/mpi-europe>.

<sup>63</sup> Hotspot approach: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/hotspot-approach\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/pages/glossary/hotspot-approach_en).

<sup>64</sup> The interview specifically refers to the Italian administrative offices. The centre in question is the CPIA, standing for “Provincial Centre for adult education and training”, namely a school managed at the state level by the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research.

to pick them up, drive them to school, and then take them back to the structure. This implies extra costs that are not sustainable for us in the long term: we had a budget of about € 1,500 for vehicle rental costs and, instead, they ask us for € 50 per trip a day. This is another aspect on which we should make a further step at the level of remodelling of the plan, because the municipality does not have a school bus suitable for the transport of the beneficiaries who attend high school, lower secondary school or primary school (Interview N. 1).

In the second case, a very demanding issue regards the house market that negatively affects integration and inclusion as a result of prolonged discrimination and lack of trust mostly related to migrants' often precarious situation. Concerns have been expressed about the necessity to avoid the building of 'ghetto' areas, which can lead migrants to isolation and strongly jeopardise the efforts made in their path towards integration and inclusion (ICF Consulting Services, 2020).

## **2.2. Lessons learnt**

Section 2 of the New *Action Plan* focuses on the knowledge gained by taking stock of the previous achievements. The New document stands upon the results of the *2016 Action Plan* and gives importance to the existing and future shortcomings that need to be addressed, realising that there is still room for improvement.

One main aspect regards people with migrant background who keep not having the same opportunities as native-born people. For this reason, the EU Commission considered worthwhile to embrace this category within the broader scope of the *Action Plan*, which also witnessed a further focus on more vulnerable groups, such as migrant women, children and young people who may encounter harder obstacles to their integration in the receiving society. For example, women can show themselves to be more reluctant to attend languages courses because of the household responsibilities; providing assistance in childcare may enhance their prospects of learning the local language and looking for a job (Interview N.2).

Another relevant dimension concerns greater attention to healthcare, especially after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic that called to order all policymakers and

stakeholders, making even more clear that an extra intervention is required in a way not to increase inequalities in the access to regular health services. Guidance, effective communication and the spread of information is a fundamental action to explain who basically is in charge of the delivery of those services and which steps are needed to get them. Healthcare gained such a prominent role that it has been dedicated a specific headline to this priority area in the New *Action Plan* (previously incorporated under the macro title *Access to basic services*, together with housing).

When it has been asked whether the New *Plan* could respond at least to some difficulties, if compared to the previous one, the answer was that the evaluations carried out allowed to draw a few conclusions taken as future recommendations, like treating vulnerable groups separately, and putting an accent on the multi-stakeholder approach, considering that integration demands a full coverage on the side of central governments, NGOs, civil society, in all directions (Interview N. 2).

Some webinars have been organised to raise awareness on the topic:<sup>65</sup> they saw the participation of the DG HOME, along with representatives from diverse associations of different MSs to present new models of integration or just take notes of the best ones. For an overall account of the implementations between the past and the present, what emerged is that asylum and migration networks don't always work together and a more coordinated strategy would be essential to avoid discontinuities in the construction of integration and inclusion programmes. The consultations also pointed out the eminence of some questions linked to capacity building and rural development projects. In particular, it happens very often that people who work in these networks are doing a voluntary activity for which they are not formed. Foreseeing staff training would be optimal to conduct effective actions. The extension of integration and inclusion plans to rural areas has been considered as well. Migrants can play a fundamental role in the revitalisation of the countryside that can in turn give value to their experiences and contributions. Migrants' networks – made up of diaspora communities able to offer guidance accordingly – can be created and enhance the multi-stakeholder cross-sectoral approach on the ground, for a holistic perspective

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<sup>65</sup> For example, 'Exploring partnerships on the inclusion and integration of migrants and refugees in rural areas': <https://eu.app.swapcard.com/event/euregionsweek-2022/planning/UGxhbm5pbmdfOTYwNTI1>.

including all the relevant actors coming from all social environments.<sup>66</sup> This is a mutually beneficial investment that can be accomplished by bringing all the levels closer, offering a good mapping of all the projects in the concerned areas preventing other knowledge gaps, and making explicit the procedures and figures for service delivery. A further critical element has been detected in the availability of political representatives, who are very busy due to their tight schedules and consequently out of reach on some occasions.

Last but not least, a missing element that has been integrated into the New *Action Plan* – under a distinct paragraph – has to do with the monitoring instruments that were ineffective and/or insufficient. For this purpose, a tracking tool will be soon enacted to trace the progress made and be sure to be in line with the calendarized timescale.

The previous *Action Plan* foresaw some mechanisms of surveillance within the frameworks of the *Country Reports* and the *Country-Specific Recommendations*, together with the *Europe 2020 Strategy for Growth and Job* and the *European Semester* (Commission, 2016, p.14). The latter cyclically ensures the coordination of all policies at the EU level – comprising the *European Pillar of Social Rights* (2017) – to verify that these ones are in agreement with the EU values, rules and economic and social standards. A scoreboard registers since 2015 the advancements of the active programmes in the subject matter of migration, including the exchanges between the relevant EU institutions directly involved in the ordinary legislative procedure, and makes available the linked results.<sup>67</sup>

Well, the *2021-2027 Action Plan* introduces a new *Eurobarometer on Integration*, that will be particularly useful for our analysis of the Italian context, and relies on implementation reports, together with the identification of common challenges to examine the improvements. It came out that only a small percentage of European citizens believes it is well-informed about immigration and integration issues, it is rather more inclined to have a distorted perception of the actual number of migrants present in European counties.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibidem. The concept of partnership has been adopted as a key word all over the workshop.

<sup>67</sup> REFIT Scoreboard: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/com/refit-scoreboard/en/policy/13/index.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Key findings in ‘Special Eurobarometer: integration of immigrants in the European Union’: [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/special-eurobarometer-integration-immigrants-european-union\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/special-eurobarometer-integration-immigrants-european-union_en).

In addition, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights unveiled an imminent EU survey on immigrants and their descendants (now ongoing).

As far as the state of housing in Europe, the DG Home suggested the consultation of a specific platform that produces some dossiers giving an account of the current situation (Observatory, 2022). Recent events caused a remarkable rise in the housing market prices, as well as in the cost of living, triggering the accessibility and affordability of the most vulnerable groups. It is inevitable that the new arrivals are putting additional pressure on the accommodation and housing system.

The EU Commission makes a distinction between the output and the outcome, namely the services provided and their connected effects. Notwithstanding, it also revealed the difficulty in checking small-scale results (since they cannot be detected in the short time) without a solid cooperation between the local authorities, which stresses once again the prominence of the multi-stakeholder approach. The mere scrutiny of the implementation of the various actions in the priority areas enlisted in the *Action Plan* does not imply the same degree of complexity as carrying out measurement of broader-spectrum developments for a successful implementation over time, in different contexts, and across many different fields of actions.

The point of departure of the New *Action Plan* was to measure progress over time, with a mid-review term in 2024. Unfortunately, in the course and in the aftermath of the new crises, the EU assisted to a substantial change in the backdrop of integration, which brought to the adoption of a new perspective more focused on the evaluation of the losses.

[...] At the time this *Action Plan* was conceived, those who were behind its preparation had the optics of monitor in progress; therefore, the goal was to measure how this *Action Plan* contributes to the reduction of disparities or inequalities between migrants and citizens, or second-generation descendants of migrants and habitual residents.

Unfortunately, the *Action Plan* has now been hit by two shocks, both unexpected, which are on the one hand the Covid-19 and, on the other hand, the crisis in Ukraine that make our perspective become, not so much as measuring progress, but rather to assess the damage. This must be meant in the sense that, as we already know, due to Covid there has been, both for the state

of health, but also for the level of education of the migrants, a negative impact that has made the integration indexes go back substantially (Interview N. 3).

