THE UNIVERSITY CORRIDORS FOR REFUGEES (UNI.CO.RE) PROGRAM IN ITALY (2019-2023)

Evaluation Report

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Marco Borraccetti
Mariateresa Veltri

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The aim of the evaluation report – produced by the evaluation team of University of Bologna in the framework of the EU-Passworld project – is to generate findings, recommendations, insights and learning around the UNICORE program editions and its core's phases implementation across the national territory led by UNHCR, Caritas Italian, Centro Astalli, and the 41 partner Universities. This report will serve likely to contribute towards designing and developing policy and guidance on this subject matter, including the next education complementary pathway handbook in the framework of the EUPassworld project.

EU-Passworld is a three-year project funded by the European Union's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). It aims to establish new education and labour pathways with a link to community sponsorship in Belgium, Ireland and Italy for at least 200 main applicants across the three countries by the end of 2024. A key question that the project examines is under what circumstances sponsorship makes education and labour pathways more sustainable. For further information on EU-Passworld visit the project website: https://www.eupassworld.eu/.

For any questions regarding this publication, contact us at: mariateresa.veltri@unibo.it

Cover photo: The welcoming of refugee students admitted to the program at their arrival at the Airport of Rome by UNI.CO.RE partners. (Ph. by UNHCR)

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List of Abbreviations

AMIF Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund
ATCR Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement
A.Y. Academic Year
CEFRL Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CEP Complementary Education Pathway
CSO Civil-society organisation
CTD Convention Travel Document
DOV Declaration of Value
EEA European Education Area
ETD Emergency Travel Document
EUAA European Union Agency for Asylum
GPA Grade Point Average
GRF Global Refugee Forum
GTF Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways
G7 Group of Seven
HEI Higher Education Institution
IDP internally displaced people
ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross
IOM International Organization for Migration
MOFA Ministry of Foreign Affair and International Cooperation
NGO Nongovernmental Organisation
OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SAR Scholars at Risk
UN United Nations
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency
UNIBO University of Bologna
UNICORE University Corridors for Refugees

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Executive summary

About the evaluation

This document was elaborated by the evaluation team of University of Bologna in the framework of EUPassworld - Widening Complementary Pathways linked to Community Sponsorship, a three-year project funded by the EU's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). It reviewed the University Corridors for Refugees (UNICORE) program led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR-Italy), in coordination with Caritas Italiana, Diaconia Valdese, Centro Astalli and 41 Italian Universities and other local partners. It also reviewd the Universities' leadership role, strategies and program performance with the double purpose of informing the future of university corridors strategy as higher education pathways and UNICORE program implementation as durable solution.

In this context, over the past five years UNICORE has been providing a higher education pathway, in which national and local partners have been able to experiment with diverse approaches and models of admission, reception and inclusion. This has enabled the program to adapt like a chameleon to the ever-changing challenges of time, space, resources, people. People in need of protection as individuals with rights and as the center of basic, environmental, social, psychological, and linguistic needs were bringing, in addition to the challenges of reception on different territories and, not least, the broader educational challenge in a broad sense.

Now UNICORE program provides refugees with appropriate protection safeguards, proper travel documentation and legal entry and stay arrangements for the duration of their studies (including scholarships, accommodation, etc.), and recently post-graduation options, which may include accompaniment towards permanent residency and post graduate study or employment. Academic scholarships and study opportunities allow refugee students to access legally and safely a Third Country to study, continue their education and/or undertake research. Civil society, universities and government actors normally collaborate to develop and fund customized education or scholarship programs. Essential components of such program include funding for travel, accommodation, subsistence, tuition, language training, cultural orientation and psychosocial support for successful refugee applicants.

Specifically, the findings and recommendations performed a learning function by aiming to:

- enhance the protection, inclusion and well-being of refugee students in Italy;
- inform the theory and practice of university corridors for the construction of a structured model of CEP and areas of intervention of greatest importance in the Community Sponsorship programs;

- influence strategic direction and inform the development of a legal and safe migration strategy, planning (including resourcing), advocacy and partnerships;
- highlight how UNICORE is or could be central within the existing practices at European level as regards the CEPs and explore its potential in the global context.

The broader ambition is to design a structured, multi-level, sustainable and replicable yet flexible (tailored on the States context) model of education pathway program, where university corridors experienced in Italy represent a gateway to existing ideas, resources and capacities for universities across the EU.

The scope of the evaluation covered the Italian university corridors program and the coordination between UNHCR and all partners involved, notably the Universities. Extensive consideration was given to identifying a range of operations that reflected some of the old and new barriers and enablers at every stage of UNICORE program.

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation focused primarily on UNICORE 2.0 (2020/2022) and 3.0 (2021/2023) since their core phases are completed. However, current experience and practices of UNICORE 4.0 (2022/2024, ongoing) and 5.0 (2023/2025, ongoing), were taken into account to understand changes over time, particularly in relation to the pilot edition of UNICORE program (2019). Thus, the evaluation partially considered the fourth edition, since it is not possible to evaluate the last phases (i.e. postgraduation), and the fifth edition, since it is operatively started on December 2022, and it is currently at its pre-departure phase.

The evaluation adopted a criteria-based, mixed-methods approach and was non-experimental in nature. The primary methods included a wide-ranging document review and data analysis. In consultation with UNHCR Italy, Caritas Italiana and Diaconia Valdese, key informants were identified to take part in interviews consisting of both UNHCR and Universities' staff and external and critical stakeholders at operational levels, as UNICORE students and alumni. An online questionnaire was delivered to incorporate a broader range of views from partner universities.

Key findings

Findings can be summarized as follows: understanding and operationalization of the UNICORE program; systems and processes to support UNICORE's phases implementation; engagement and dialogue with partner universities and students; lessons learned and good practices identified. University corridors as promising complementary education pathways can play a vital role in providing access to higher education in third countries for many refugees. The UNICORE program is geared to accommodate the specific circumstances of refugee students, dealing with administrative and legal barriers hindering access, and still leading to a variety of obstacles that require the attention of governmental stakeholders, explored in depth within this report. Notwithstanding the initial (legal,

administrative, social, financial) challenges, the UNICORE program has overcome many of them over the years, moving beyond the pilot phase, through the adopting of tailor-made and flexible approaches, without ever losing sight of the objectives of protection and safeguarding of the students, and their higher education. Similarly, it has lifted its design through continuous monitoring actions and listening to the needs of potential and current students, personnel staff from universities and national and local partners. Overall, UNICORE program hold immense value in serving as building block for future complementary education pathways design and implementation in Europe, as well as for growth of more international and inclusive universities.

Conclusions

The UNICORE project constitutes an innovative experience in the Italian and European panorama. Its strengths include the constructive interaction between institutional and non-institutional actors, coordination at central and local levels and the involvement of diverse multi-sectoral actors, level of social integration and active presence within the local environment, as well as the centrality of refugee's engagement and voice attending master's degree courses across the Italian territory. Its main weaknesses include the instability of fundings structure and delays in obtaining relevant documentation for the entry into the territory timely for the start of the master's courses, as well as the legal status that may affect the smooth progress of the students staying, also undermining in a sever way the choose to continue their life in Italy after graduation. The main challenges lie in: the covering of all available scholarships (since UNICORE 4.0), gender equity, long processing times for Declaration of Value (where required) and Travel Document impacting on the visa procedure and residence permit applications, the precarious legal status, the insufficient level of Italian language, linked also to an effective job inclusion, shortages of student accommodation; and finally more structured funding for long-term sustainability. Its added value benefits communities, but above all the academic environments. UNICORE has contributed to creating a more sensitized, civic, inclusive and international university, which has led them to greater awareness of the refugees' related issues; consequently, to the creation of a reception model for refugee students, including the promotion and strengthening of local networks; similarly, to the expansion and improvement of services for the benefit of all international students and potentially of other groups, such as scholars at risk, same national students at risk with or without migrant background; finally, the diffusion of the culture of hospitality within the university. Overall, this program is offering brighter futures to refugees, where universities have a lot to gain, and they are gradually playing a more vital role. Refugees bring with them different skills, knowledge, and experience that can enrich universities and fellow students in unique ways.

Recommendations

The recommendations below follow from the conclusions and are grouped into five broad thematic areas:

Normative framework, policy and guidelines

Recommendation 1: Enhance the institutional attention on University Corridors for Refugees and place greater emphasis on contextual realities, refugee needs and the principles of accessibility, safeguarding, and dignity in education pathways at all stage.

Operationalisation and programming

Recommendation 2: In the design of the higher education support interventions, place heavier emphasis on needs assessment and analysis. Ensure that needs and vulnerabilities of refugees who arrive are accurately captured and reflected in assessments and program design.

Information management

Recommendation 3: For the collection and dissemination of information relating to education conditions in countries of first asylum, as well as for outreach activities aimed at the greater inclusion of refugee students in the UNICORE program, mainstream the use of digital platforms both online and offline and social media as well as improve the referral tools.

Coordination and partnership

Recommendation 4: Create venues for coordinating and sharing learning among actors involved in implementing the programs within each country, including the private sector to identify opportunities to create links among education and employment pathways.

External relations, resource mobilisation and budgeting

Recommendation 5: Structure budgets and design funding instruments that support lasting higher education pathways intervention spanning mixed caseloads of refugees, students and scholars at risk.

1. Introduction

This report summarizes the findings, conclusions and recommendations arising from the evaluation of the UNICORE program from 2019 to 2023, promoted and coordinated by UNHCR with 41 Italian universities, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Caritas Italiana, Diaconia Valdese, Centro Astalli and other partners, to increase opportunities for refugees currently residing in some African Countries to continue their higher education in Italy through legal and safe pathways. The evaluation took place between October 2022 and September 2023. It was managed by the University of Bologna and undertaken by its independent evaluation team.

