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## MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY AND LAW: MENTAL HEALTH AND INTEGRATION STRATEGIES FOR THE MOST FRAGILE INDIVIDUALS



**ABSTRACT**<sup>[1]</sup>

The contribution aims to carry out a socio-anthropological and juridical analysis of the issues concerning the status of migrants and refugees, in order to reconstruct an up-to-date picture of supranational and Italian legislation, and of migratory flows, which can contribute to developing an even more specific and sectorial investigation on the issue of mental health and the protection of the most fragile subjects involved in migration, trying to identify the most suitable strategies for effective integration. Solving the problems of mental health and post-traumatic stress pathologies of migrants and refugees is to all intents and purposes a guarantee of protection of a fundamental human right that can only be achieved by reorienting the health policies of the destination states, strengthening the skills of professionals in the sector, and improving the information systems for collecting, analyzing and sharing data.

**KEYWORDS:** *migrants, refugees, integration strategies, most fragile individuals, mental health*

**INTRODUCTION*****‘MIGRANTI’, ‘PROFUGHI’ AND ‘RIFUGIATI’: TERMINOLOGICAL ANALYSIS IN THE ITALIAN LEGISLATION***

The phenomenon of migration over the years has manifested itself in different and new ways that have led to transformations and significant developments also in the terminology used to delineate its characteristics and describe its connotations.

Among the most manifest changes is, without a doubt, the use of the word migrant in place of the words immigrant, or emigrant. The term, as is well known, has now taken on a broader character, increased in its semantic meaning to the point of assuming the role of a privileged key word to illustrate most of the events linked to migratory movements. Consequently, it is possible to include in the meaning of migrant not only individuals on the move, but also those who have become permanently integrated in the states in which they have found a permanent home. In official language, the broadening of the meaning of the term migrant to include different sub-categories that account for a multiplicity of conditions and paths of each, has generated the current use of different phrases such as ‘forced migrant’, ‘economic migrant’,

'highly skilled migrant' [see the Glossary on Asylum and Migration, edited by the European Commission, European Migration Network].

In legislative texts and in the lexicon of the bureaucracy, one finds the use of terms such as stateless, refugee, asylum seeker, migrant, nouns that in fact identify specific officially recognized categories; while in everyday language and in journalism, additional words such as immigrant, clandestine and refugee, which evoke more ambiguous and imprecise concepts, are also used. These two lexical levels actually proceed in parallel in order to achieve conceptual precision and unambiguous terminology, which often contrasts with the factual transformations that inexorably imply conceptual changes.

Following the humanitarian crises in African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Somalia and Sudan) and with the beginning of the war in Syria, since 2010/2011 the term migrant has been used with a more generic meaning to refer to different subject categories including those fleeing wars and situations of destruction, oppression and torture, individuals who risk their lives and seek protection and preservation. These are people who no longer embody the generic status of migrant but are undoubtedly refugees seeking asylum.

Therefore, since migratory flows have coincided with mass transfers of people fleeing countries at war, or from situations of persecution, or risking their lives, even the media have started to move away from using the term migrant in a generic sense and have begun to use the noun refugee or clandestine more frequently. It should be noted, however, that the concepts of refugee and clandestine have gradually taken on different meanings and that now only the term refugee refers to a precise status outlined in international law and finds conceptual equivalence in other European languages.

- a. *Profugo*. In the concept of 'exiled, outcast', it is a noun of ancient Italian derived from Latin *profūgus*, itself related to the meaning of the verb *profugere* 'to seek escape' (compound of *pro* 'forward' and *fugere* 'to flee'). In its modern meaning of 'a person fleeing or expelled from his country of origin or residence for political, religious or racial reasons and then for war and natural disasters', the first historical dictionary to record it is the Tommaseo-Bellini who, in his definition of refugees as 'those exiled, or escaping exile, for political reasons', highlights the contexts and period of the word's diffusion. In the current definition, which

emerged between the 19th and 20th centuries (the *Grande Dizionario Della Lingua Italiana* has examples from Foscolo to Ojetti), it is possible to distinguish two types of refugees: international refugees, i.e. those who, due to political, religious or racial persecution, seek refuge in another state; internal refugees, i.e. those who are necessarily obliged to temporarily move from their habitual residence due to war or natural disasters, while remaining in their country of origin.