## Chapter 3

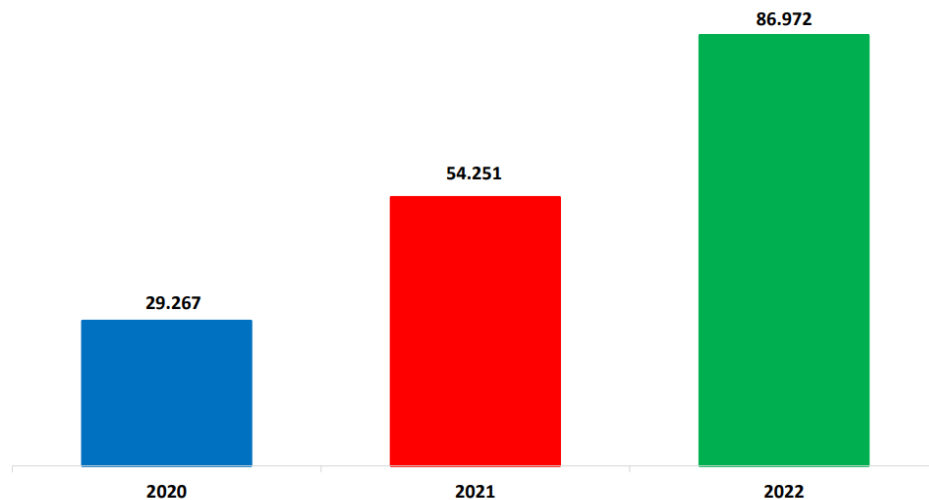
### The challenges of integration in Italy

Migration has always been a characteristic of the Italian territory: the country has been experiencing for years the disembarkation of vulnerable people on the move in search of better living conditions.

The year 2022 has registered till now an increase in the number of arrivals, as it can be confirmed by the statistics made available at the Italian government's website.

Those records hide 'individuals or families starting a new life in a new place'. Local governments play a crucial role in integrating newcomers and enabling them to commit to their new communities, working in collaboration with all levels of government and other local partners. Integration and inclusion must take place where people are (OECD, 2018).

Il grafico illustra la situazione relativa al numero dei migranti sbarcati a decorrere dal 1 gennaio 2022 al 3 novembre 2022\* comparati con i dati riferiti allo stesso periodo degli anni 2020 e 2021



\*I dati si riferiscono agli eventi di sbarco rilevati entro le ore 8:00 del giorno di riferimento.  
Fonte: Dipartimento della Pubblica sicurezza. I dati sono suscettibili di successivo consolidamento.

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<sup>69</sup> The Italian Ministry of the Interior daily publishes some dashboards that can be found at the following website: <https://www.interno.gov.it/it/stampa-e-comunicazione/dati-e-statistiche/sbarchi-e-accoglienza-dei-migranti-tutti-i-dati> Source: Department of Public Safety.



Quotas in Italy are intended to regulate the admission of third-country nationals and their access to the Italian labour market by combining purely quantitative selectivity with some qualitative selectivity elements. The government (particularly the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Labour) bears primary responsibility for determining annual quotas of new inflows, which are established through a Prime Minister Decree (so-called *Decreto Flussi*). The Quotas Decree must be published at least once a year. Overall, the quota system, which is supposed to manage the admission of foreign workers from abroad, has been largely used to regularise workers who were already present in the country irregularly. Many people believe that economic migrants today use the asylum channel incorrectly because the entry channel for work is practically closed. Furthermore, the principle of necessary (prior) ownership of an employment contract represents a failure that is repeated year after year, because the quota system assumes that the matching of demand and job offer in relation to foreign workers must occur while they are still abroad. Finally, a benign neglect policy has been implemented, which entails illegally bringing in low-skilled workers and then recruiting them via irregular ways. Confindustria, the Association of Industrial Producers, estimates that more than 300.000 specialised and semi-specialized workers are required, in addition to the estimated seasonal agricultural workers. The General Confederation of Italian Industry declared the need for a competent workforce in tourism and agriculture, calling for a total of 200.000 units to fill the gap in the two sectors (100.000 for touristic enterprises and 100.000 for agricultural ones).<sup>70</sup>

Thus, as far as concerns regular entries, Italy determines every year the number of people who can benefit from a legal permit, notwithstanding some data gaps that have been identified in the past few years (Interview N. 3).

Considering that the New *Action Plan* has only recently been translated into a national plan, the collected results make also reference to previous procedures adopted locally in the domain of integration. However, it must be said that the related measures could be subjected to a change of course due to the recent political reconfiguration shaping the new government. The leading ideology of the new-born administration feeds a general scepticism – sometimes even hostility – of some Italian citizens towards

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<sup>70</sup> Malogioglio Maurizio and Amato Valentina, September 2022, in the context of the activities carried out for the Center for Migration of the Ortygia Business School Foundation.

migrants on the territory, which gave rise to right-wing anti-immigration parties. This may inevitably hinder integration and inclusion policies nationally. So, the Italian case is now placed in an extremely uncertain context and the impacts on the management of migration will be seen in the long run. Unfortunately, it has already been declared the intention to restore the *Security Decrees* on Immigration that opened the way, in 2018, to more irregular channels, less social inclusion and a change in the reception system.<sup>71</sup> This might reveal the absence of political will to tackle the issue at the European level within a common framework, because it disadvantages politicians who want to put border controls at the core of their electoral programme.

The negative consequences of this political campaign, made up of manipulations for political purposes aimed at changing the generally positive narrative on migration, remodelled the Italian policymakers' agenda-setting on the phenomenon.

Besides, this aspect has been validated by some of the conducted interviews.

Practically, in 2018, Salvini<sup>72</sup> did what he did, changing the rules of the game, and pulling certain categories of migrants out of the reception system.

He abolished humanitarian protection in 2018. Therefore, for those who had humanitarian protection, AMIF funds were used to cover the expenses. I believe that, with respect to those that are the reception funds, the *Plan* is still operational because there has been such a novelty in recent years that has led to the use of these funds (which hasn't been done before). The projects that have been implemented with AMIF funds are truly a lot, with some focus on job placement and the issue of housing (Interview N. 5).

It's a thorny situation that needs to be addressed carefully, where the *Security Decrees* became a parameter of reference to measure the unsteady waves of reception and integration in the area.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> 'I decreti sicurezza hanno prodotto effetti opposti a quelli promessi' (The security decrees have produced opposite effects than promised): [https://www.openpolis.it/i-decreti-sicurezza-hanno-prodotto-effetti-opposti-a-quelli-promessi/?utm\\_source=Newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=cooperazione-e-migranti](https://www.openpolis.it/i-decreti-sicurezza-hanno-prodotto-effetti-opposti-a-quelli-promessi/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=cooperazione-e-migranti).

<sup>72</sup> Minister of the Interior at the time.

<sup>73</sup> Migration in Italy: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/migrazioni-italia-tutti-i-numeri-24893>.

Especially if compared to other EU Member States, ‘Italy is a country that looks at migration’, all in all notwithstanding the criticalities; it disposes of a welcoming system that aims at migrants’ integration (Interview N. 6).

Thus, despite not having a ‘self-standing integration law’,<sup>74</sup> more broadly speaking, Italy could potentially carry good examples of integration practices, as also remarked by the NIEM in different reports. For example, the country appears to be in the top list of the indicators connected to education legislation for vulnerable groups, particularly for children and BIPs, and other special services destined to disabled refugees and unaccompanied minors (MSNA). Primary healthcare is guaranteed to everyone and Italy seems to ensure that medical assistants are informed about refugees’ rights and limitations. Housing keeps being the sector with more shortcomings to address, even though legal tailored aid strikes as being accessible: ‘long-term targeted housing support without time-limit is only partially available in Italy’ (Sinem, 2021, p.9).

Another aspect to which the author will return in the following paragraphs is the opportunity to promote migrants’ entrepreneurship that sees fertile ground in the Italian territory through policies aimed at fostering business’ development.

The country is in line with the multistakeholder partnership praised by the EU Commission as an innovative element in the *New Action Plan*. The organisation of cultural events to convey a positive message of integration to create opportunities of conviviality and mutual cultural knowledge and awareness is at the forefront of the Italian systematic approach. Although these positive elements, the NIEM registered no advancement in relation to the pillars of the *Action Plan* (education, employment, healthcare and housing) between 2017 and 2019, or even a worsening, to an extent (Sinem, 2021, p.12), as a prelude of the present situation. Surely, some new public policies in the domain are required.

One of the main challenges Italy has to face is to prevent the formation of *banlieues*, as already happened in other EU countries, not relegating migrants in isolate areas and preferring melting-pot solutions with natives.

What some Italian organisations complain about the EU strategies on reception and integration is the absence of a common line of conduct. This emerges in the heat of

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<sup>74</sup> ‘Governance of migrant integration in Italy’: [https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/country-governance/governance-migrant-integration-italy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/country-governance/governance-migrant-integration-italy_en).

crises, when the differences between Member States are even clearer, considering that the management of the pressing necessity is often referred to national programmes.<sup>75</sup> However, the previously mentioned interview shed light to an important figure, namely funding instruments. Italy relies upon public and private national financial support and it also counts on European funds. Sometimes, it is hard to clearly identify the concrete contribution of EU funding tools due to the huge number of local practices more or less directly related to those funds. Professor Ennio Codini, from the ISMU Foundation (Initiatives and Studies on Multi-ethnicity), pointed out the absence of specific ‘studies on the overall impact of EU funds’ because of the heterogeneity in the implementation of EU guidelines at the national and regional level. He affirmed that the basic regulation – resulted from consultations between the relevant Ministries and the EU institutions – comes from the State and every municipality from the various regions adopts its own handling according to local needs. So, municipalities pursue their methodologies to solve national or regional problems with *ad hoc* solutions on the ground.