The evaluation aimed to generate evidence, lessons learned and provide recommendations to inform the future of the UNICORE program in Italy, and broader the future of university corridors as complementary education pathways for a legal and safe migration in Europe, for the construction of a structured model of the areas of intervention of greatest importance in the Community Sponsorship programs at global level. It inquired into a range of situations and contexts in which all UNICORE partners respond.

It was primarily concerned with data collection and analysis focused on a sample of responses to understand the facilitating factors and limitations in every stage of the UNICORE programming. The evaluation was complemented by a separate parallel qualitative and quantitative data analysis initiative commissioned by the UNHCR Office for Italy, the Holy See and San Marino, which the evaluation was able to draw on. In addition, several concurrent evaluations were taking place at the time of this evaluation from foreign entities devoted to the complementary education pathways matter, and brief consultations and workshops between evaluation and research teams to identify any commonalities took place in the framework of the EUPassworld project[1].

1.1 The UNICORE program as a whole

The University Corridors for Refugees (UNICORE) program was launched by the University of Bologna (5 students) and UNHCR Italy with relevant partners in 2019[2]. The project gradually expanded to 41 universities[3], 307 courses offered, and 202 scholarships provided (See Figure 1).

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[1] https://www.eupassworld.eu/

[2] In the same edition, a sixth student has been admitted by Luiss University at a later stage.

[3] Across the editions, the overall Italian universitiy partners have been: Università di Bari, Università di Sannio, Benevento, Università di Bergamo, Università di Bologna - Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Brescia, Università di Cagliari, Università di Campania Luigi Vanvitelli – Caserta, Università di Catania, Università di Chieti "G. d'Annunzio" – Pescara, Università di Firenze, European University Institute, Università di L'Aquila, Università di Salento – Lecce, Università di Messina, Università di Milano – Bicocca, Università di Milano – Bocconi, Università di Milano – Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Università di Milano - La Statale, Politecnico di Milano, Università di Modena and Reggio Emilia, Università di Napoli "L'Orientale", Università di Padova, Università di Palermo, Università di Parma, Università di Perugia, Università per gli stranieri di Perugia, Università di Pisa, Università di Roma, La Sapienza, Università di Roma, LUISS Guido Carli, Università di Sassari, Università di Siena, Università per gli stranieri di Siena, Università di Torino, Politecnico di Torino, Università di Trento, Università di Venezia, Università del Piemonte Orientale, Vercelli, Università di Urbino "Carlo Bo",

The project met with significant interest in the academic and 2020, at the launch of the *Manifesto per l'Università Inclusiva*[4], ten universities offered 20 scholarships, while in 2021 (UNICORE 3.0) the number of participating universities rose to 24 offering 45 scholarships. For UNICORE 4.0, 33 universities have joined the project by offering 71 scholarships, effectively doubling the number of scholarships offered in the first three editions of the project. For the latest edition of UNICORE 5.0, 35 universities have joined the project offering 60 scholarships.
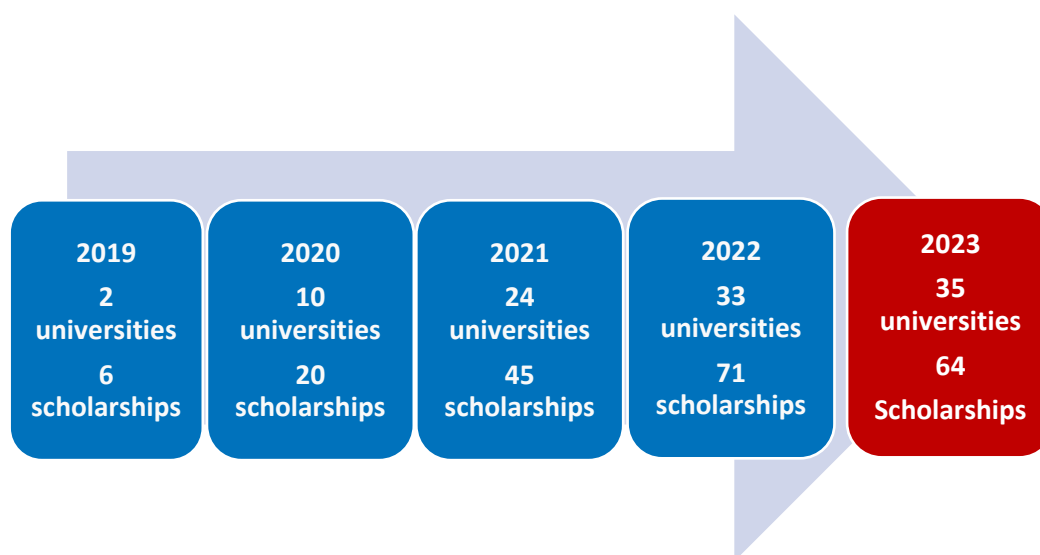
2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
2 universities	10 universities	24 universities	33 universities	35 universities
6 scholarships	20 scholarships	45 scholarships	71 scholarships	64 Scholarships

Figure 1 - Number of partner Universities and scholarships per A.Y. (Source: UNHCR)

As for eligibility, for the first three editions the program was open to refugees residing in Ethiopia. Subsequently, the project opened to refugees residing in several other countries in Africa: Cameroon, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe (UNICORE 4.0); Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe (UNICORE 5.0).

UNICORE is based on a broad partnership between the Italian government, religious and civil society organizations, individual universities, and the UNHCR-led coordination. **Universities have a central role in the program**: they have responsibility for financing the scholarships, running all academic aspects and the reception of the students, as well as the coordination of the local partnerships.

Università di Verona, Università di Tuscia, Viterbo, Università di Notre Dame (US). For the latest edition, see: https://universitycorridors.unhcr.it/

[4] https://www.unhcr.org/it/manifesto-on-an-inclusive-university/

In fact, alongside national partners, each university identifies and creates agreements with local partners called upon to offer specific support services and benefits to students, for a positive and smooth path to inclusion in Italy. These stakeholders are chosen between regional companies or regional study bodies, municipalities, NGOs, voluntary associations, foundations, bank foundations, and business associations. The universities are required to closely follow and monitor, together with local partners, the student's course of study and inclusion through periodic meetings to intervene, if necessary, with any corrective measures or more specific support actions.

UNHCR's role is to coordinate their work. At national level, Caritas Italiana, the Diaconia Valdese, Centro Astalli per i rifugiati (since the third edition) and Ghandy Charity play a key role in the implementation of the project, since they support refugees once they arrive in Italy by providing legal, social, psychological or health assistance, often in coordination with other partners of the network created locally by each University. In addition, Caritas Italiana and Gandhi Charity provide significant logistical and travel-related support to students, as well as advancing the project by contributing to its dissemination in refugee communities.

Another supporting stakeholder is the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), engaged in the implementation of the project regarding the issuance of visas and support with Consular documentation. The Italian Ministry of the Interior's role is not formalized, although the public security department is involved since their role in the issuance of residence permits and relevant travel documents – on an *ad hoc* basis - is significant.

However, State actors do not finance directly[5] the project in any way or participate in a very substantial way in the core phases of this program.

In 2023, contacts have been strengthened with institutions or organizations where graduated students are currently carrying out professional experiences, such as Banca IFIS, Banca Etica, the Canadian Embassy in Rome and the International Institute of Humanitarian Law in Sanremo, For the 5.0 edition, UNHCR agreed with the Communitas Consortium to finance and facilitate 2019 the purchase of airline tickets for students residing in Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

UNICORE strives to promote and increase opportunities for refugee students – residing in countries of first asylum – to obtain study visas and access scholarships in Italy, through ad hoc opportunities offered by universities and/or higher education organizations. The objective, therefore, is to create and consolidate a safe and regular entry model specifically for people in need of protection, recognized as refugees in certain countries of first asylum, already in possession of a three-year bachelor's degree, strongly motivated, who intend to continue their university course (Master's degree) in Italy.

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[5] Study visas are issued for free based on a MoU signed by all partners, including MoFA.

The purpose of the project, however, is not only to ensure their entry into Italy and provide them with a scholarship and other primary services (food, accommodation, health, etc.), but to accompany them on their path of study and social inclusion in Italy, to contribute to the consolidation of inclusive and welcoming societies.

As mentioned, beneficiaries of the project are students, recognized as refugees in the identified (above-mentioned) countries of asylum, who have completed the first three-year cycle of academic studies – within the five years preceding the closing of the UNICORE calls for applications – with a score of 3.0 (GPA) or lower (depending of the master's degree course) and who are strongly motivated to continue their studies in Italy.

Refugee students enroll in a second-cycle degree program (120 ECTS), which leads to a master's degree. Courses are held in English (or – in a few cases – in Italian) and there is considerable variety in terms of subjects. The selected receive a two-year scholarship that covers accommodation, meals, residence permit-related expenses, health insurance, legal, social and psychological support, and study materials, as well as many other benefits from each University's network of local partners (pocket money, bicycle, laptop, sim card, etc.).