- b. *Rifugiato*. The term has been part of the Italian language since the 20th century and derives from the French word *réfugié* (already present in the Edict of Nantes 1598, later revoked in 1685). An analysis of historical Italian vocabularies shows that the word refugee appears as a headword in Tommaseo-Bellini, with a very generic definition that is largely similar to that of *profugo* (which, among other things, is indicated as a synonym): ‘Who is sheltered, who has found refuge (or even hospitality) in a safe place or region, in order to escape danger or escape from difficult situations or conditions. – Also outcast, refugee’. While in the *Grande Dizionario Della Lingua Italiana* the entry gives an account of the peculiarity of the concept in the sphere of international law, where it states that the term ‘indicates the person who, as part of a more or less numerous collective phenomenon, has abandoned or has been forced to abandon his own country where he was persecuted, oppressed or discriminated against for political, religious or racial reasons and has taken refuge in a foreign country’.

The weakening of the synonymy between the two terms occurred at the semantic level when the word refugee was used as a single word to indicate a specific status enshrined in international law. In fact, with the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, refugee status was granted to those who had already been declared as such by agreements and conventions stipulated between 1926-1938. Furthermore, following a 1967 addition to Art. 1 of the Convention, one can read the legal definition of a refugee, which appears as ‘Any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the State of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear,

is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that State; or any person who, being stateless and being outside his State of domicile in consequence of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

In all the treaties subsequent to the Geneva Convention, which have progressively involved countries in Africa, Central America, Mexico and Panama, up to the most recent EU Directives on minimum standards on the qualification of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees, the basic notion of a refugee is always shared, qualified as a person forced to leave his or her country of origin and seek protection in a foreign country. And this is precisely what characterizes the refugee as opposed to the economic migrant: whereas the economic migrant voluntarily and freely chooses to leave his or her country to achieve economic, social or cultural betterment, the refugee is forced to do so: it is exclusively a necessary choice, a real constraint.

Also underlining this distinction between the two concepts of migrant and refugee was the Pope's authoritative intervention in November 2016, expressed in an interview with the *'Corriere della Sera'*, in which the Pontiff reiterated that *a distinction must be made between migrant and refugee; the migrant is treated with certain rules, the refugee, on the other hand, comes from a situation of war, of terrible anguish, refugee status needs more care.* This was also reiterated in the same year in a report by Amnesty International on Identification Centers, which highlighted the need to improve the moment of identification, which most often takes place in a hasty and superficial manner, often using coercive methods, whose results are certainly not reliable.

It is worth remembering that the Italian lexicon also includes the term *sfollato/sfollati* to indicate the mass displacements that occur within the borders of a single State. The word in fact qualifies individuals who have fled for the same reasons as refugees, but who 'have not crossed a recognised international border' (<https://www.unhcr.it/chi-aiutiamo/sfollati>).

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the noun *profugo* is only present in the Italian lexicon. In fact, in IATE (InterActive Terminology for Europe) the Italian word *profugo* is translated in other European languages with the term corresponding to '*rifugiato*' (e.g. *refugee* in English, *réfugié* in French, *refugiado* in Spanish and Portuguese, *Flüchtling* in German, etc.). Finally, synonyms also include the expression '*sfollato esterno*', which coincides with

the English *Internally Displaced Person*, the French *déplacé*, the Spanish *deplazado*, the Portuguese *pessoa deslocada*, and the German *Vertriebene*. It can therefore be noted that the terms coinciding with the concept of 'sfollato esterno' in languages other than Italian fill the semantic ambit that in the Italian language is expressed by the word *profugo*.

But in order to delineate the many different conditions of the immense multitudes of people 'on the run' from a large number of countries around the world, it would be appropriate to immediately distinguish those who have the right to apply for international protection as refugees from those who cannot be included in these parameters and, consequently, remain in the position of migrants, inclined to seek a better life in other states, or refugees with the determination to return to their country of origin, once so-called normality has been restored.

### **THE LEGAL PROTECTION OF REFUGEES: FROM THE GENEVA CONVENTION TO THE RULES OF THE ITALIAN LEGAL SYSTEM**

The right to asylum is among the fundamental human rights and is recognized by the third paragraph of Article 10 of the Italian Constitution to a foreigner who is prevented in his or her country from effectively exercising the democratic freedoms guaranteed by the Italian Constitution, in accordance with the conditions established by law.