This is the reason why he believes that Italy can be depicted as an inspiring integration model only if taking into consideration this particular aspect that is intrinsic to the Italian administration.<sup>76</sup>

Then, this diversity corresponds to a difficulty in assessing the outcomes of the locally-based projects, for which the monitoring procedure requires amelioration.

Going back to funds, the *Migration and Home Affairs* Website (EU Commission) made a list of actions recently ratified with MSs to turn EU financial allocations into national activities in the area of migration, border management, visa and security.

EU financial support for these programmes amounts to about **3.7 EUR billion**, representing approximately **33% of the total allocation** for the Funds to the Member States. The remaining programmes are currently being assessed. The

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<sup>75</sup> ‘Oltre i muri, oltre i mari: l’Europa che si difende a est e sud dai migranti’ (Beyond the walls, beyond the seas: Europe defending itself from migrants to the east and south): [https://www.openpolis.it/esercizi/in-cammino-verso-una-vita-migliore/?utm\\_source=Newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=cooperazione-e-migranti](https://www.openpolis.it/esercizi/in-cammino-verso-una-vita-migliore/?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=cooperazione-e-migranti).

<sup>76</sup> Professor Codini’s intervention can be found at the following link: <https://www.migpolgroup.com/index.php/2021/09/20/refugee-integration-webinar/?fbclid=IwAR18I2faEmDHo2G4sAku0V8HZCUt8F2IXPdaPcInMq-01XpiwSFkRXJAv-E>

Commission aims at adopting all the Member States programmes 2021 - 2027 by the end of 2022.<sup>77</sup>

In particular, the Italian government intends to use AMIF funds mainly for early initiatives on integration, devote ESF+ to labour market and inclusion, and allocate RRNP (Recovery and Resilience Facility) to foster inclusion as a top priority (Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 2022). Other useful funds are under the shared management of various Ministries as well as national and regional authorities and other actors (see below).

The monitoring proceeding related to the use of the AMIF instruments remains the most reliable, as also confirmed by the interviewees. A preliminary, albeit not definitive, assessment of the actions performed appears positive in terms of the scope of the financed interventions, the recipients intercepted, and the results obtained.

A service of independent evaluation deals with the analysis of the use of those funds, on a legislative basis.

The examination carried out in 2021 allows to state that the AMIF has provided a qualified contribution to strengthening the integration system mainly through the improvement of the offer of services directed to third countries' citizens, the enhancement of the skills of operators who work in services aimed at citizens of third countries (public administration officials, service operators, educators, teachers, school directors, representatives of the Territorial Councils for Immigration), and the exchange of good practices between various institutions, with the involvement of other Member States, identifying service models for third-country nationals and signing memoranda of understanding and agreements for their implementation. This is the reason why the more effective measures previously adopted will be maintained.

It has already begun the management programming of the AMIF financial tools for the 2021-2027 seven-year period, with a total financial endowment of 994 million euros, with the goal of consolidating and expanding the services provided in the current multi-year financial cycle. Some successful interventions are going to be consolidated and

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<sup>77</sup> 'HOME Affairs Funds: adoption of Member States programmes for the 2021-27 period': [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/home-affairs-funds-adoption-member-states-programmes-2021-27-period-2022-09-28\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/home-affairs-funds-adoption-member-states-programmes-2021-27-period-2022-09-28_en)

expanded, in order to avoid the risk of the fragmentation of interventions and to foster the promotion of national system measures through regional implementation plans.

The previous programming established solid and effective networks with institutional actors at the central, regional, and local levels, while migrants' participation was frequently mediated: the intention is thus to establish listening channels and active participation of migrants for the purpose of co-programming interventions, putting the final recipients at the centre, recognising them as the primary parameter for planning actions and verifying the results.

The migration policy system is developed under the framework of the 2021-2027 Programming National Strategy: the intentions are to strengthen the intervention networks, connect the reference services, and improve and standardise the response capacity of public offices to the needs expressed by migrants at the national level.

In addition, the EU Commission signed some agreements with Member States for the funds sharing (*Partnership Agreements on EU funds 2021-2027*). In the case of Italy, €42.7 billion from the EU are going to be devoted to Cohesion policies, aimed at strengthening socio-economic development and territorial cohesion.<sup>78</sup> Eight strategic objectives have been depicted in the framework of the Just Transition Fund, to help countries in their green transition and to face the economic difficulties arising from the crises: objective four is destined for inclusion (towards a more inclusive Europe) and foresees the recourse to the ESF+ and the ERDF to encourage the involvement of vulnerable people in the societal processes. These funds are supported by other EU tools and they are integrated into the common Plan of Resilience and Recovery. The Social Scoreboard indicators put an accent on the differences existing at the national level taking as a reference point the European values on social participation, which reveals the persisting imbalances at risk to be widened.

### **3.1. Initiatives to implement the *Action Plan***

In many Member States, the *Action Plan* contributed to the development or review of national integration strategies and provided information on the use

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<sup>78</sup> 'EU Cohesion Policy: €42.7 billion for Italy to support sustainable growth, employment and modernisation while reducing regional disparities':

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_22\\_4562](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_4562).

of funding for integration. In a number of cases, tailor-made technical support was provided to national authorities in designing and implementing integration policy reforms (Commission, 2020, p.3).

The *New Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion* intends to improve and expand the existing integration-related measures of TCNs and seeks, as well, to embrace the inclusion of people with a migrant background in the multi-year programmes, in the name of more cohesive societies.

The Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Directorate General for Immigration and Integration Policies, brought to notice a Multiannual Agenda for the years 2021-2027. The idea is to spread the values underlying the *Plan* and explain how they are going to be concretely translated into national initiatives.

All measures must adhere to the Next Generation EU guidelines, particularly the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan will serve as a tool for guiding the country toward a more innovative, environmentally sustainable, and socially inclusive economy. According to the Italian Plan, which is divided into six missions and sixteen components, ‘ensuring full social inclusion is essential to improve territorial cohesion, aid economic growth, and overcome profound inequalities often exacerbated by the pandemic.’ Inclusion is a strategic axis of the Plan: ‘for Italy's recovery to be effective, structural, and in line with the objectives of the European pillar of social rights, it must provide equal opportunities to all citizens, especially those who do not reach their full potential. The persistence of gender inequalities, as well as the lack of equal opportunities regardless of origin, religion, disability, age, or sexual orientation, is a significant impediment to economic growth.’ (Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Directorate-General for Immigration and Integration Policy, 2022).

The presented strategy is multidimensional, multi-fund, multi-stakeholder and multilevel. It foresees coordinated cooperation between the involved actors, along with the introduction of a steering committee to address territorial disparities and prevent the duplication of intervention, especially if considering the fragmented institutional reality of Italy. All the established prerogatives, including peer-to-peer education, mentorship programmes, the fight against illegal recruitment, language training,

emancipation of Italian women, access to STEM professions, are integral part of a bigger blueprint aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The *2021 – 2027 Multiannual Agenda on Labour Integration and Social Inclusion* translates the four pillars of the *New Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion* (education, employment, healthcare and housing) into seven areas of intervention, namely:

1. Actions to support the improvement of multi-level governance for the integration of migrants among the various subjects involved, with a view to vertical (central administrations, regions and local authorities) and horizontal (social partners, third sector, representatives of migrant citizens, etc.) subsidiarity;
  2. Prevention and fight against undeclared work and the phenomenon of illegal hiring, promotion of decent work and the culture of legality;
  3. Social-employment integration of vulnerable groups of migrants through the model of personalised care (applicants/beneficiaries of international protection, unaccompanied foreign minors, women with minors, etc.);
  4. Enhancement, transparency and development of skills, also through actions to prevent delays, early school dispersion, and nexuses between education, training and the world of work;
  5. Promotion of participation and social and work inclusion of migrant women;
  6. Promotion of the active participation of migrant citizens in economic, social and cultural life, and actions for the prevention of all forms of discrimination also through qualified information services;
  7. Promotion of legal channels for regular entry into Italy for work reasons.
- (Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Directorate-General for Immigration and Integration Policy, 2022, p.28).