UNICORE

- Public calls
- Assessment of applications
- Selection of candidates and official admission

- Attendance of two-year master programme
- Graduation

- Pre-departure package
- Pre-registration at the Italian Embassy and issuance of entry visas
- Arrival of students in Italy and reception at the student residence

- Consultation with partners and drawing up project draft
- Drafting of the Memorandum of Understanding
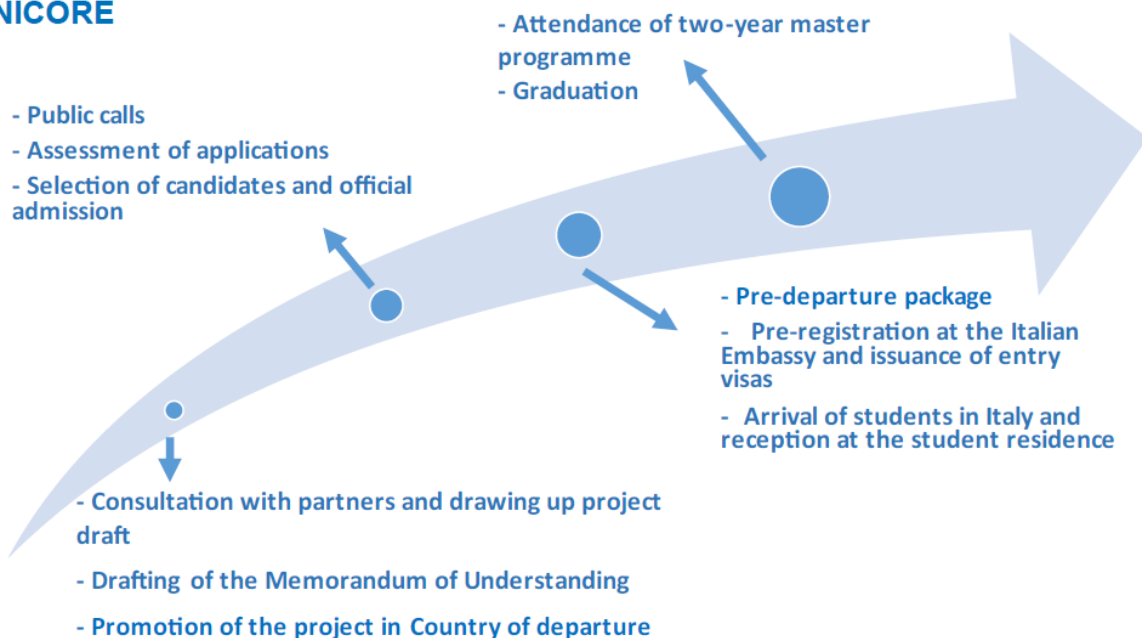- Promotion of the project in Country of departure

Figure 2- UNICORE's core phases. (Source: UNHCR)

The UNICORE implementation (Figure 2) requires strong collaboration between a variety of actors (multisectoral and multistakeholder approach), including (but not limited to) government entities, higher education institutions, NGOs, and other stakeholders from the public and private sectors.

UNICORE relies on a large number of funding sources that cover different program aspects (decentralized model)[6]. Such sources may include universities, public or private donors, civil society organizations providing in-kind support, fundraising campaigns, etc. The fact that universities are placed at the crossroads of multiple communities that can be engaged (students, faculty, staff, local public and private actors) facilitates the development of such arrangements.

Finally, the project is implemented with a strong refugee participation component, thanks also to regular participatory assessment exercises conducted by UNHCR yearly and periodic *thematic focus groups* that are organized periodically with selected groups of students who can actively contribute to the project's improvement.

1.2 Objective, purpose, audience and scope of the evaluation

The **purpose** of this evaluation is primarily learning-focused. It was designed to generate evidence, insights and learning around the UNICORE program and the Universities', partners' and communities' support to reception; education and integration activities across the Italian territory; as well as to contribute towards designing and developing policy and guidance on this subject matter; including the next education complementary pathway handbook in the framework of EUPassworld project.

The evaluation had four specific **goals**:

- To support strategic reflection on universities' roles and responsibilities in complementary education pathways situations, and how it is reflected in national and European policy and translated into practice.
- To assess the effectiveness of the UNICORE approach to all phases of referral and selection, pre-departure, stay and arrival, and postgraduation across a range of territorial contexts, and identify enabling and constraining factors to effective implementation.
- To generate evidence and insights around good practices and lessons learned on the UNICORE program.
- To generate concrete and context-specific recommendations that can be used to guide and inform future policy and practice around complementary education pathways, including contribution to reviewing and revising UNICORE's current program.

The **scope** of the evaluation was set through the three aspects of geographical, temporal and thematic scope.

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[6] See the mapping report drafted in the framework of EUPassworld project "Financing Complementary Education Pathways for Refugees: Existing Approaches and Opportunities for Growth", 2023, available at https://www.eupassworld.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Mapping-Report-on-Financing-Complementary-Education-Pathways-for-Refugees.pdf

Geographically, the scope was national, and related to the Italian territory. The evaluation conducted in-depth studies in those Universities that have been experimenting with best practices and/or strong criticalities.

Temporally, the evaluation covered the period 2019–2023, starting from the first pilot edition of UNICORE to the current one (partially including UNICORE 5.0, starting at the time of this drafting and the UNICORE 4.0, since it is not concluded yet).

Thematically, the evaluation covered all UNICORE's core phases from different spectrums and through several qualitative indicators, with more focus on the reception of refugee students across the Italian universities, and then the job inclusion and legal status issue.

The primary **users** of the evaluation include UNHCR, Universities and all partners involved in UNICORE program as well as the EUPassworld project Consortium. All other stakeholders included in resettlement, community sponsorship and complementary education pathways activities – nation states, donors, other United Nations (UN) agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs) – are considered important secondary users. Lastly, refugee students are unlikely to be direct users of this evaluation; nonetheless, they are considered critical stakeholders. Wherever possible, efforts have been made to reflect the direct voices of refugees in the evaluation.

2. Methodology and Limitations

2.1 Methodology

This section provides an overview of the process and the tools used to define the evaluation and collect data in a systematic manner, including the guiding framework (Figure 3).

The analysis of the quantitative results is integrated with qualitative information, focused especially on data surveys and open questions concerning the respondents' perceptions. Finally, the respondents had the opportunity to include free comments on the UNICORE program edition in which they participated and to provide suggestions for future activities and pledges.

The report placed specific attention on gathering information regarding the operational phases implementation and the main obstacles met by beneficiaries and Universities across those. Moreover, the report provides a listing and analysis of legal and administrative requirements, and barriers, for student refugees to access rights, and to maintain a legal status to stay in Italy. This was done as these are frequently central obstacles for refugee students´ social and labor inclusion at the 'end of the corridor'. This section also provides an overview of the limitations of the evaluation.

The guiding framework

The guiding framework depicts the overall phases, qualitative indicators, and outcome results to achieving the overall objectives as framed in the New York Declaration (2016) and the Global

Compact on Refugees (2018) and finally encouraged by the Recommendation on legal pathways to protection in the EU (2020), as well as the current EU legislation and policies on related matters (i.e. legal migration, tertiary education, work mobility, visa, etc.)
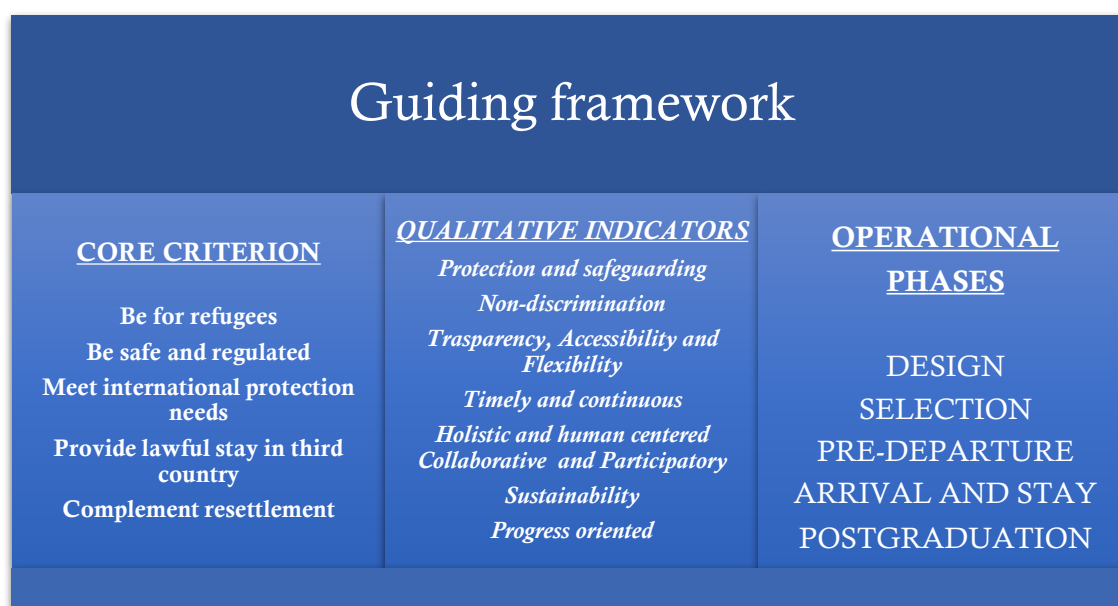

Guiding framework

CORE CRITERION

Be for refugees
Be safe and regulated
Meet international protection needs
Provide lawful stay in third country
Complement resettlement

QUALITATIVE INDICATORS
Protection and safeguarding
Non-discrimination
Trasparency, Accessibility and Flexibility
Timely and continuous
Holistic and human centered
Collaborative and Participatory
Sustainability
Progress oriented

OPERATIONAL PHASES

DESIGN
SELECTION
PRE-DEPARTURE
ARRIVAL AND STAY
POSTGRADUATION

Figure 3 - The guiding framework. (Source: the Evaluation team)

According to UNHCR[7], to satisfy the core criterion of complementary pathways, regardless of which pathway is utilized, a program must:

- Be for refugees: As indicated in the study by OECD and UNHCR from 2021: "*complementary pathways are meant to complement refugee resettlement by offering safe and legal admission avenues to refugees and other persons in need of international protection who find themselves outside their country of origin and seeking opportunities in a third country*"[8].

- Be safe and regulated: The pathway enables the refugee to move in a safe and orderly way to the third country, as opposed to being exposed to illegal routes in the hands of smugglers. The refugee has access to a travel document and a visa to the third country prior to entering there and his or her

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[7] UNHCR "Mapping of Complementary Education Pathways in the Nordic and Baltic Countries" (2022), online (PDF): UNHCR available at https://www.unhcr.org/neu/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2022/11/2022-UNHCR-EDU_Pathways_Mappingscreen.pdf.