The legal reservation provided by the third paragraph of Article 10 of the Constitution for a foreigner's right to asylum, to date, has not been followed by the enactment of a specific implementing law.

Moreover, it is worth highlighting that jurisprudence (Judgment No. 4674 of 1997 of the United Section of the Supreme Court) has affirmed the preceptive character and the consequent immediate operativeness of the constitutional provision, which, with sufficient clarity, outlines the case in point that gives rise to the right of asylum for the foreigner.

Although the two terms are often used synonymously, the institution of the right to asylum does not coincide with the institution of refugee status. For the latter, it is not sufficient, as specified above, to be accepted in another state, that

fundamental freedoms are generally repressed in the country of origin, but it is necessary that the individual applicant has suffered specific acts of persecution.

Recognition of refugee status was provided for in our legal system following Italy's accession to the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 (ratified by Law 722/1954) and is essentially regulated by the EU sources.

A refugee is thus a foreign national who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the territory of the country of which he or she is a national and cannot or, owing to this fear, does not wish to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country. It may also be a stateless person who is outside the territory in which he or she was previously habitually resident for the same reasons and cannot or does not wish to return there.

For a long time, Italy's regulations were limited to the recognition of refugee *status*. Following accession to the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951, which defines refugee *status* (ratified by Law no. 722 of 1954; however, it was not until Decree-Law no. 416 of 1989 that the geographical reservation made at the time of ratification was removed). Subsequently, the Dublin Convention of 15 June 1990 intervened on the determination of the State responsible for examining an asylum application submitted in one of the Member States of the European Community (ratified in Italy by Law No. 523 of 1992).

It was the incidence of Community provisions that gave impetus to a greater articulation of the Italian internal normative discipline. Asylum, in fact, in its various articulations, is one of the matters falling within the competence of the European Union, which under Article 78 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union pursues a 'common policy' through a 'common European asylum system'.

The legal basis of the European asylum system derives from Article 78 of the Treaty of Lisbon, which entrusts the European Union with the development of a common policy on asylum, subsidiary protection and temporary protection, with the aim of offering appropriate status to any third-country national in need of international protection and guaranteeing the principle of non-refoulement; this policy must, however, be in accordance with the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 and the Protocol of 31 January 1967 and other relevant treaties.

Other provisions of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union also concern the management of external borders (Article 77) and the common immigration policy, 'aimed at ensuring, at all stages, the effective management of migration flows, fair treatment of third-country nationals residing legally in the Member States and the prevention of, and enhanced measures to combat, illegal immigration and trafficking in human beings' (Article 79). Furthermore, Article 80 of the Treaty provides that the Union's policies on border controls, asylum and immigration *shall be governed by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, including its financial implications, between the Member States.*

In terms of competences, it is up to the European Union – as far as legal migration is concerned – to define the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals who enter and reside legally in one of the member states, including for the purpose of family reunification. Member States retain the power to determine volumes of admission for third-country nationals seeking employment.

From an integration perspective, the Union can provide incentives and support for measures taken by Member States to promote the integration of third-country nationals legally residing in the country; however, no harmonization of Member States' laws and regulations is envisaged.

With regard to the fight against illegal immigration, the EU is obliged to prevent and reduce irregular immigration, in particular through an effective return policy, while respecting fundamental rights. With regard to readmission agreements, the EU has the competence to conclude agreements with third countries for the readmission to the country of origin or provenance of third-country nationals who do not or no longer fulfill the conditions for entry, presence or residence in one of the member states.

European legislation then introduced the institution of international protection, which comprises two distinct legal categories:

- recognition of refugee status, governed as it is by the Geneva Convention, and granted to those who are exposed in their own country to individual acts of persecution that constitute a serious violation of their fundamental rights.
- subsidiary protection, available to foreign nationals who do not qualify for refugee status, i.e. who are unable to prove that they are the object of



specific acts of persecution, but who, nevertheless, if returned to their country of origin, would face a real risk of suffering serious harm and who are unable or (precisely because of that risk) unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of their country of origin.

In relation to the particular condition, therefore, a foreign national who applies for refugee *status* may be granted refugee *status* or the measure of subsidiary protection may be granted. The different protection relates to a series of objective and subjective parameters, which refer to the personal history of the applicant, the reasons for the request and the country of origin.