Nevertheless, as stressed before, it will be up to municipalities to make the *Action Plan* concrete in order to understand how it can be effectively used. The *Plan*, as such, is not normative and it just provides recommendations (Interview N. 6): many organisations decided to build some interesting projects linked with the primary concerns of the EU Commission. Indeed, the interviewees suggested to give the case



study of the present work also a regional structure to reveal the distinctive traits of the local implementations all over Italy. These aspects will be explored in the next paragraph.

### **3.2. Concrete steps towards integration and inclusion**

Some of the interviews carried out promoted successful models of integration. Two of the most inspiring are the projects realised under the oversight of Includ-EU and ANCI Toscana which also worked in strict cooperation. More specifically, the International Organisation for Migration, leader partner of the EU-financed *Regional and local expertise, exchange and engagement for enhanced social cohesion in Europe*, is using the *Action Plan* as a conceptual basis for the whole events schedule.<sup>79</sup> The two main goals of the planned activities are to supply MSs with the knowledge and ability tools to respond to the *Plan* in the most appropriate way and incentivise exchanges between the countries to build a prosperous network around the priority areas of the *New Action Plan*.

Then, the Includ-EU project is mainly focused on webinars, briefings and regional workshops, marked by a bottom-up approach striving for the exchange of best practices and aspiring to a change of the narrative on migration. This is basically the *fil rouge* around which the whole initiative is organised. Despite the initial delays due to the pandemic (since the project started in 2020 and there is a declared intention to ask for an extension), the gathered results are satisfying and they led to the proposal of transversal issues considered of primary importance in the area of integration, namely intercultural mediation. One of the main undertakings relates to the creation of interinstitutional tables reuniting policymakers at all levels to put dialogue at the core of the universalistic approach required in the field.

In the following months an information campaign will be strengthened, together with other events and meetings at the European level, as well as training activities for schools (especially in the Italian context).

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<sup>79</sup> More details will be provided in the Appendices (Appendix C).

The Includ-EU activities involve different countries with specific projects on the ground, that is to say, Greece, Spain, Slovenia, Romania, the Netherlands and Italy. With reference to the Italian context, the partnership with ANCI Toscana revealed itself to be very fruitful. The Association is dealing with a pilot project with a focal point on Housing.

There was nothing about the housing policies. We were in contact with the IOM, and we decided to present the project [...]. It is a project never seen before, let's say, also aimed at the inclusion of third country nationals through various actions tested in the various countries. And therefore, as an inclusion-oriented project, it also has various dimensions of experimentation with inclusion, work, language training... So, we said to ourselves, yes, we are interested in experimenting, in deepening a dimension of inclusion [...]. We decided to take part to this experimentation on this theme. We worked on collaborative living through the activation of participatory paths, which has characterised the whole project. We talk about collaborative living, not simply about living. That is, we are talking about participatory processes and therefore about the empowerment of third country citizens for the shared definition of housing solutions. It is a particular approach to the theme of the house because it goes in the direction of giving housing solutions, but what we are interested in doing is using a participatory, collaborative, and shared definition approach (Interview N. 4).

ANCI Toscana plays a role of institutional representation and support for the partner municipalities. It was also engaged in initiatives giving birth to a *White Book for Reception and Inclusion Policies* in 2015 (later published in 2017), which acted as an inspiration for the design of future strategies, thanks to the intervention of the integration local department. The main areas identified as a priority for inclusion are the same addressed in the *New Action Plan* – education, employment, housing, healthcare – in a direction of interoperability between all the sectors. As a matter of fact, these guidelines have also been used to prepare two AMIF projects devoted to employment and social inclusion respectively. The implementation of the various

planned operations has been realised through participatory approaches via the creation of Focus Groups at the regional level.

In addition, processes of mapping and municipalities orientation laid the groundwork for the Includ-EU project on housing, with the declared intentions to go beyond the phase of field testing and build solid policies devoted to housing solutions in the long term (Interview N. 4).

Others underlined the relevance of sport as a vehicle of integration: it is a symbol through which the beneficiaries can enjoy themselves and get in touch with local people. Integration activities by means of sports centres are targeted as good ideas for migrants to get involved in the social fabric (Interview N. 1).

More broadly, the role of culture assumes greater importance, thanks to the organisation of cultural events and initiatives to spread knowledge about cultural diversity. As emphasised in the *Partnership Agreements on EU funds 2021-2027* (2022), the specific goal is to strengthen the prominence of culture in economic development, social inclusion, and innovation. The main expected outcomes in this context are an increase in cultural participation by citizens, businesses, and communities, as well as an increase in active citizenship and social integration paths via the recourse to the ERDF in conjunction with the ESF Plus funding instruments.

These objectives foresee some forms of participatory governance and rigorous collaboration between cultural institutions and centres, administrations, businesses, and third-sector subjects, as well as the development of management schemes that ensure the financial sustainability of the activities and services launched, including innovative partnerships with public and private stakeholders.

Initiatives in the cultural and creative fields that integrate the institutional offer with the non-profit sectors are prioritised, with the goal of regenerating and revitalising cultural and heritage sites, as well as other public spaces or spaces for public use, with the active participation of local communities. These initiatives may include interventions for structural recovery and reuse of the spaces in question, where they are relevant to projects of cultural participation, inclusion, and social innovation.

Integrative approaches to promoting well-being can also be tested through strategies that depend on culture and cultural welfare, as well as through the adoption of collaborative protocols between sectors and institutional systems, primarily health, inclusion, education and training, and work.

Last but not least, an essential step towards integration and inclusion in Italy has been identified in the migrants' entrepreneurship, namely programmes destined for migrants who want to start their economic businesses.

Even if many calls are made available at the EU level, it has been identified a persistent obstacle, especially for small-scale projects, to reach the regional authorities. An example could be made by Ortygia Business School Foundation and its activity within the Center for Migration. The centre acts as a gathering point of scholars, researchers and experts in the field, who are willing to share their knowledge on the matter to foster a good communication around migration. It intends to take part to some EU call for tenders and to use the grants to organise courses for migrants' entrepreneurs who want to start their economic activity in the country of origin or in the country of destination.

### **3.3. Actors**

When it comes to migration, it is impossible to overlook the associative fabric. The primary and secondary actors engaged in the policymaking and implementation of integration are many. From a theoretical point of view, a form of synergistic partnership is foreseen between central administrations, regions, municipalities, economic, social partners, schools, training institutions, third sector, associations, diaspora, and international organisations. The managing authorities in all the MSs are in charge of detecting the areas of improvement in terms of institutional capacity via technical assistance.<sup>80</sup> For example, the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Funds, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies is entitled to manage the European Social Fund, together with the Erasmus + one (in cooperation with other administrative institutions), the FEAD and other public funding. Further financial instruments are directed at the regional level, such as the ERDF and the EAFRD.

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<sup>80</sup> 'The partnership principle acts as a reference to empower the European Commission and national authorities to jointly manage EU funds':

[https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/newsroom/panorama/2022/09/28-09-2022-partnership-principle-underpins-cohesion-funding-and-synergies-with-other-policies](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/panorama/2022/09/28-09-2022-partnership-principle-underpins-cohesion-funding-and-synergies-with-other-policies).

Moreover, the programme INVEST EU, which aims at enhancing job opportunities, is run privately by financial intermediaries, like *Compagnia di San Paolo*, *Fondazione Monte dei Paschi di Siena* and others.

Apart from funding, the stakeholders whose function is fundamental at the national level, as also emerged during the interviews, are the public administration, the territorial Commissions responsible for pronouncing the status of migrants asking for protection, the Prefectures – via their Immigration Territorial Councils – also entitled to the monitoring process, and the workers in charge of the delivery of public services in all the interested areas. The CPIAs are of primary concern for the sphere of education, even if their way of conduct has been criticised in many occurrences.

All the institutional levels committed to the drafting of the pluriannual strategy on integration and reception governance are grouped under the National Asylum Round Table, chaired by the Ministry of the Interior and made up of the Central Administrations, Regions and Autonomous Provinces, Local and International Organisations, with the fundamental participation of the Third Sector. Third-sector organisations operate at all layers of society and act as catalysts for change thanks to strict collaboration agreements and co-programming territorial services, innovative partnerships and capacity-building instruments. Thus, they require reciprocity and adaptability to work in networks, as well as a better value appreciation of the pivotal role of the workers under this umbrella term, since it is often underestimated and underpaid.<sup>81</sup>

Together with the Integration Table, the National Asylum Round Table is responsible for the intervention directions and strategies aimed at the implementation and monitoring of the integration measures. Moreover, this technical working group is in charge of preparing the National Integration Plan. The integration model issued by the definition of the migration policies of the Italian government is coherent with the *2021-2027 Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion* (Ministry of the Interior and European Commission, 2022).