[8] Please note that in this report the term is used in a general sense, not only in the specific one stated by the 1951 Convention definition (Article 1A defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion"). Indeed, many complementary pathways are open to all people in need of international protection, and not exclusively to people who are determined to have refugee status.

movement is managed or facilitated by the third country´s authorities and/ or the operators of the complementary pathway program.

- Meet international protection needs: There are measures in place to assure that refugees are protected against *refoulement,* (in line with article 33 (1) of the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and customary international law). One measure is the right to seek asylum in a third country or to be able to obtain another legal status which enable them to stay in this country after completion of their studies. Another measure to guarantee such protection is that the refugee can return to the first country of asylum and enjoy the same rights and status that they had before departure.

- **Provide lawful stay in Third Country**: A lawful stay for a refugee in a third country is interpreted as having access to legal status and documentation in that country. The legal status is provided through an entry visa as well as a temporary or permanent residence permit but also entitles the refugee student to several legal rights and services in the third country. The rights and services provided vary between countries and complementary pathway programs.

- Complement resettlement: The objectives of complementary pathways and resettlement may often overlap since both can be tools for protection and solutions, as well as a mechanism for sharing responsibility for refugees between states. However, complementary pathways are legal pathways in addition to and separate from a national resettlement program.

Although this core criterion made of five pillars constitutes a valid baseline, the analysis also considered ten quality standards that are be identified when experiencing higher education pathways programs[9]. This systemic effort can help to ask and evaluate in some way whether and to what extent the program phases meet these standards, to be defined as a durable solution, at least a convincing and successful one.

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[9] Unlike some documents (See the Global Task Force report on Minimum Standards for Complementary Education Pathways, 2021, available at https://wusc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Global-Task-Force-Minimum-Standards-for-Complementary-Education-Pathways.pdf), the systemic choice of the report not to include the term "integration" among the indicators is the result of a reflection that has led to considering the meaning of this 'slippery word' as a qualitative standard, which should indeed measure the degree of inclusion of the refugee students. The success of a tertiary education program cannot be measured by the integration of the student *latu sensu*, but rather by the success of their studies (completed on time, with a good grade and personal level of satisfaction), by the certainty to feel legally safe in the territory in where they live, and the concrete possibility of receiving job offers corresponding to their study path, demonstrating that the skills and knowledge acquired during their studies have borne fruit.

We can argue that a refugee student who effectively accesses the services offered to him/her, participates in social activities, feels included in the educational and social communities will have a better level of well-being and serenity which will allow him/her to conduct the study course in peace to be a human resource for the benefit of the entire host community.
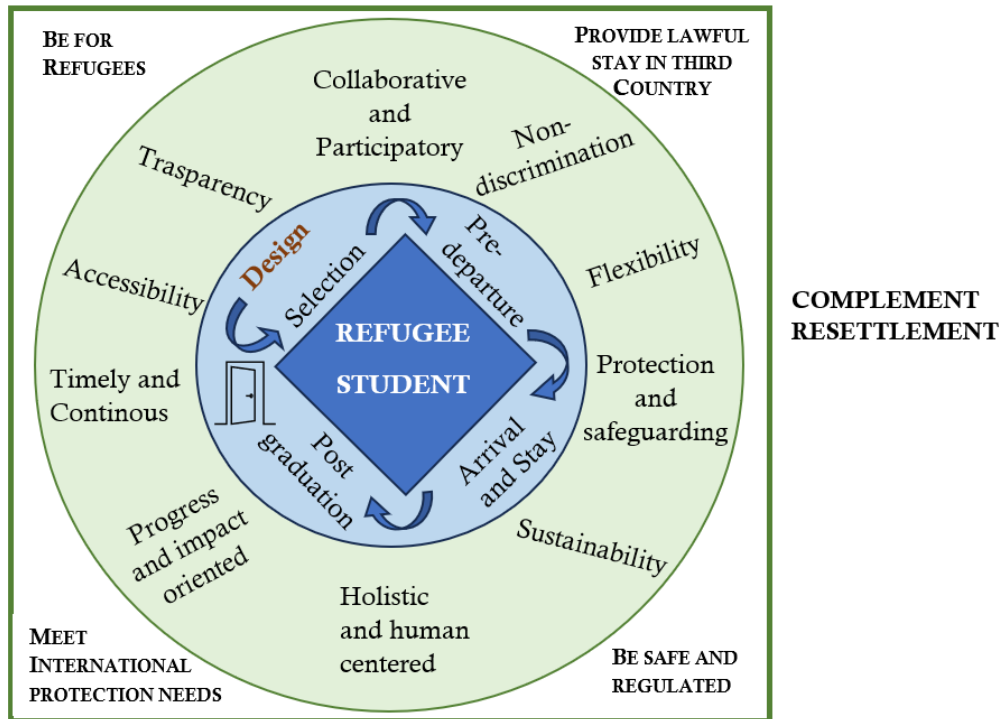
Figure 3 – Structural and Systemic dimensions of the UNICORE program (Source: the evaluation team)

In accordance with the guiding framework (Figure 4), these qualitative indicators that revolve around UNICORE's core phases may be potentially considered as minimum quality standards for complementary education pathways. They are intended to be satisfied by a constellation of public and private stakeholders at each stage of the UNICORE program, including the refugee students themselves. In the economy of the evaluation, these indicators served to guide the reflection on how UNICORE activities have been implemented and what have to be done for its future improvement. For reasons of time it was not possible to further develop these indicators in a comprehensive way over the entire program.

A brief description of the indicators is given as follows:

Protection and safeguarding

Protection is about making the environment safe for refugee students. It refers to actions done to protect also specific individuals from concerns of risk or harm. It is related to ensuring the beneficiaries' equal access to legal rights (freedom from discrimination, exploitation and exposure of identity without consent), to providing any kind of assistance or facilitation in getting travel documents or other relevant ones; and to supporting protection against *refoulement* at all stages of the program.

Safeguarding refers to a set of policies, procedures and practices employed to make an education pathway program safe for all beneficiaries. It is also related to communication management with relevant government entities.

Non-discrimination

Education pathway programs must not be discriminatory and not distinguish based on nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinion, according to the principle enshrined in diverse international and European charters. Pathways need to be based on objective criteria, taking into consideration the specific situation of the refugees targeted, such as educational and learning needs, which may have been affected by displacement, and/or medical or psychological needs resulting from forced displacement as well as the overall protection context in the country of asylum.

Accessibility, Transparency and Sustainability

Accessibility is a precondition to ensure their full and equal participation in society. Making refugee students visible and accessible to EU Higher Education Institutions. The European Agenda on Migration of May 2015[10] highlighted the need for a proactive policy of sustainable, transparent, and accessible legal pathways.

Transparency is intended as set out in the EU treaties. It requires the program to disclose information on its decisions and policymaking, spending and to uphold the principle of freedom of information.

Sustainability is the ability to be financed in a proper and ecological way. It requires financing mechanisms for the expansion and growth of the program, such us public student loan schemes, revolving loan funds, employer-sponsored education pathways, and social impact bonds[11].

Timely and continuous

The program processes must be implemented timely and continually examined to eliminate problems or risks that can undermine the education path of refugee students. Every actor helps in evaluating the measurable outcomes and becomes part of the solution. Through continuous analysis of the program, monitoring processes and updating based on lessons learned, it is feasible to devise solutions.

Holistic and human-centered

Every refugee is multi-faceted, hence different approaches work for different individuals, where every step becomes a multidisciplinary activity. The needs of the individual as a refugee and as a student should always be in the forefront. The whole program thus must not be limited in scope and purpose,

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[10] https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_15_4956

[11] See the mapping report "Financing Complementary Education Pathways for Refugees: Existing Approaches and Opportunities for Growth", EUPassworld project (2023), available at www.eupassworld.eu

and in light of the education aspect, it must take a holistic look at how admission, teaching and assessment are organized.

The human-centered indicator is a ground-up problem-solving approach based on discovering underlying human needs through a deep understanding of the people being designed for. It can count on collaborative, experiential methods like immersion, observation, interviewing and creative discussions to allow empathy and first-hand understanding.

Collaborative and participatory

The collaborative indicator relies on the principle of whole-of-society contained within the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Public Integrity[12], describing how governments can partner with the private sector, civil society and individuals to help promote a culture of integrity and more inclusive societies.

The participatory indicator reminds us that every stage of the pathway program should be understood and implemented together with student refugees, not (only) for them. Refugee participation is also a useful tool to gain valuable inside knowledge, enables evidence-based program feedback and offers a different perspective on related situations that may occur.

Progress and impact oriented

Impact orientation is particularly relevant for broader social programs and for all projects with educational, training and outreach elements. The program should not be *ad hoc*, focused only on results and/or dispersed, but exportable and extendable, replicable to broader categories of beneficiaries.

Progress is about "walking the education path" because each step leads further, while results are about figuring out "where the education path leads and then walking the chosen path". The main trade-offs are speed and stability.

Flexibility

Flexibility is the adaptive capacity of the program to address internal needs (e.g., from beneficiaries) and/or external contingencies (e.g., legal barrier) with controlled simplification of upstream processes, and streamlining of downstream administrative processes.