Refugee *status* and forms of subsidiary protection are recognized at the outcome of the preliminary investigation carried out by the Territorial Commissions for the recognition of international protection: as provided for at the EU normative level by the so-called Dublin II Regulation, the foreigner can apply for international protection in the State of first entry, which, therefore, becomes competent to examine the application.

A further case introduced and regulated is temporary protection, which may be granted in cases of a mass influx or imminent mass influx of displaced persons from non-EU countries who cannot return to their country of origin, in order to ensure immediate and temporary protection, in particular when there is a risk that the asylum system cannot cope with this influx.

In contrast, of exclusively domestic source is protection on humanitarian grounds (which Decree-Law No. 113 of 2018 abolished as a general institution, while maintaining some enumerated and typified forms of specific application).

With regard to the transposition into domestic EU legislation, the prerequisites and contents of the two forms of international protection – refugee status and subsidiary protection – were originally regulated by Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 (the so-called Qualification Directive), which was transposed into our legislation by Legislative Decree No. 251 of 2007 (the so-called Qualification Decree). The Directive was subsequently amended by Directive 2011/95/EU, which was implemented by Legislative Decree No. 18 of 2014.

As for the procedures for the purposes of the recognition and revocation of international protection, the normative discipline is set by Legislative

Decree No. 25 of 28 January 2008, as amended by Legislative Decree No. 142 of 18 August 2015, implementing the *procedures* Directive No. 32 of 2013.

The same Legislative Decree No. 142/2015, with subsequent amendments and additions, also provided for the implementation of the new Reception Directive (2013/33), containing the modalities for the reception, immediate and longer-term, of applicants.

The transposition of Directive 2011/51/EU, which intervenes on a specific aspect, i.e. the extension of the right to obtain an EU long-term residence permit to holders of international protection, through the amendment of Directive 2003/109/EC, was carried out with the issuance of Legislative Decree No. 12/2014.

#### A. *THE RECEPTION SYSTEM FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES IN THE LIGHT OF THE AMENDMENTS OF DECREE-LAW NO. 130/2020*

Reception measures for asylum seekers consist of several phases. The very first phase consists of rescue and first assistance, as well as the identification of migrants, especially in places of landing. According to the amendments introduced by Decree-Law no. 130/2020, first assistance functions are ensured in governmental centers and temporary facilities provided for in Articles 9 and 11 of the Reception Decree (see below).

Reception proper is in turn divided into two phases:

- the first reception phase for the completion of the identification of the applicant and the submission of the asylum application, within the so-called ordinary and extraordinary governmental first reception centers.
- a second reception and integration phase, ensured, at territorial level, by local authority projects:

The activities of so-called first reception, which include the identification of the foreigner (where it has not been possible to complete the operations in the hotspots), the verbalization and initiation of the procedure for examining the asylum application, the assessment of health conditions and the existence of any situations of vulnerability, are ensured by the newly established governmental centers, provided for by Legislative Decree no. 142/2015 on the basis of the planning of national and interregional coordination tables (Art. 9) and,

in first application, by existing reception centers, such as Reception Centers for Asylum Seekers (CARA) and Reception Centers (CDA). The applicant is sent to these facilities by the Prefect, after consulting the Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration of the Ministry of the Interior.

In the event of exhaustion of places in governmental centers, due to massive influxes of applicants, they may be hosted in facilities other than governmental centers. The nature of these facilities, called CAS (extraordinary reception centers), is temporary and the identification is carried out by the Prefectures, in consultation with the local authority in whose territory the facility is located. Data from recent years on the presence of migrants in reception facilities show that most refugees are hosted in temporary facilities (i.e. CAS), as conventional services at central and local level have limited capacity.

According to the data disseminated in the Report on the functioning of the reception system for foreigners in the national territory, referring to the year 2019 transmitted at the end of December 2020 by the Ministry of the Interior to Parliament (Doc. LI, No. 3), the network of first reception consists of:

- 9 governmental centers, with the presence of 2.569 migrants.
- 5.465 temporary reception facilities (CAS) located in the territory, down from 9.132 facilities in 2017 and 8.102 in 2018. Overall, these centers host the majority of asylum seekers, amounting to 63.960.