The debate on the partnership agreement has been built around 5 thematic tables, one for each of the policy objectives:

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<sup>81</sup> ‘L’Economia Sociale Tra Sviluppo e Resilienza’ (The Social Economy Between Development and Resilience): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FE2t7SIT5pw>.

Table 1: a smarter Europe

Table 2: a greener Europe

Table 3: a more connected Europe

Table 4: a more social Europe

Table 5: a Europe closer to citizens

(Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, Directorate-General for Immigration and Integration Policy, 2022, p.25).

The Directorate-General for Immigration and Integration Policy is competent, in the context of “A more social Europe”, to deal with the issue of the integration of migrants at the national level, in relation to the priority areas of intervention on which to focus the working actions. Some targets to address have been pinpointed: new Italian citizens, foreign minors and their inclusion in the Italian school system, unaccompanied minors, foreign students with disabilities, foreigners in the Italian labour market, irregular workers, foreign employees subjected to accidents and occupational diseases or to illegal recruitment (especially in the agricultural sector), foreign entrepreneurs, overqualified migrants and foreigners living in extreme poverty.

### **3.4. Critical issues: Gaps and Deficiencies**

Taking into account the priority areas of the New *Action Plan*, a series of stressors can be identified: the sector of housing has been recognised as one of the most critical in Italy. Its precariousness is due to the difficulty in finding suitable accommodations, public construction buildings, regular rents, trustworthy relationships between the house owners and the tenants of migrant origins, and the cohabitation experiences. This poses many limits to the residential autonomy of migrants. In order to avoid homelessness once the reception experience is concluded, a form of legal support should be ensured to migrants so as to make them aware of the available service in compliance with the national law. Another recommendation refers to the possibility to grant financial aid in a way to assist them in the first part of their research for a new accommodation.

In the fields of education and employment, the major problems concern respectively the education of asylum seekers as well as their exposure to risks such as exploitation

and illegal recruitment preventing them from the recognition and enhancement of their skills. The Provincial Centres for adult education and training are not often operational as they should and many barriers have been detected for young migrants wanting to start an educational course (*vacatio legis*). More diversified intervention according to the needs, age, skills, and qualifications would be desirable and reduced administrative times would swift the procedures of integration.

The conducted interviews provided insight into the issues of overqualification and miscommunication problems.

Migrants are very often too experienced and knowledgeable for the classes they attend and for the activities they engage in. They have to start from the beginning their educational paths because of the language, regardless of their level, and this prevents them from going on because they feel unmotivated. And if they do find a job, it is very frequently unskilled in comparison to what their skills might be. They are also confronted with the stereotypes of the community they are trying to integrate in, since there is a generalised idea that they can mostly work in the field of catering service because their qualifications are not recognised in the destination country. There are those who are qualified enough but do not have the same opportunities as natives do (Interview N. 5). So, this reveals a depreciation of the growth paths of their own cultural experience.

This is a sore point because it means that there are qualified people who arrive here and do not have the possibility of having their title recognised: it is disqualifying for a person who has attended university to find himself/herself attending the evening course with illiterate people and having to colour the capitals of Italy. There are people from all social extractions, all lumped together in the same class. So, it can't work. CPIA courses are not delivered in a functional way (Interview N. 5).

Some difficulties in communicating have been observed especially in relation to migrant children. They are barely assigned intercultural mediators and, even in reception centres, the figure of the psychologist is rarely assisted by the one of the mediators. This slows down the passing of information and the expression of needs on

the migrants' side, which generates some pitfalls in the rationale of intervention that risks not to be appropriate.

As concerns the evaluation system, a specific focus has been put on the absence of a regional monitoring process, mostly based on self-assessment. It has been remarked an absence of clear instructions as well as mechanisms to be adopted to implement the mid-review after three years. This explains the disaggregation of data in the area, particularly on the subject of asylum seekers' enrolment in language learning programmes and BIPs' access to mentorship initiatives.

What is sorely missing, but which we are trying to borrow from the FAMI thanks to these funds, is instead a monitoring and evaluation system on projects developed in the social sphere, also on regional funds, or on other types of funds where instead the monitoring system and evaluation is underdeveloped... [...] But at the end of four years of work, what can we evaluate, observe... what are the things that in our opinion are the elements of evaluation of the project and the essential things detected: we're working on it a bit autonomously.

On projects from other funds, there isn't even monitoring, sometimes it gets out of hand. But it's about the whole evaluation system, which is a bit the evaluation of public policies in general, this discourse is not very developed... Indeed, this is missing, there is a lack of public policy action and public resources used for these purposes. There is project monitoring. However, the issue of evaluation, in our opinion, needs (it is one of the things we have highlighted in occasion of the Region's meetings) more attention, and the development of a different system of evaluation (Interview N. 4).

In the end, it has also been noticed a hindrance linked to resource availability presided over by public administration, which regulates access to services.

The problem arises with projects requiring engagement on the part of the public administration. Taking into consideration the social aspect of integration, which creates communication difficulties, there are people within social services who are not so collaborative, and others who are more proactive (Interview N. 1).

The usability of the law is often left to local authorities who are not perfectly aware of the rules, neither of the necessary approach that can handle the complexity behind



migrants' integration and inclusion. For example, social and health services are almost always overburdened, and they don't succeed in their role of service providers in the most suitable way (Interview N. 6).

## Conclusions

Integration of migrants all around the European Union is not an automatic process and it does not have an explicit point of arrival that could be made universal for everybody, because it is strictly dependent on the Member State's interpretation. As a matter of fact, 'integration is planned centrally but managed locally'<sup>82</sup> and the New *Action Plan* – containing EU's recommendations and guidelines –<sup>83</sup> has a different resonance for every MS. This is also due to the fact that there are some countries that have recently come across migration management. Instead, others have a more direct and long-lasting experience with the phenomenon, as well as related rooted traditions. Integration and inclusion are interconnected: without the former, the latter is not possible and some difficulties in broadening the inclusion-associated criteria have been detected.

Some conclusions of the present work can be drawn. The three chapters that form its structure unveil, in order, the noteworthy contents of the *2021-2027 Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion*, put in a theoretical and economic framework, also touching upon the role of undocumented migrants together with the principle of solidarity; the critical points that emerged in comparison – but not in opposition – to the *2016 Action Plan*, which made the persistent challenges come to the surface; the implementation of the guiding principles of the New *Plan* in the Italian territory in a backdrop of change. Despite the recourse to a division into different parts, mostly connected to a more specific thematic, the author of the present document intended to create a continuum all along the whole work, without a net distinction between the various chapters that are, therefore, strictly interrelated, in the name of a holistic and coherent standpoint. The *2021-2027 Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion* undoubtedly represents a milestone in the general architecture of integration, even if its added value is questionable for some aspects that have been scrutinised throughout the text. In particular, the research conducted aimed at illustrating the results gathered via the explained qualitative methods, and it is sprinkled with direct proofs of people who

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<sup>82</sup> Vincent Catot in <https://eu.app.swapcard.com/event/euregionsweek-2022/planning/UGxhbm5pbmdfOTYwNTI1>.

<sup>83</sup> The document works as a reference point to the EU countries that are later entitled to settle their own priorities.

work in the field covering different positions. So, the original information provided can offer a key to reading the present document from different perspectives and viewpoints, in a way to preserve the idea of the multi-stakeholder approach that has been spread across the *Action Plan*. The above-mentioned interviews are an essential element of this work: they reflect and support the thought of the author that is also based on personal experience on the ground.

An integration plan can fully fulfil its function only if combined with solid solutions to guarantee migrants' stability from a legal point of view, by facilitating their regularisation through coordination between the actors involved, and consequently opening the doors to fruitful integration procedures in all the sectors requiring documentation in view of durable strategies. New funding and programmes in the macro areas of education, employment, healthcare and housing are at the forefront of the renewed purposes of the European Union to carry on with the migrants' participation in the European way of life. However, all-round assistance is extremely important to achieve this goal, trying to avoid the fragmented enactment at the national and regional levels. The organisation of tailored language courses, adapted to the starting level, swifter access to training, as well as to working experiences, short waiting periods for the status recognition preventing precariousness and frustration, interactive and dynamic programmes within the receiving society environments avoiding isolation, insurance and medical aid at 360 degrees, affordable housing to sustain migrants even after the reception pathways, adequate and periodical spread of information to encourage migrants to become familiar with the social life and raise awareness of their rights: these are enormous challenges the European Union is currently facing, for which they require a real engagement. The evasion of the legal sphere surely represents a critical aspect and it opened the way for many organisations to conduct a due investigation on the subject.