Data collection methods and tools
The evaluation employed a range of data collection methods designed to complement one another and provide the most suitable mix of data sources (Figure 5). Notably:

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[12] https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/b3090ab7-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/b3090ab7-en

- **Document and literature review**. These documents included: internal UNHCR operational and program documents, surveys, evaluations and assessments; and external documents by other actors relevant to UNICORE activities.
- **Italian context analysis**. A context analysis was conducted to provide background context within which UNICORE program phases were assessed, both on the Academic freedom and right to study and legal status of the beneficiaries.
- **Semi-structured key informant interviews.** The evaluation team interviewed a total of 21 individuals (see Section below).
- **Online survey**. The online survey was administered to approximately 120 representatives from Italian Universities, in the quality of UNICORE program contact persons. A full summary of the online survey responses can be found in Annex 1.
- **Case studies:** These included a focus on the legal barriers that students may face pre and post-arrival to the Italian territory, and the balance between their protection needs versus their right to study.

In total, the evaluation team interviewed 6 refugees (5 male, 1 female) who have concluded the UNICORE program, 5 UNHCR staff, and other 10 stakeholders at the national level, and reviewed 110 documents. Finally, 28 Italian Universities among administrative and academic members responded to the online survey made by the evaluation team.
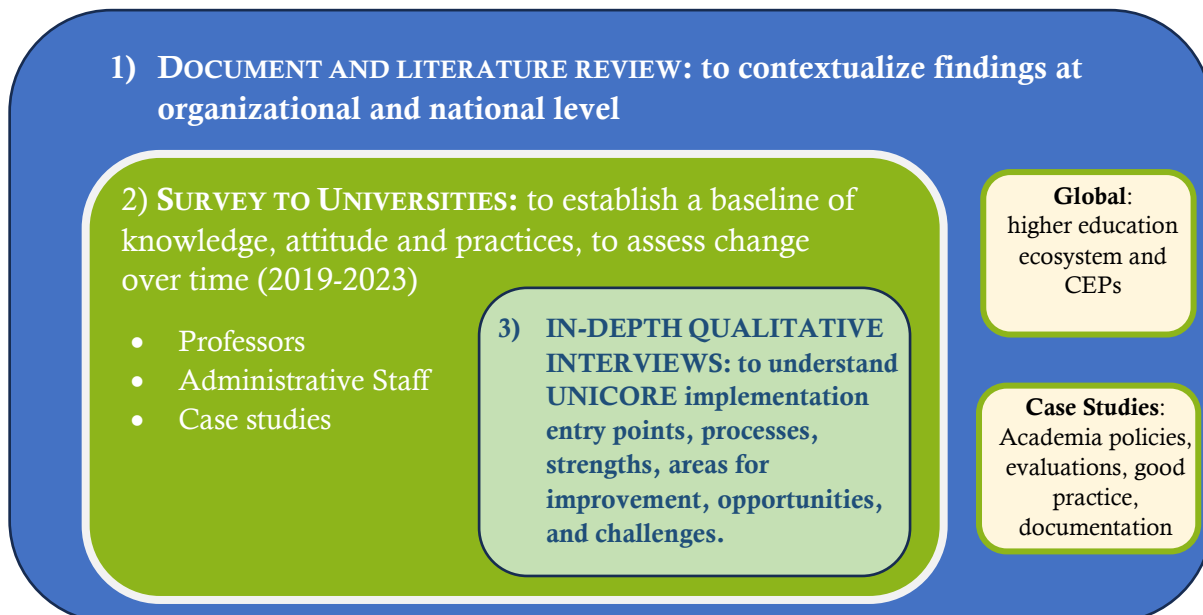

Figure 4 -Overview of mixed-methods approach (Source: the Evaluation team)

2.2 Stakeholders' engagement

Within the inception phase, targeted UNHCR stakeholders from the Protection Unit, Universities and other critical stakeholders, specifically Caritas Italiana and Diaconia Valdese, were consulted to contribute to the development of the evaluation framing. During data collection, the evaluation team consulted with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders at the country's academic environment. Moreover, the evaluation team could count on the multi-stakeholder network of the EUPassworld project, since the design, pilot, and implementation of innovative complementary pathway programs have been running also in Belgium and Ireland and several working and focus groups have been organized.

Reflecting the evaluation team's interest to engage directly with refugees, six (6) refugee students who have participated at UNICORE program (editions 2 e 3) have been engaged. They have been consulted after the initial evaluation findings and before the finalization of this report.

The interviews have been conducted online and, in one case of student currently residing in Eritrea, offline, through the written text with the questions. Many thought-provoking reflections resulted from the interviews, and some quotes have been highlighted and reported within the results section.

2.3 Survey data

The survey was delivered in June 2023 and was addressed to the 38 Universities of the UNICORE project, both administrative and teaching staff in the quality of the project's referents. Thirty-nine (39) questionnaires were completed out of 112 requests, by one or more representatives – 16 professors and 23 administrative staff – of 26 public universities[13] and 2 private universities[14] across the national territory. Participation in the survey was voluntary and the participants were invited to fill in the questionnaire. Questionnaires are anonymous and the evaluator cannot identify any specific person. The survey consists of 50 questions (multiple-choice, form field, matrix table) whose structure is set as below:

(a) General information (No. 2 questions)
(b) Student beneficiaries UNICORE. (No. 18 questions)
(c) Critical issues and good practices in relation to the project phases (No. 8 questions)
(d) Administrative and legal issues related to legal status (No. 11 questions)
(e) Local network and initiatives (No. 8 questions)

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[13] Sapienza - Università di Roma, Università di Milano Bicocca, Politecnico di Milano, Università di Milano, Università Degli Studi di Bari "Aldo Moro", Università degli studi della Campania, Università per Stranieri di Siena, Università degli studi di Siena, Università degli Studi di Firenze, Università degli Studi "G. d'Annunzio" Chieti – Pescara, Università della Tuscia, Università degli studi di Bergamo, Università degli studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia, Università di Urbino Carlo Bo, Università degli studi di Brescia, Università di Parma, Università di Padova, Università degli studi di Messina, Università per Stranieri di Perugia, Università degli studi di Cagliari, Università di Bologna, Università di Catania, Università degli studi dell'Aquila, Politecnico di Torino, Università degli Studi del Piemonte Orientale, Università degli Studi di Verona.

[14] Università Bocconi (Milan) and Luiss Guido Carli (Rome).

(f) Added values and conclusions (No. 3 questions).

2.4 Evaluation limitations

The main highlights of imitations and mitigation successes are as follows:

- The thematic scope of the subject matter makes it difficult to capture and prioritise the most important findings. During the inception phase, the evaluation team tried to identify and delineate the boundaries of focus across the Selection, Pre-departure, Arrival and Stay and Post-graduation spectrum. However, this remained a constant challenge throughout the data collection phase of the evaluation, and it did prove challenging during the analysis phase to prioritise the most critical findings focused specifically on Referral and post-graduation.

- The thematic scope does not focus expressively on the "Design" program phase. This includes: the identification of UNHCR operations abroad and countries of departure based on specific criteria (related to the refugee population, presence of the Italian Embassy on site, etc.), the dissemination in the country of first asylum. Nonetheless, design issues and cooperation aspects among national and local stakeholders are touched cross-sectionally in several parts of the evaluation.

- The limited time availability of respondents, or their lack of interest in the survey. The evaluation team had a systematic methodology for reaching out to stakeholders. However, the team kept in constant contact with the UNHCR MCO Italy, who provided significant assistance in connecting with key stakeholders.

3. Context

This section of the report provides an overview of the global legal and operational context for complementary education pathways and the role and activities of the University environment within this context. It is based both on a literature review and the experience of the evaluation team.

3.1 Global legal and operating context of CEP

As illustrated in Figure 6, refugee situations have increased steadily in scope and scale in the past decade. In 2022, number of people forcibly displaced by persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order grew by 21 per cent standing at an estimated 108.4 million at the end of the year.

For each refugee that returned or was resettled in 2022, there were 16 new refugees[15].

Facing this increasing number, durable solutions are a strategic priority for UNHCR and the humanitarian and development communities, enabling refugees and IDPs to rebuild their lives in safety and dignity.

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[15] See UNHCR (2023) Global Trends report – Forced Displacement in 2022, Figure 20.
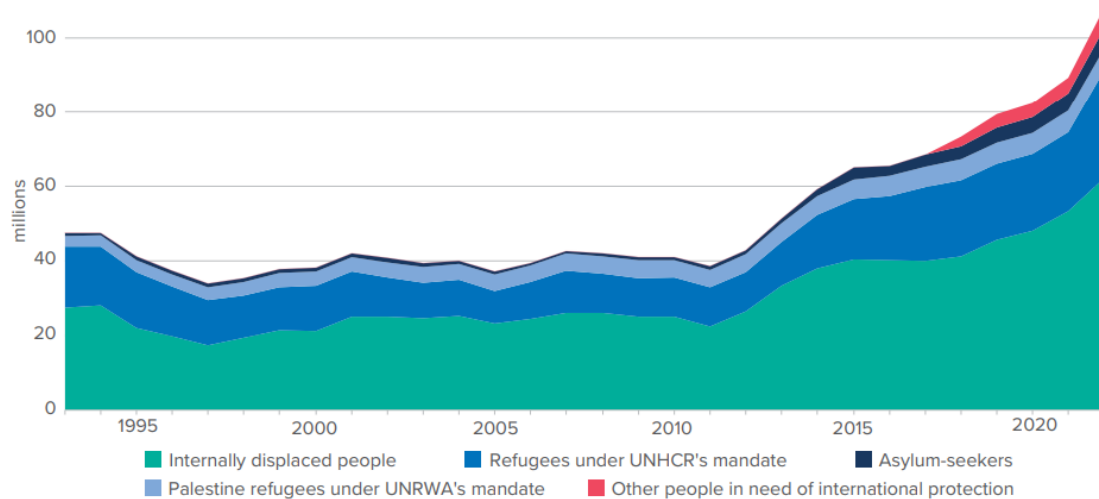
Figure 5 – People forced to flee | 1993 – 2022 (Source: UNHCR (2023) Global Trends report – Forced Displacement in 2022)

For refugees, durable solutions include voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement to a third country (Figure 7). Complementary pathways for admission are safe and regulated avenues for refugees that complement resettlement by providing lawful stay in a third country where their international protection needs are met. They are additional to resettlement and do not substitute the protection afforded to refugees under the international protection regime. Complementary pathways include existing admission avenues that refugees may be eligible to apply to, but which may require operational adjustments to facilitate refugee access.