On the implementation front, the Commission of Inquiry on the reception system established at the Chamber of Deputies during the 17th legislature highlighted a mismatch between the theoretical model established by Legislative Decree 142 of 2015 and the reality of the system. The investigation carried out revealed, two years after the approval of the decree, the excessive recourse to extraordinary reception centers (CAS) and a restricted adherence to SPRAR projects by local authorities, despite regulatory and administrative interventions aimed at incentivizing municipalities in this sense. This led the Commission, also in consideration of further critical factors, to suggest appropriate corrective measures to ensure the implementation of the reception model outlined by Legislative Decree no. 142/2015 (Doc. XXII-*bis*, no. 21).

During the eighteenth legislature, Decree-Law 130 of 2020 (Art. 4, par. 1) redefined the material reception conditions in governmental first reception facilities, establishing:

- the need to ensure adequate health and hygiene and housing standards in the centers, in accordance with criteria and procedures to be established by decree of the Minister of the Interior, after consulting the Unified Conference, adequate security standards, as well as suitable prevention, control and surveillance measures, with regard to participation or active propaganda in favor of international terrorist organizations.
- the type of services to be provided by the centers, which consist of: material reception services, health care, social and psychological assistance, linguistic-cultural mediation, provision of Italian language courses and legal and territorial orientation services.

It has also been established that services can be provided, including by means of organization on a territorial basis, i.e., by way of example, at municipal, supra-municipal or provincial level as well as in individual reception centers.

The second reception is guaranteed by the projects of the Protection System for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (SPRAR), established in 2002, renamed Protection System for Holders of International Protection and Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (SIPROIMI) as of the end of 2018, following the amendments provided for by Article 12 of Decree-Law 113/2018 and, most recently, reformed by Decree-Law 130 of 2020 (Article 4, par. 3-4), which defined the new *Reception and Integration System* (SAI).

Local authorities join the system on a voluntary basis and implement projects with the support of third sector organizations. The system is coordinated by the Central Service, activated by the Ministry of the Interior and entrusted by agreement to the National Association of Italian Municipalities (ANCI). The projects are financed by the National Fund for Asylum Policies and Services, established by Law no. 189 of 30 July 2002, which includes both national resources, coming from the Ministry of the Interior's budget (cap. 2352), and annual allocations from the European Refugee Fund. The so-called second reception projects are not limited to basic material interventions (board and lodging),

but ensure a series of functional activities for the reconquest of individual autonomy, such as the teaching of the Italian language, vocational training and qualification, legal orientation, access to local services, orientation and job, housing and social integration, as well as psycho-socio-health protection.

In the original structure of Legislative Decree 142 of 2015, the so-called second reception services were intended for those who had already applied for international protection (and also those to whom said status had been recognized), lacking sufficient means of subsistence. With the changes introduced by Decree-Law 113 of 2018, the type of beneficiaries accessing the second reception system and the methods of access had been modified.

The reform reserved the reception services of the local authorities adhering to the SPRAR, renamed SIPROIMI to holders of international protection and unaccompanied foreign minors, excluding applicants for international protection from the possibility of using the relevant services. In addition, foreign citizens holding residence permits for special cases (social protection and victims of trafficking, domestic violence and serious labour exploitation), for medical treatment, for disasters, for acts of special civic value, could also be admitted to the system.

As a result of this intervention, applicants for international protection, unless the conditions requiring detention in the Centers of Permanence for Repatriation (CPR) were met, could only access the measures provided for in the first reception centers. Moreover, as an exception to the legislation in force at that time, with the DD.LL. no. 18 and no. 34 of 2020, some measures related to the reception and health protection of immigrants were provided for, in consideration of the needs related to the state of epidemiological emergency from Covid-19, for which we refer to the specific topic.

**B. MEASURES CONCERNING THE RECEPTION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS, FRAGILE AND VULNERABLE PERSONS AND HEALTH PROTECTION OF APPLICANTS FOR INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION**

As a result of the amendments introduced by Decree-Law No. 130/2020, the inclusion in the structures of this circuit has been extended, within the limits of available places, not only to holders of international protection and unaccompanied foreign minors, but also to applicants for international protection, who had been excluded by the previous Decree-Law No. 113 of 2018, as well as to holders of different categories of residence permits provided for by the Immigration TU (if they do not access specifically dedicated protection systems) and to new-born children entrusted to social services in administrative continuation. These subjects are transferred to the structures of the Reception and Integration System within the limits of available places: however, Decree-Law 130 of 2020 added a priority criterion in the transfer to municipal structures for applicants who fall into one of the categories of vulnerability provided for by Article 17 of the Reception Decree.