Conversely, inclusion presumes that integration has already happened but this is not always that obvious even in the case of people with a migrant background and who have always lived in a given European country. This may be due to some citizenship acquisition issues considering the whole framework EU-wide, together with people's mindset still not ready to embrace cultural diversity.

Migrants face similar challenges but their situations need to be addressed via *ad hoc* projects. It is impossible to generalise and associate things that are basically dissimilar.

It has to be taken into account during the preparatory phases of the different initiatives on the topic.

The language on migration requires serious improvement. Soumaila Diawara, a Malian activist currently living in Italy, paid close attention to a sentence that has been recently pronounced in the Italian context, referring to migrant children: ‘children who go to school with our sons and daughters’. He stressed the impact that such an expression can have in a community, so maybe everyone should also work on him/herself and be more careful.

To conclude, two orders of problems stop integration and inclusion from their complete implementation: the lack of a common EU framework for migration policy (Margaritis Schinas, 2020)<sup>84</sup> and the logic of emergency featuring integration measures.

First, as the EU Commission Vice President pointed out, the EU just disposes of regulatory patchworks that give birth to diverse and unbalanced ‘land results’ (Interview N. 3), which narrows the opportunity to increase the knowledge on the matter.

This may suggest that an enlargement of EU competences in the area has been contemplated.

Mr Schinas also stressed the political significance of the *Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion* as a vehicle to contribute to the effective adoption of the *New Pact on Migration and Asylum* and the principles it carries. He invites EU Member States to make use of the EU Commission’s means to help people on the move and abandon the misinterpretation of the concerted agreements, in order to avoid the risks of ineffectiveness.

It is out of the question that it urges to ‘go beyond migration containment’.<sup>85</sup>

The second shortcoming concerns the fact that both *Plans* have, in a certain sense, to deal with situations of emergency and crises, though in the second case a bit unexpected (the *2016 Action Plan* was specifically conceived). The dramatic events are having a huge impact on the stakeholders’ interests in integration instruments: the

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<sup>84</sup> ‘Action plan on integration and inclusion 2021 2027. EU debates inclusion for all’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCKHy6YLVCQ>.

<sup>85</sup> Malogioglio Maurizio et als. (2022), *Migration, Economic and Social Development. A Students’ Handbook*, ReShape Paper no.18, Jean Monnet Centre, University of Catania, p. 242.

Ukrainians' displacement is proving that integration policy is frequently modelled on crises and this risks to produce only short-terms responses and collect an 'evidence-based culture in migrant integration',<sup>86</sup> as well as leading to the repetition of recurring previous scenarios.

To go back to your initial question, we must also be aware that the goals we set ourselves won't most likely be achieved either in 2024 or even in 2027, because the problems and integration needs of people who arrived from third countries, practically during this period of implementation of the *Action Plan*, exploded to a level of a magnitude that was not foreseeable (Interview N.3).

At the end of this path, the author wants to conclude the present work with an open consideration that can represent some food for thought for future studies on the subject: the *Action Plan* might have had a revolutionary impact on the effective integration and inclusion of migrants at the EU level. What currently appears as a missed opportunity still has chance to turn into efficient action if supported by a concerted effort to put into practice what has been expressed theoretically, without forgetting the human sphere of migration.

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<sup>86</sup> 'Migrant Integration: Learning from What Works in Times of Uncertainty': <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/events/migrant-integration-learning-what-works-times-uncertainty>.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Articles and Principles

#### Article 67 TFEU

1. The Union shall constitute an area of freedom, security and justice with respect for fundamental rights and the different legal systems and traditions of the Member States.
2. It shall ensure the absence of internal border controls for persons and shall frame a **common policy on asylum, immigration and external border control**, based on **solidarity** between Member States, which is fair towards third-country nationals. For the purpose of this Title, stateless persons shall be treated as third-country nationals.
3. The Union shall endeavour to ensure a high level of security through measures to prevent and combat crime, racism and xenophobia, and through measures for coordination and cooperation between police and judicial authorities and other competent authorities, as well as through the mutual recognition of judgments in criminal matters and, if necessary, through the approximation of criminal laws.
4. The Union shall facilitate access to justice, in particular through the principle of mutual recognition of judicial and extrajudicial decisions in civil matters.

#### Article 79 TFEU

1. The Union shall develop a **common immigration policy** aimed at ensuring, at all stages, the **efficient management of migration flows, fair treatment of third-country nationals** residing **legally** in Member States, and the prevention of, and enhanced measures to combat, illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings.
2. For the purposes of paragraph 1, the European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the **ordinary legislative procedure**, shall adopt measures in the following areas:
  - (a) the conditions of **entry and residence**, and standards on the issue by Member States of **long-term visas and residence permits**, including those for the purpose of **family reunification**;

(b) the definition of the **rights** of third-country nationals residing legally in a Member State, including the conditions governing **freedom of movement** and of residence in other Member States;

(c) illegal immigration and unauthorised residence, including **removal** and **repatriation** of persons residing without authorisation;

(d) combating **trafficking** in persons, in particular women and children.

3. The Union may conclude **agreements** with third countries for the **readmission** to their countries of origin or provenance of third-country nationals who do not or who no longer fulfil the conditions for entry, presence or residence in the territory of one of the Member States.

4. The European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the **ordinary legislative procedure**, may establish measures to provide **incentives** and **support** for the action of Member States with a view to promoting the **integration** of third-country nationals residing legally in their territories, **excluding any harmonisation of the laws** and regulations of the Member States.

5. This Article shall not affect the right of Member States to determine **volumes of admission** of third-country nationals coming from third countries to their territory in order to seek work, whether employed or self-employed.

#### Article 80 TFEU

The policies of the Union set out in this Chapter and their implementation shall be governed by the **principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility**, including its **financial implications**, between the Member States. Whenever necessary, the Union acts adopted pursuant to this Chapter shall contain appropriate measures to give effect to this principle.

#### Article 153 TFEU

1. With a view to achieving the objectives of Article 151, the Union shall **support and complement** the activities of the Member States in the following fields:

(a) improvement in particular of the working environment to protect workers' health and safety;

- (b) working conditions;
- (c) social security and social protection of workers;
- (d) protection of workers where their employment contract is terminated;
- (e) the information and consultation of workers;
- (f) representation and collective defence of the interests of workers and employers, including co-determination, subject to paragraph 5;
- (g) **conditions of employment for third-country nationals** legally residing in Union territory;
- (h) the **integration of persons excluded from the labour market**, without prejudice to Article 166;
- (i) equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work;
- (j) the **combating of social exclusion**;
- (k) the modernisation of social protection systems without prejudice to point (c).

2. To this end, the European Parliament and the Council:

- (a) may adopt measures designed to **encourage cooperation** between Member States through initiatives aimed at **improving knowledge, developing exchanges of information and best practices**, promoting **innovative approaches** and **evaluating experiences**, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States;
- (b) may adopt, in the fields referred to in paragraph 1(a) to (i), by means of directives, minimum requirements for gradual implementation, having regard to the conditions and technical rules obtaining in each of the Member States. Such directives shall **avoid imposing** administrative, financial and legal constraints in a way which would hold back the creation and development of small and medium-sized undertakings. The European Parliament and the Council shall act in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

In the fields referred to in paragraph 1(c), (d), (f) and (g), the Council shall act unanimously, in accordance with a special legislative procedure, after consulting the European Parliament and the said Committees.

The Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission, after consulting the European Parliament, may decide to render the ordinary legislative procedure applicable to paragraph 1(d), (f) and (g).

3. A Member State may entrust management and labour, at their joint request, with the implementation of directives adopted pursuant to paragraph 2, or, where appropriate, with the implementation of a Council decision adopted in accordance with Article 155.

In this case, it shall ensure that, no later than the date on which a directive or a decision must be transposed or implemented, management and labour have introduced the necessary measures by agreement, the Member State concerned being required to take any necessary measure enabling it at any time to be in a position to guarantee the results imposed by that directive or that decision.

4. The provisions adopted pursuant to this Article:

— shall not affect the right of Member States to define the fundamental principles of their social security systems and must not significantly affect the financial equilibrium thereof,

— shall not prevent any Member State from maintaining or introducing more stringent protective measures compatible with the Treaties.

5. The provisions of this Article shall not apply to pay, the right of association, the right to strike or the right to impose lock-outs.

#### Article 166 TFEU

1. The Union shall implement a **vocational training policy** which shall **support and supplement** the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the **responsibility of the Member States for the content and organisation** of vocational training.