Complementary pathways can also expand third country solutions, easing pressure on host countries and enhancing refugees' self-reliance by building their capacities to attain a solution, including through education or labor mobility pathways.

Figure 6 – Third Country solutions (Source: UNHCR)

Since the adoption of the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants[16], State parties have committed to expand opportunities for refugees and people in need of international protection to be admitted to a third country through safe and legal pathways, taking part in resettlement programs and promoting complementary pathways for admission and protection.

The New York Declaration has further set out commitments for State Parties to develop humanitarian pathways and increase opportunities for refugees to obtain student visas or scholarships in the European Union member states.

In this context, complementary education pathways (CEPs) are safe and regulated avenues, complementing the resettlement, through which refugees may move to a third country for the purpose of higher education, while being able to support themselves and reach sustainable and lasting solutions. Refugees who live in a country of first asylum may face several barriers to accessing higher education, such us: lack of money, insufficient language skills, lack of certificates, restrictions on moving around the first country of asylum or moving to another country, limited access to information, and lack of necessary support for attending and completing studies.

Quality higher education plays a key role in helping them acquire the tools to become self-sufficient and build a future in line with their aspirations, since it can have a tangible impact and positively influence their lives by enabling them to become an important resource for their families, host communities and – potentially – to contribute to post-conflict reconstruction in their countries of origin.

3.2 UNICORE, GCR and the GRF 2023

According to the UNHCR[17], globally only **6% of refugees have access to higher education**. The UN Agency aims to achieve the target of ensuring that 15% of refugee students can access higher education in host countries and third countries by 2030, including through the expansion of safe pathways that consider their needs and aspirations. It also aims to admit more than 2,000,000 refugees to third countries by 2028 through complementary protection pathways.

Those who experience a learning gap could also experience frustration and lack of motivation to continue their education. The UNHCR observed that the learning gap is a pronounced phenomenon in women's lives, so that it can be considered also an issue of gender. As was already mentioned, higher

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[16] New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted on 19 September 2016, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/migration/new-york-declaration-refugees-and-migrants#:~:text=The%20text%20of%20the%20New,for%20international%20human%20rights%20law.

[17] See UNHCR Education report 2021: "Staying the course"- The challenges facing refugee education", available on: https://www.unhcr.org/media/unhcr-education-report-2021-staying-course-challenges-facing-refugee-education,.

education serves a protective function, especially for women and this is the reason UNHCR is putting effort on reducing learning gaps in women's experience.

Furthermore, even if in this context may be associated with the experience of a refugee student, such barriers often also affect other marginalized groups (such as women, students with disabilities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community and cultural or linguistic minorities). These barriers always coexist in the experience of an asylum seeker.

The imperative to realise expanded access to third-country solutions for refugees, including through resettlement and complementary pathways, is a cornerstone of the **Global Compact on Refugees**[18]. The Global Compact on Refugees, and subsequently the UNHCR Roadmap 2020–2030 on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, emphasize the need to make complementary pathways available to refugees on **a more systematic basis**. While resettlement is a useful tool to meet the protection needs of refugees at heightened risk, complementary pathways can expand third country solutions, ease pressure on host countries and enhance refugees' self-reliance by building their capacities to attain a durable solution.

Designed to support the practical implementation of the objectives set out in the Global Compact on Refugees is the **Global Refugee Forum** (GRF), the world's largest international gathering on refugees, which is held every four years. It gives the opportunity for States and stakeholders to announce concrete pledges and contributions, highlight progress made, share good practices, and take stock of the challenges and opportunities ahead.

UNICORE was presented both as good practice and pledge at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, with the aim to improve access for refugees to tertiary education and has since grown extremely fast. **UNICORE was published as good practice of GCR and launched as a renewed and expanded pledge for the forthcoming GRF 2023**.

- *UNICORE as a good practice of GCR*

In the framework of UNICORE program, it has been underlined how the program meets the GCR objectives and then how partner universities assist students from a refugee background to navigate higher education (up to Master's degree) and to the transition into the professional world.

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[18] See https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-are/global-compact-refugees

Obj 1: Ease the pressures on host countries

UNI.CO.RE provides higher education, professional development and networking, helping graduates to obtain gainful employment and a durable solution in Italy.

Obj 2: Enhance refugee self-reliance

UNI.CO.RE assists and supports students pursuing higher education and helps them develop their professional skills so that when they graduate, they will have both the knowledge and skills to obtain gainful employment and to better their future.

Obj 3: Expand access to third-country solutions

UNI.CO.RE opens avenues for persons in need of international protection that provide for a lawful stay in a third country where the international protection needs of the beneficiaries are met. Beneficiaries are given legal access to a third country where they can gradually obtain a more sustainable permanent status.

Obj 4: Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity

Several students (First edition) express a desire to take what they learn back to their countries or to the refugee camps where they once lived. Many recognize that with the knowledge they have gained through education, they are able to help others, whether that be helping them start and fund business, providing medical care or going back to teach others.

Among several and articulated activities, three have been highlighted, together with elements facilitated the implementation of the good practice:

1. Refugees' engagement in local student life and community
2. Job inclusion paths
3. Scholarships and other benefits funded.

- *UNICORE as pledge for GRF 2023*

UNICORE Consortium several meetings led to the possibility to pledge ten future concrete actions to expand and enhance the program starting from the 6th edition.

Title of the pledge	Expand Higher Education Pathways for Refugees and Develop Welcoming Communities through a Whole-of-Society Approach
Action 1	Increasing the number of students sponsored (from 6 in 2019 to 50 in 2022) to their universities each year
Action 2	Increasing the number of Countries of first asylum (from 1 in 2019 to 7 in 2022) where refugees reside
Action 3	Ensuring gender equality and parity of access by creating opportunities specifically for women and girls (from 0 in 2019 to 13 in 2022) and people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.
Action 4	Supporting in harmonizing the administrative selection procedures among all Italian universities.
Action 5	Supporting acquisition/certification of alternative documentation confirming credentials and learning.
Action 6	Developing study-work hybrid programs also by the strengthening of the corporate sector engagement and synergies with existing labour pathways programs.
Action 7	Working towards building welcoming and inclusive communities by raising awareness and utilising community sponsorship models.
Action 8	Amplifying the refugee students and alumni voice and strengthening their engagement at every stage of UNICORE's programming, including their involvement in designing and remodulation of existing study, legal and psycho-social services.
Action 9	Providing trainings and technical support to other institutions who could welcome refugee students or open new education pathways
Action 10	Develop sustainable funding mechanisms and social support structures, also by the strengthening of the Italian Government partnership
Expected impact 2023-2027	Provide at least 200 full scholarships from 10 Countries between Africa and Middle East; have at least 150 refugee graduates by 2027, of which at least 30% female; at least 45 HEI's, 3 CEOs associations, 2 banks and 5 other private sector entities engaged as partner at national level; replicate this model to at least 4 EU MSs.

Finally, UNICORE program led some partners to get involved in the **Global Task Force on Third Country Education Pathways**[19], launched in 2020 to promote the expansion of tertiary education as a complementary pathway. Its activities include gathering relevant stakeholders to expand available

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[19] See http://edpathways.org/

pathways; supporting the creation of pilot programs and sustainable funding models; and coordinating a Global Community of Practice to share best practices and support cooperation.

4. Findings

Findings have been consistent with expectations, although the manifestation of gaps and challenges are highly specific to the Italian context.

The findings delved with: (i) understanding and operationalization of the UNICORE's program; (ii) systems and processes to support UNICORE'S phases implementation; (iii) engagement and dialogue with partner universities and students; (iv) lessons learned and good practices identified.

In the following sections, they can be found through the main operational phases as described in Figure 8. Please note that the report investigated only UNICORE phases in which universities are directly involved (selection, pre-departure and arrival and stay). In addition, findings also concern the post-graduation phase and the cross-cutting matter of the legal status linked to the right to study.
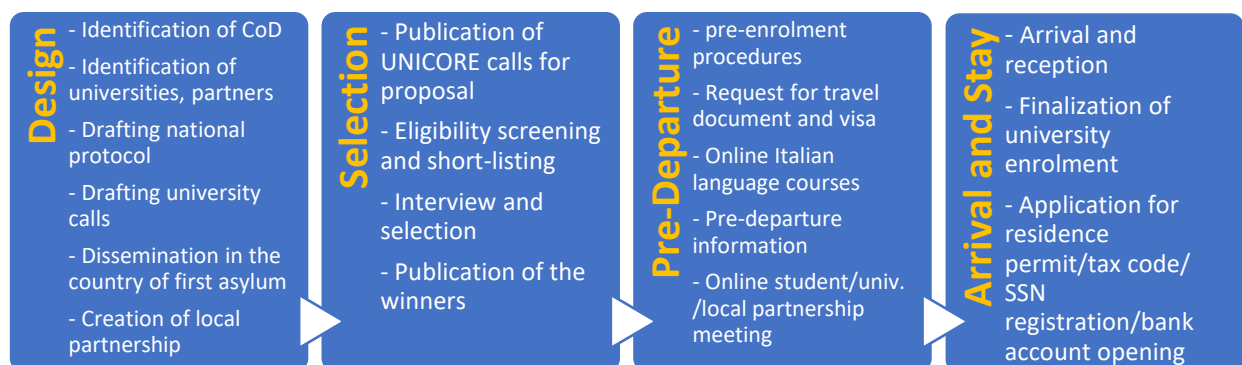
Design
- Identification of CoD
- Identification of universities, partners
- Drafting national protocol
- Drafting university calls
- Dissemination in the country of first asylum
- Creation of local partnership

Selection
- Publication of UNICORE calls for proposal
- Eligibility screening and short-listing
- Interview and selection
- Publication of the winners

Pre-Departure
- pre-enrolment procedures
- Request for travel document and visa
- Online Italian language courses
- Pre-departure information
- Online student/univ. /local partnership meeting

Arrival and Stay
- Arrival and reception
- Finalization of university enrolment
- Application for residence permit/tax code/ SSN registration/bank account opening

Figure 7 – UNICORE Operational phases in detail (Source: The Evaluation team)

There are both significant **achievements and gaps**. There is also a distinction between issues that can be argued to be 'refugee protection specific' (vulnerability, access to rights), and those that reflect enabling factors and barriers within the activities implementation that may also impact their student status (legal status, language, qualifications).