It should be recalled that within the scope of reception measures, Decree No. 142/2015 reserves special attention to persons *with special needs* (so called vulnerable persons, the list of which is enlarged compared to the past), for whom specific arrangements are introduced in the reception and assistance procedure. Thus, special reception services are activated in governmental centers, also in cooperation with the local health authority, which must guarantee special care measures and adequate psychological support. Among all the categories of vulnerability, special provisions are reserved for the reception of unaccompanied foreign minors (MSNA).

Law Decree 130/2020 provided for a diversification of the services of the SAI, which is now divided into two levels of services in relation to the different categories of users:

- first-level services, accessed by applicants for international protection, which include: material reception services, health care, social and psychological assistance, linguistic-cultural mediation, administration of Italian language courses and legal and territorial orientation services.

These are the same services that must be provided in governmental first reception centers.

- second-level services, accessed by all the other categories of beneficiaries of the system, who already have access to the services provided at the first level: these are additional services, aimed at integration, which include job guidance and vocational training.

Finally, the same decree (art. 5) provides that for the beneficiaries of reception measures accepted in the Reception and Integration System, further integration projects are initiated by the competent administrations and within the limits of the available resources, as well as identified some priority lines of intervention for the updating of the National Plan for the Integration of Persons with International Protection for the two-year period 2020-2021.

According to the data reported by the Central System Service, as of June 2022, 847 projects involving 719 local authorities for a total of 39.418 funded places were active and admitted to funding by the Ministry of the Interior, as follows:

31.981 ordinaries;

6.634 for unaccompanied minors;

803 for people with mental distress or disabilities.

## **MENTAL HEALTH OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES: STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATION**

One aspect that deserves special attention concerns the mental health of migrants and refugees, an issue that is often overlooked in studies on migration flow analysis. The effects of the migration path unfortunately inevitably reverberate on the health status of migrants and refugees, their psychic sphere and mental integrity.

The settlement of migrants and refugees in a totally unfamiliar country and the insertion into a completely foreign and unknown cultural context, which follow the painful path taken by these individuals forcibly, undoubtedly jeopardize the psychological stability of women and men, who, having lived through difficult experiences such as wars, forced displacement and harsh

migration routes, are unable to cope with the magnitude of such strong emotions that all this can entail.

In this regard, the data published in July 2022 by the European Migration Network can be of great help, in which it is possible to see the mapping of policies in favor of migrants' mental health, highlighting the challenges for member states regarding access to primary services by foreigners.

In reality, migrants and refugees, despite the fact that the right to care is the same as that available to European citizens, are faced with additional, and often insurmountable, difficulties, such as language barriers, lack of information, difficult access to integrated services, high costs and long waiting lists, lack of awareness and trust, and socio-economic disadvantages.

It follows that the integration of migrants also requires the development of policies and strategies that pay attention to the training of staff so that they have specific skills to support and help those who speak a different language and have distant cultural roots.

With regard to the difficulties encountered by migrants and refugees in this specific field, the words of Franco Voltaggio are still of great relevance and impact. In 2007, during a *lectio magistralis* on transcultural psychiatry, a discipline that studies and treats all disorders that can be traced back to the cultural environment of onset and cannot be ascribed to recognized or shared pathological categories, stated, highlighting problems that are still unresolved in Italy today, that 'while our politicians were deciding what to do with themselves, what to do when they grow up, whether to continue with the first or the second republic, Italy, considered rightly or wrongly as a sort of *Eldorado*, was invested by a great flow of migrants. From this novelty, namely from finally coming into contact with the real things – with men, women, children – it was in the first instance doctors, and even earlier of course psychiatrists, who had to deal with the consequences of migration, discovering various things. When we speak of integration, we should not think of the integration of others into Italian society, but of a reciprocal integration that starts with the Italians and is taken up by the guests'.

The unhappiness of migrants and refugees stems from the fact that most of the time they do not find work easily, and if they do, the conditions are often terrible; that they have enormous difficulty finding housing. But the



unhappiness is also caused by a syndrome that can be defined as disorientation: the young migrant, who arrives in Italy, welcomed in what are called First Reception Centers, but which in reality are real concentration camps, is disoriented because he finds himself in a place that does not belong to him and feels a deep melancholy combined with a strong sense of nostalgia for his country. But as paradoxical as it may seem, this state of nostalgia will also be felt by the migrant or refugee with respect to the first land of arrival, since, knowing that he will also have to leave his new homeland, he will experience a kind of anticipated nostalgia since he leaves his roots behind, but once he enters that kind of paradisiacal hell that would be Italy, he will sever others.