2. Union action shall aim to:

— facilitate adaptation to industrial changes, in particular through vocational training and retraining,



— improve initial and continuing vocational training in order to **facilitate vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market**,

— facilitate access to vocational training and encourage mobility of instructors and trainees and particularly young people,

— stimulate cooperation on training between educational or training establishments and firms,

— develop **exchanges of information and experience** on issues common to the training systems of the Member States.

3. The Union and the Member States shall foster **cooperation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the sphere of vocational training**.

4. The European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, shall adopt measures to contribute to the achievement of the objectives referred to in this Article, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States, and the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, shall adopt recommendations.

#### Article 312 TFEU

1. The **multiannual financial framework** shall ensure that **Union expenditure develops** in an **orderly manner** and **within the limits of its own resources**.

It shall be established for a period of **at least five years**.

The annual budget of the Union shall **comply** with the multiannual financial framework.

2. The Council, acting in accordance with a **special legislative procedure**, shall adopt a regulation laying down the multiannual financial framework. The Council shall act unanimously after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament, which shall be given by a majority of its component members.

The European Council may, unanimously, adopt a decision authorising the Council to act by a qualified majority when adopting the regulation referred to in the first subparagraph.

3. The financial framework shall determine the **amounts of the annual ceilings** on commitment appropriations by **category of expenditure** and of the annual ceiling on payment appropriations. The categories of expenditure, limited in number, shall correspond to the **Union's major sectors of activity**.

The financial framework shall lay down any other provisions required for the annual budgetary procedure to run smoothly.

4. Where no Council regulation determining a new financial framework has been adopted by the end of the previous financial framework, the ceilings and other provisions corresponding to the last year of that framework shall be extended until such time as that act is adopted.

5. Throughout the procedure leading to the adoption of the financial framework, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission shall take any measure necessary to facilitate its adoption.

#### Article 352 TFEU

1. If action by the Union should prove necessary, within the framework of the policies defined in the Treaties, to attain one of the objectives set out in the Treaties, and the Treaties have not provided the necessary powers, the Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament, shall adopt the appropriate measures. Where the measures in question are adopted by the Council in accordance with a special legislative procedure, it shall also act unanimously on a proposal from the Commission and after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament.

2. Using the procedure for monitoring the **subsidiarity principle** referred to in Article 5(3) of the Treaty on European Union, the Commission shall draw national Parliaments' attention to proposals based on this Article.

3. Measures based on this Article **shall not entail harmonisation of Member States' laws or regulations** in cases where the Treaties exclude such harmonisation.

4. This Article cannot serve as a basis for attaining objectives pertaining to the common foreign and security policy and any acts adopted pursuant to this Article shall respect the limits set out in Article 40, second paragraph, of the Treaty on European Union.

#### IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION POLICY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION - Council conclusions

1. Immigration is a **permanent feature** of European society. If the flow of immigrants – who should be understood throughout the text as **legally residing** immigrants in the territory of the Member States - is orderly and well-managed, Member States reap many benefits. These include stronger economies, greater social cohesion, an increased feeling of security, and cultural diversity. Taken together and across all Member States, these benefits advance the European process and strengthen the Union's position in the world. Therefore, **the effective management of migration by each Member State is in the interest of all.**

2. **A critical aspect of managing migration is the successful integration of legally residing immigrants and their descendants.** At the same time immigration policy can contribute to the **success of integration policy.** It is vital for Member States to maintain and further develop societies in which newcomers feel welcome, which are defined by a **spirit of mutual understanding and accommodation**, and where there are clear expectations of all residents — new and old.

3. **Integration takes place simultaneously at the individual, family, and general community and State levels, and occurs in all facets of life:** in fact, integration can easily span a generation or more. Consequently **successful integration policy must engage the local, regional, and national institutions, with which immigrants interact, in both the public and private realms. The development and implementation of integration policy is therefore the primary responsibility of individual Member States rather than of the Union as a whole.**

4. **The failure of an individual Member State to develop and implement a successful integration policy can have in different ways adverse implications for other Member States and the European Union.** For instance, this can have impact on the **economy** and the **participation at the labour market**, it can undermine the **respect for human rights** and Europeans' commitment to fulfilling its international

**obligations to refugees and others in need of international protection**, and it can breed alienation and tensions within the society.

5. **The precise integration measures a society chooses to implement should be determined by individual Member States.** However, it is clearly in the common interest of all Member States of the Union that each individual Member State pursues **effective integration strategies.**

6. These policies will **differ significantly** from Member State to Member State. They must be geared to the **individual needs of the receiving society, reflecting each individual Member State's history and legal framework.** They may also target **diverse audiences**, the mix of which varies between the Member States — for example, from **temporary workers to permanent residents** and to the **children of immigrants**; from **individuals who await to be admitted** to those who are **already residing**; from **immigrants who have acquired citizenship** to **long-established third-country nationals**; and from **highly skilled refugees** to **individuals who have yet to acquire the most elementary skills.**

7. **Developing a set of EU common basic principles on integration is essential**, not only given the diversity of experiences and circumstances, but also given the **shared interest** that Member States have in agreeing upon **shared goals on integration.**

8. The common basic principles aim at the following:

a. to **assist Member States in formulating integration policies** by offering them a simple **non-binding but thoughtful guide** of basic principles against which they can **judge and assess their own efforts.** They also can use these basic principles to **set priorities** and further develop their own measurable goals. It is up to the individual Member States to determine whether these principles assist them in formulation policies for other **target groups for integration.** The principles will be relevant both for Member States with considerable experience of substantial immigration as well as for those that more recently have become destinations for significant numbers of immigrants;

b. to **serve as a basis for Member States to explore how EU, national, regional, and local authorities can interact in the development and implementation of**

**integration policies.** Furthermore, the common basic principles can also help determine **how these policies can best engage other actors involved in integration** (for example, social partners, NGOs, women's and migrants' organisations, businesses, and other private institutions);

c. to serve to be complementary and in **full synergy** with **existing legislative frameworks**, including the **international instruments** on Human Rights, Community instruments containing **integration provisions**, **EU objectives** on gender equality and non-discrimination and other **EU policies**;

d. to assist in structuring the **regular dialogue** between **governments** and all other **relevant institutions** and **stakeholders** at the EU-level;

e. to serve as **a basis for and assist the EU to explore how existing EU-instruments related to integration can be developed further**; and

f. to assist the Council to reflect upon and, over time, **agree on EU-level mechanisms and policies needed to support national and local-level integration policy efforts**, particularly through **EU-wide learning and knowledge-sharing**.

Recalling the above considerations and objectives of the common basic principles,

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES:

Establish the following common basic principles for immigrant integration policy in the European Union, which will be explained individually in the Annex:

9. Integration is a **dynamic, two-way process** of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of Member States.

10. Integration implies **respect for the basic values** of the European Union.

11. **Employment is a key part of the integration process** and is central to the participation of immigrants, to the contributions immigrants make to the host society, and to making such contributions visible.

12. Basic **knowledge** of the host society's **language, history, and institutions** is indispensable to integration; enabling immigrants to acquire this basic knowledge is **essential to successful integration**.

13. Efforts in **education** are critical to preparing immigrants, and particularly their descendants, to be more successful and more **active participants** in society.

14. **Access for immigrants to institutions**, as well as to public and private goods and services, on a basis equal to national citizens and in a **non-discriminatory way** is a **critical foundation for better integration**.

15. **Frequent interaction** between immigrants and Member State citizens is a **fundamental mechanism for integration**. **Shared forums, inter-cultural dialogue, education about immigrants and immigrant cultures**, and **stimulating living conditions in urban environments** enhance the interactions between immigrants and Member State citizens.

16. The practice of diverse cultures and religions is guaranteed under the **Charter of Fundamental Rights** and must be safeguarded, unless practices conflict with other inviolable European rights or with national law.

17. The **participation of immigrants in the democratic process** and in the **formulation of integration policies and measures**, especially at the local level, supports their integration.

18. **Mainstreaming integration policies** and measures in all relevant policy portfolios and **levels of government and public services** is an important consideration in public-policy formation and implementation.

19. **Developing clear goals, indicators and evaluation mechanisms** are necessary to adjust policy, evaluate progress on integration and to make the exchange of information more effective.

## Appendix B: Interviews

The interviews have been carried out in Italian (except for one). Only the most meaningful parts, that have been estimated relevant to the explanation and support of some arguments, have been translated into English.