There are **external relevant factors**, such as the local and geographical contexts within which each University works. This may include the extent to which the national context itself is highly resource constrained (namely, a lack of availability of services, fundings and/or specialized partners), and it can also include the extent to which delivering on the UNICORE mission is facilitated or limited by local authorities.

Overall, students expressed a good level of appreciation for the project reporting 6 to 8 points' average concerning the main phases of the project and the comfort of the physical environment[20].

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[20] UNCHR survey delivered in February 2023 to all UNICORE students. See Annex 2.

4.1 Extent to which SELECTION is implemented

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The referral sub-phase of the selection on the identification and subsequent communication of potential eligible students to universities is implemented by UNHCR in a well-structured and impactful manner, given the exponential growth of applications submitted by students from the first to the fifth edition (+233%). The Countries of first asylum targeted have been expanding after the pilot edition, from one to seven African Countries and are envisaged to increase the number. UNHCR's Country Operations have the role of disseminating information about the program and contextually supporting on-site orientation sessions with potential applicants, which is carried out about a month and a half before the launch of the call for application. In addition, UNHCR logistically supports potential students in submitting the application and performing the interviews by providing internet connections and computer stations in refugee camps when necessary. Two main areas in need of improvement: identification of countries of departure has been highlighted as the main area in need of improvement, and project's dissemination in the countries of first asylum.

Notwithstanding, the implementation of the selection phase registered one significant criticality in the fourth edition: lower numbers of students (50) selected for the master's degree compared to available scholarships (71). Since the receipt of applications on the dedicated web portal, several factors have been reported by universities that have delayed and, in some cases, hindered the selection phase. Factors that have slowed down the selection include: (i) applications received often incomplete; (ii) remote connection to take the interviews. Among the factors that hindered selection, are reported: (i) the scarcity of successful candidates due to low grade point average, (ii) the legal status of asylum seeker instead of refugee, (iii) the scarcity of English language. Nonetheless, gender equality remains a challenge.

➢ *Selection criteria*

The selection process is **merit-based**, carried out by the partner universities individually (or, in some cases, through joint interviews). Academic background and grade point average (G.P.A.), professional experience and personal skills, the personal strong motivation and coherence between previous studies and the degree the individual wishes to take, are the key criteria used by universities to evaluate candidates.

Candidates can apply to a maximum of two universities and choose among several master's degree courses only from those selected universities. Each university constitutes a Committee of Experts to carry out the entire selection for admission. Then this process consists of two stages: 1) evaluation of documentation; 2) online interview to evaluate the technical skills, subject knowledge and language skills of the applicant.

Surprisingly, **the fourth and fifth editions registered a lower number of students selected for the master's degree compared to the available scholarships in the previous edition** (Table 1). Notably, the fourth edition registered a gap of 21 lost scholarships: 50 students admitted against 71 scholarships available. Likewise, it happened when comparing in the current edition (UNICORE 5.0) the number of scholarships available – that has been slightly reduced from the previous edition (64) – and the number of admitted students (52). It can be argued that in the framework of the interviews carried out by the Selection Committee in charge, eligible candidates did not meet the academic requirements of the master's degree program they applied for. However, this requires a deeper understanding of the causes of the failure to pass the oral interview, which this analysis cannot fully investigate at this stage.

Table 1 – Total number of applications, eligible candidates, shortlisted for interviews, admitted students and scholarships in UNICORE editions (Source: the Evaluation team)

UNICORE edizione	Received Applications	Eligible Applications	Shortlisted for interview	Admitted	Scholarships
UNICORE 1.0 (2019-2021)	**30**	n.a.	13	**6**	**6**
UNICORE 2.0 (2020-2022)	**100**	n.a	n.a	**20**	**20**
UNICORE 3.0 (2021-2023)	**491**	370	176	**45**	**45**
UNICORE 4.0 (2022-2024)	**356**	179	76	**50**	**71**
UNICORE 5.0 (2023-2025)	**557**	265	136	**52**	**64**

Should any scholarships remain vacant, in the Calls for Applications the university reserves **the right to select an alternative beneficiary from the lists of other partner universities**, subject to acceptance by the candidate. However, even with the system of repechage and redistribution of candidates, it was not possible to cover all scholarships.

These gaps constitute a significant critical issue for the program since they can **negatively impact the governance choices of universities,** which every year allocate a quota to fund from 1 to 5 scholarships for refugee students. Furthermore, the effort to support the project is also significant in terms of cost, personnel and time to build and/or renew or extend the local partnership.

To reduce this risk, dissemination information activities should be accurately planned for the next editions, as well as the empowerment of referral systems and referral tools.

Participatory and human (refugee)-centered approach: The forthcoming UNICORE students committee

In February 2023, UNHCR launched two concurred surveys[1] among students and universities partners coming from the four editions of the project and they ran five working days.

In that context, UNICORE students expressed preference in starting consultation for the committee through video calls and they reported the need to further explore possibilities to ensure their regular involvement. Some ideas put forth are combining an annual in presence meeting with regular online consultations, including WhatsApp groups; and implementing a representation system involving one student from each region where UNICORE scholarships are offered.

The committee has been considered in terms of **facilitating the dissemination of information** within the concerned refugee population in order to ensure that potential eligible candidates have effective access to relevant information, selection process and transparent procedures.

The committee has also been proposed to **support the orientation of new selected students** to facilitate their inclusion in Italy and in general to actively contribute to the decision-making process of the refugee students' population interested in continuing their studies with UNICORE.

Finally, the creation of this committee where beneficiaries of the UNICORE program spread the information will strive to make a lasting impact.

➢ *Qualifications and documentation assessment*

The first reason for failure to pass the selection as reported in the survey (Figure 9) is the insufficient possession of the skills and knowledge (8 out of 16) necessary to attend the degree course selected, legal status (3 out of 16) and lack of qualification (2 out of 16).

Among the reasons reported in "Other, specify", there are three cases of reasons for not passing the selection due to **lack of refugee status at the time of the interview**. There are many students who live in refugee camps with asylum seeker status only. The international protection procedure can take several years to finalize, and this certainly constitutes a critical barrier to accessing the program, especially if, in those cases reported, there has been a lack of information to the universities that have carried out the interview with an asylum seeker and not with a refugee.

In some reported cases (3), the evaluation Committee was not able to admit to the oral exam students who met all the requirements at the academic level but were asylum seekers. Finally, he was admitted conditionally as being asylum seekers, whose legal status was indicated by UNHCR only after the evaluation of qualifications and admission to the oral exam.
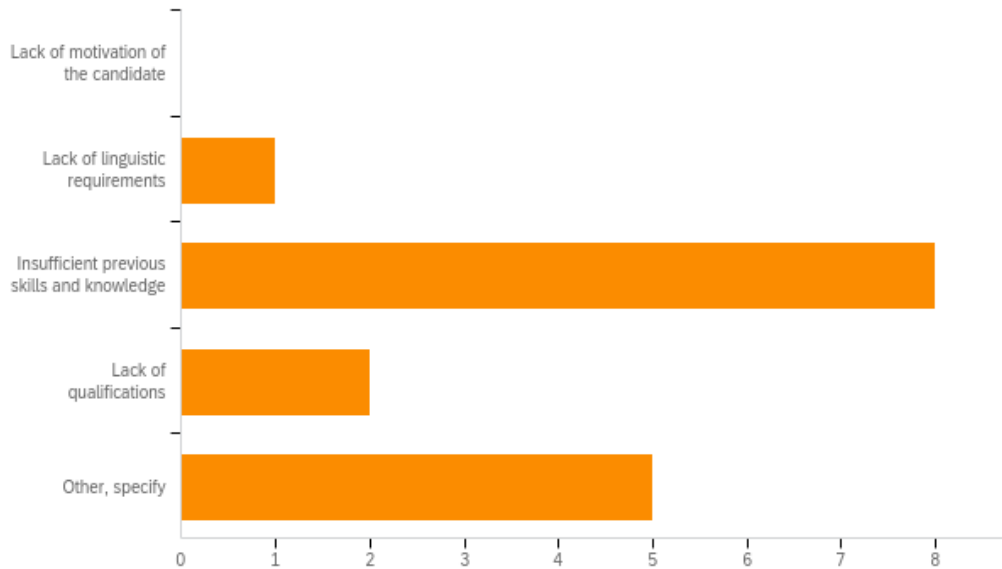
Figure 8 - Q22: "If it happened, what were the main reasons for not passing the selection?

The selection process is expressed in the **Call for Applications**, published in English and in Italian. An online compilation system is provided that does not require printing and scanning documents, since this can constitute a material obstacle for applicants residing in refugee camps. Also, on many university platforms there is the possibility to save the uploaded documents and proceed to upload and finalize the application afterward. From 1 to 5 scholarships have been funded by universities; in most cases, a maximum of 2 scholarships have been funded. It is worth noting that funding at least two scholarships per university would be relevant to allow the students beneficiaries to support each other, as a strongly positive factor reported during the interviews.