The first World Report on Refugee and Migrant Health, published in July 2022 by the World Health Organization, starts by analyzing numbers that have almost doubled over the previous ten years, with 281 million people on the move in 2020 alone. Despite the current difficulties, one in every 30 people in the world, as highlighted earlier, lives outside their country: the 281 million international migrants account for 3.6% of the world population.

According to the WHO, although refugees and migrants are affected by the same health determinants as the indigenous population, *their migration status may itself represent a health determinant that, combined with the other individual (genetics, gender, personal behavior and age) and social and economic (education, health literacy, income and social status, employment, social support networks, etc.), plays a role in the different stages of the migration cycle and makes them particularly vulnerable from a health perspective* (INMP, 2022). It is especially women who are most at risk of physical and sexual violence, whose status, when associated with having low educational qualifications and unstable occupations, is relevant for the effects on health; but unaccompanied minors are also vulnerable to the risk of suffering violence and mental disorders caused by the discomfort experienced, also in relation to the interruption of the school cycle due to migration.

Finally, economic insecurity and employment in often dangerous and demanding jobs, as well as residence in unsafe or overcrowded housing, inevitably affect migrant's health.

With regard to mental disorders, depression and anxiety appear to be prevalent, which can certainly be greater among refugees and migrants at different

stages of displacement and migration, depending on various individual, social and environmental factors.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is frequently found in conflict-affected refugee children and adolescents” (INMP, 2022).

There are many factors that influence the onset of mental problems: a history of family separation in order to face a long journey, being widowed or having a divorce experience behind one’s back, the recent arrival in a foreign country of which one has difficulty learning the language and expressing oneself, having suffered violence and sexual abuse or having experienced discriminatory experiences that were never communicated.

In Europe, the incidence of anxiety disorders is somewhat similar among refugees (13%) and the general population (9%); however, the incidence of depressive disorders is different, affecting 32% of migrants and refugees versus 4% for auctotots respectively.

A study of young migrants in Sweden, aged between 19 and 25, shows that the prevalence of mental disorders decreases with a higher level of education and that the risk of developing post-traumatic stress is associated with a longer stay in the host country.

With regard to schizophrenia and psychotic disorders, migrant populations are more susceptible, especially depending on the regions of origin and destination, as well as their combination; factors such as separation from parents during childhood and discrimination and ethnic density in the host country play a significant role in the onset of these disorders.

The prevalence of some mental conditions compared to others varies with social and environmental factors, as well as access to treatment and diagnostic services.

However, the risk of developing diseases or aggravation of already established diseases is higher for migrants than for the native population.

## CONCLUSIONS

From these reflections, carried out in this contribution, some particularly relevant data emerge.

In today's official lexical panorama of the Italian language, which substantially reflects the legal one, refugees are distinguished into displaced persons and refugees, both protected by international law. Despite the meritorious efforts of European institutions to delineate a univocal and non-discriminatory language, it remains very difficult to follow the rapid and sudden geopolitical changes that inevitably give rise to new types of migrations and that invariably produce semantic effects that reverberate in technical and official terminology, with the creation of neologisms or the conceptual broadening of terms in order to include and define new situations.

It should also be noted that the Italian legislator has intervened incisively regarding the adaptation of internal legislation to the principles dictated by international bodies, starting from the Geneva Convention on the topic of refugees. In particular, in this contribution a great sensitivity has emerged, regarding the interventions to protect fragile migrants and refugees, by the Italian legislator who has prepared specific interventions on the subject of unaccompanied minors, fragile and vulnerable persons and health protection of migrants and refugees.

In light of these brief remarks made in the last paragraph, it is clear that promoting the health of migrants and refugees, reorienting health policies, strengthening the skills of health workers, and improving information systems for collecting, analyzing and sharing data, means guaranteeing a fundamental right, which is in line with the goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind, promoting mental health and well-being for all.

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### ENDNOTES

- [1] English translation by dr. Pietro Giovanni Antonio Santoru (PhD in Legal Studies).