### Appendix B.1.: List of the interviews carried out between May and June 2022

#### Date, Position, Institution.

- 10 May 2022: Administrative Coordinator of a **SIPROIMI** centre (Protection System for Beneficiaries of International Protection and for Unaccompanied Foreign Minors) based in Oliveri, Messina, Sicily (IT).
- 20 May 2022: Policy Coordinator of the **DG Home and Migration**, European Commission, Brussels (BE).
- 20 May 2022: Policy Officer of the **DG Migration and Home Affairs**, Unit C2 Legal Pathways and Integration, European Commission, Brussels (BE).
- 23 May 2022: Person in charge of the Immigration Office of **ANCI Toscana** (Association of Municipalities of Tuscany) (IT) – among the partners of the Includ-EU “Includ-EU: Regional and local expertise, exchange and engagement for enhanced social cohesion in Europe”, a project headed by the International Organisation for Migration and financed by the DG Home of the European Commission.
- 2 June 2022: Coordinator of a **SAI** (Reception and Integration System) centre in Catania, Sicily (IT).
- 24 June 2022: Integration and Technical cooperation Unit Coordinator, **IOM Italy**, and Project manager of Includ-EU Italy, Rome (IT).

People who contributed to the data collection via relevant documents sharing:

- Central Director for Immigration Policies and AMIF Funds, **Italian Ministry of the Interior**, Rome (IT).

- Project Assistant, Regional Office for the EEA, EU, and NATO, **IOM Brussels** (BE).

## **Appendix B.2.: List of questions to the interviewees**

1) Which are the main difficulties migrants can encounter when it comes to integration and inclusion especially in terms of employment, education, health care and housing? How does the *Plan* respond to these difficulties even in the light of the *2016 Action Plan*?

2) How do you think this *New Plan* can actually boost integration practices all over the European Union? How can it encourage inclusion and avoid discrimination?

3) Is the present *Plan* helping in coping with irregular migration? Will the proposed measures create new opportunities for migrants to move through legal channels?

4) The *New Plan* is integrated with the Multiannual Financial Framework for the year-period 2021-2027. In this respect, how can it facilitate economic stability and development in Europe?

5) Which are the new instruments for monitoring the implementation of the *Plan* at a European and national level?

6) Do you think that the devoted funds will be correctly used by all Member States in unison in the same way? What can you do in this regard? (To make this aspect work) Are these funds enough to support and implement all the projects listed in the *New Action Plan*?

7) In which elements this *New Plan* can be considered in line with the *New Pact of Migration and Asylum*? Does it contradict the principles of solidarity and shared responsibility according to which the Member States can also decide just to contribute economically or via return sponsorship to support migrants?

8) How (in which direction) the mentioned policy areas should be developed in order for a migrant to be considered fully integrated? What does fully integrated mean according to your organisation?



9) In your opinion, why people with a migrant background are not integrated yet?  
(Since one of the novelties of this New *Plan* consists in the target groups)

10) Which are the perceptible results your organisation is able to collect until the present moment?

11) Who are the main (or even secondary) actors involved in the implementation of the *Plan* in your organisation? Can you provide an insight into what you precisely do to make it operational?

### Appendix B.3.: Codebook for qualitative analysis (via *MAXQDA 2022*)

Code	Description	Example
<b>Structural barriers</b>	The interviewee refers to some restrictions that make the fulfilment of the integration process very difficult in its full implementation. To this respect, language has been identified as the main means towards successful integration. The same problem has been addressed as a <i>vacatio legis</i> .	‘There’s also a Tunisian minor who arrived in March and who is no longer entitled to enroll in compulsory school. Registration for compulsory school must be done online by 31 December and the boy is not old enough to enroll in the CPIA adult education center. So, this is already a first problem that we must face because the Italian legislation does not meet us halfway in ensuring training courses in line with the ones provided to the other ten beneficiaries. Therefore, this is a form of limitation to his integration path, in particular

		<p>as regards the local language learning. Here, from this point of view, perhaps, it would be the case that community policies could guarantee priority training courses with respect to Italian legislation.’</p>
<p><b>Administrative length</b></p>	<p>The interviewees mention the braking of the integration-related activities due to the bureaucracy’s slowness in different domains, such as the validation of projects, the adjustments of official documents in case of mistakes (especially typing errors), the recognition of migrants’ status, and the appointment of a guardian <i>ad litem</i> for minors.</p>	<p>‘The problem is also the slowness with which projects are approved. For example, I don’t know if the professional training courses are financed with these funds... however, as concerns the regional professional training courses we have big problems because perhaps they ask us to do a list of potential participants. The time it takes to participate in tenders and for them to be approved is two years. In the meantime, the beneficiaries create expectations, because they think they can take this course in a short time... I had enrolled I. in a course as a multi-skilled construction worker in 2017 and they called him in 2020.’</p>

<b>Dysfunctional synergies</b>	Some of the interviewees complain the ineffective cooperation between the relevant actors and/or notice that this deficiency hinders migrants' integration and inclusion in the receiving society.	'On a theoretical level everything is beautiful, then you go to the municipalities, and you really get depressed because the staff employed is not stimulated... they shift responsibilities from one side to the other... if you say that there is a project it means that there is more work for them. There is not always this will to carry things forward, with exceptions.'
<b>Delivery disruption</b>	The interviewee makes reference to the difficulty in the services delivery to migrants facing uncertain conditions.	'An investment on this target is not made. But, even there, it is about people who have stayed in our territory for years, who in fact cannot work because otherwise they will lose the reception system, they cannot be trained because they are still applicants, because it makes no sense to invest in an applicant person, not knowing if he/she will never be able to stay. All this would make sense if they stayed for three, four, five,

		<p>six months, but then when they stay three, four years and they can't do anything... This whole discussion collapses when this need arises.'</p>
<b>Narrative shift</b>	<p>The interviewees wish for a change in the narrative connected to migration that risks otherwise to distort the reality around the issue.</p>	<p>'Also building a counter-narrative is essential to pay attention to the data. So as not to let certain messages pass without offering a different reading on this aspect as well.'</p>
<b>Grounded projects</b>	<p>Most of the interviewees refer to projects financed by the AMIF funding instrument that appear to be the most efficient at the local level, in relation to the Italian context.</p>	<p>'A huge number of FAMI projects has also been organised with schools... Several literacy teaching courses, even in summer, have been scheduled: something that wasn't there before, or rather, there were courses for obtaining the lower secondary school certificate. But now, for a year or so, it has been decided to organise a whole series of literacy courses, perhaps because it has been understood that the CPIA is not exactly exceptional in terms of training and that,</p>

		instead, the language is the main means of communicating.’
<b>Concreteness</b>	The interviewee alludes to the absence of clear instructions to put the theoretical principles of the <i>Action Plan</i> into practical measures.	Despite the <i>Plan</i> being interesting, it is perhaps lacking in concreteness, then, the local authorities have to invent something to make it sustainable in terms of funds, for example, and from a political point of view. In the transition from the SPRAR to the SIPROIMI, there was a significant decline in these experiences, at least in the Italian context.  The <i>Plan</i> can give directions thanks to resources, thinking about the sustainability of these initiatives, to carry out integration experiences.

### **Appendix C: Events under the Includ-EU’s project**

#### First Includ-EU’s briefing: Housing

(Analysis of the housing context for migrants in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia and Spain).

#### Second Includ-EU’s briefing: Education

(Analysis of the education context for migrants in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia and Spain).

Third Includ-EU's briefing: Participation

(Analysis of the participation context for migrants in Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia and Spain).

Pilot Projects

(Pilot actions do not only benefit regional and local authorities, but they concretely enhance migrants integration).

Webinar: Improving access to services

(First webinar focus on how an intercultural approach helps to increase efficacy of public services by reducing cultural distances) – 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

Webinar: Improving Labour Market Inclusion

(Second webinar within focus on different experiences on how regions work to improve labour market policies) – 10<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

Webinar: Active Participation & social inclusion to harness the diversity advantage

(Regional and local experiences facilitating migrant's active participation and social inclusion) – 16<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

Webinar: Cross-sectoral approaches to inclusive housing

(Main challenges and innovative approaches to inclusive housing for local authorities and relevant stakeholders) – 7<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

Webinar: Access to quality education and training: an intercultural approach

(How to unlock the potential of education and training as key enablers for inclusion?) – 24<sup>th</sup> May 2022.

Workshop: Looking back at the Include-EU First Regional Peer-2-peer Learning

(First Include-EU Regional Workshop, analysing and sharing problems and challenges) – 10<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

Workshop: Hate-Speech – Towards a comprehensive approach

(Building sustainable cities and communities).

Workshop: Design for inclusion services

(Agenda 2030 – Transforming regions, changing the world).

Workshop: Inclusion, creativity and human potential

(Third Includ-EU Regional Workshop: a holistic approach to labour inclusion) – 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022.