Which master's degree courses do you have to offer? *Takeaway for universities*

- Held in English
- With a good percentage of employability
- Including a curricular internship in the study program.

Keeping in mind that the Call for Applications contains a basic form shared by UNCHR, it has been implemented with details and eligibility criteria over the academic years. However, every university is free to adopt a more specific and detailed call.

One weakness reported is the presence, therefore, of as **many calls for applications as universities**: there are differences that can be qualified as unimportant (e.g., about name and qualification of the selecting board) and others more significant (e.g., specification of rankings and scholarship assignment). Another example is given by the documentation: the cover or motivation letter may be among the mandatory or non-mandatory documents, depending on each university. This inhomogeneity probably does not help in coordinating the selection activities and may generate little clarity on the methods and terminology used by each committee.

According to the last UNHCR coordination meeting, this weakness will be filled since for the sixth edition under the design phase, the Consortium has taken coordinated actions with the aim to harmonize this procedure and publish one single call for application on one merged platform.

> **Grade Point Average in Italy**
>
> Exams in Italian universities are graded according to a scale ranging from 0 to 30, with 18 as a passing mark. A *cum laude* may be added to the highest grade ("30 e lode"), as a special distinction. The minimum passing mark for the final degree is 66/110, whereas the maximum is 110/110. Outstanding students' degrees may be awarded a cum laude distinction. Some Universities in Italy use a 100-point scale instead of 110, for example, the faculty of Engineering of University of Bologna.
>
> There are significant differences between different universities and, above all, between bachelor's (first cycle) and master's degrees. The grades received by master's degree students are statistically higher than those received by bachelor's degrees.

Table 2 - Comparison of admission requirements and documentation requested by Universities in UNICORE 2.0-3.0-4.0-Extracts of the Calls for Application (Source: the Evaluation team).

Extracts of Articles of the UNICORE Call for applications published by some Universities	UNICORE 2.0	UNICORE 3.0 (added/modified documents and requirements compared to the previous edition)	UNICORE 4.0 (added/modified documents and requirements compared to the previous edition)
Admission requirements	2. hold a qualification valid for admission to the chosen Second Cycle Degree Program by May 20, 2020; 3. the degree must be issued by a higher education institution accredited in **the Ethiopian higher education system**[21]; 4. **have a Grade Point Average (GPA) of at least 3.0** according to the	**Grade point average of at least 24/30** referred to the Italian grading system. For the conversion of the average marks from the foreign system to the Italian grading system, the official ministeriel	4. Average grades (GPA - **Grade point average) as described in the requirements for each degree program** listed in article n. 9 of this call. For the conversion of the average to the Italian grading system, please, use the official

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[21] Note that in the first two editions, only candidates who graduated in Ethiopia were admitted. Since the third edition, the country of graduation has not been included among the eligibility criteria.

	Ethiopian tertiary education grading system; 5. the degree must not have been obtained before the year 2015; 6. meet the specific admission requirements of the Second cycle degree program of interest; for more information about specific requirements see Art. 10; 7. have never been enrolled before in a degree programs at any of the Partner Universities.	formula in attachment 2 of this call for applications will be used; Applicants must have a certificate of proficiency in English at level B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (https://europa.eu/euro pass/it/common-european-framework-reference). The English language skills of candidates who do not possess the above certificate will be assessed during the interview.	conversion formula provided by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research available in Annex 2 of this call.
Mandatory Application documents	1. The application form. 2. The Ration Card Number of their Proof of Registration or Refugee Identity Card, issued by Ethiopian authorities and UNHCR. 3. An official certificate of the first level degree, issued by the awarding university, confirming the qualification required for admission to the chosen master program. 4. An official transcript of exams passed and relative marks. 5. Any relevant and additional document required by the specific programs chosen.	**Curriculum vitae**	**Cover letter [*as required from some Universities, e.g. Bari, Verona*]**
Non mandatory documents	Letter/s of references (in English or in Italian) written by supervisor/advisor supporting the student's application.	**Motivation letter (maximum two A4 pages)** **References from a supervisor or advisor;** Applicants are strongly recommended to record a **short CV video** (e.g. using their mobile phone) where they introduce	

		themselves and explain their motivation. Some examples can be found by using the Google search engine. At this stage, translations of documents not in English, French, Spanish, German or Italian may be done directly by the applicant.	

According to what is shown, universities should set up fair and transparent procedures and policies and ensure that applicants receive clear, understandable and accessible information. For instance, to ensure that the applicants' qualifications is adequate, information should be required from students on their previous education. Such information includes the:

- duration of study
- study program
- institution they studied at
- the formal rights given by the qualification obtained
- status of institution and program
- workload of the program.

According to this, a form of CV and/or a mandatory cover letter listing this key information could facilitate the selection procedure.

Finally, as for the assessment of refugees' qualifications, administration staff from several universities precise that they should consult available resources such as European Qualifications Passport for Refugees or the Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence (CIMEA).

> **Box n.1: Good practice at University of Bari**
>
> **The credential evaluator staff**
> The University of Bari adopts an **autonomous evaluation procedure**, with specialized staff in the evaluation of the comparability of qualifications, for which they no longer require certifications to international (and/or refugee) students.
> The University of Bari Centre for Long-Life learning (CAP[1]) aims to promote processes of life-long learning and to certificate the competences that everyone obtains in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. Thus, their mission is to empower the "cultural values" as important and strategic resources for humanity. This service of CAP is addressed to all European and non-European citizens. Among the activities, there are:
> - judicial inquiries and legal advice to request equivalent documents of previous studies career.
> - evaluation of the professional and not-professional experiences by recovering all professional and personal skills acquired "on the job".
> Additionally, it is possible to start the procedures to recognize the professional skills as decided by the "professional inventory" edited by the Apulia Region (www.sistemapuglia.it). "Translation" of all skills in professional ones and/or in CFU credits useful to start a new university career in the University of Bari. The competence of the Credential Evaluator is increasingly requested in higher education institutions that have or aspire to develop international projects and by agencies and companies that offer services in the education area, especially if aimed at students who, having completed part of their course in a particular country, are looking for further educational experiences or obtaining professional licenses abroad.

➢ *Gender gap*
No female students admitted to the UNICORE first edition and anyway lower in every further edition (Table 3).
To overcome this challenge, since UNICORE 4.0 separate rankings have been adopted by the universities. Art. 4.1, entitled "Selection criteria and evaluation committee", of the Calls for Applications sspecifies that: *"(…) The committee, according to the selection criteria, will produce separate rankings per degree program and each ranking will be divided into a female and a male ranking in order to guarantee equal access opportunities. If there will be no candidates for either gender, the available scholarships will be awarded to two candidates of the same gender. With the same score, the younger candidate comes first".*

Table 3 – Number of male and female students, percentage of female students. (Source: the Evaluation team)

UNICORE editions	Admitted	Male	Female	Female %
UNICORE 1.0 (2019-2021)	6	6	0	0
UNICORE 2.0 (2020-2022)	20	19	1	5%
UNICORE 3.0 (2021-2023)	45	32	13	29%
UNICORE 4.0 (2022-2024)	50	37	13	27%
UNICORE 5.0 (2023-2025)	52	40	12	23%

Although appreciable efforts have been made to encourage the participation of a greater number of female candidates, where in the last three editions female students made up an average of 26 percent of total UNICORE students (1 in 4 is woman), nevertheless the data shows a decline in the percentage of successful female candidates as scholarships increased. The evaluation team was unable to access information regarding the classification by gender of the applications submitted and, consequently, of those considered eligible for the interview.

Therefore, it is not possible to verify whether there is a significant number of women who apply and who, for various reasons, are not considered eligible and/or selected. Conversely, if the initial number of women applying is low, it would suggest a more accurate implementation of the dissemination of information and advocacy of the UNICORE program, also through female ambassadors and/or associations that promote female leadership in the targeted countries. The gender balance in such program is still challenging.

4.2 Extent to which PRE-DEPARTURE is implemented

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Once the selection process is finalized, online pre-departure orientation between the selected students and Caritas Italiana, UNHCR and Diaconia Valdese is organized to discuss inclusion paths, legal status and health related issue and individual need for supporting services. The information pre-departure material is annually updated and aims to prepare students for the new context and the sociocultural aspects of Italy and to provide them with information on their rights and duties. In some cases, since UNICORE 3.0 individual and tailor-made information meetings have been provided by Diaconia Valdese operators. Since the same edition, online Italian courses are provided in the pre-departure process, freely exploited thanks to the University for foreigners of Siena, University of Perugia and University of Notre-Dame. Moreover, information is provided and is adequate, consistent, up-to-date and specific for refugee access. It can be argued that there is not a lack of information for students during this program phase: they are aware about benefit entitlements, the details of a scholarship, financial and legal logistics, and academic expectations they could aspire to. Some coordination criticalities are reported.

The pre-departure phase is one the most critical stage of the UNICORE program.

During all editions, respondents shared concerns about: (i) the obtaining of the travel document or VISA which undermines the timing of the start of the academic courses, (ii) the language gap.

➢ *Pre-departure orientation*

UNICORE national partners provide **clear and transparent orientation, through written leaflets and online sessions to students on legal status options in the receiving country during and after the study period**. UNHCR, CARITAS and DIACONIA Valdese provide pre-departure information through ad-hoc video call with all beneficiaries, including operational aspects of the program phases and all fundamental and social rights of which students are titular of in the national territory. Starting from the third edition, local partners also provide key information to discover the city, tailored on individual needs.

With this respect, students of UNICORE 4.0 showed a good level of appreciation for the information received on the terms of the project and of the scholarship's opportunities, provided in a clear, accessible and exhaustive way (40 out of 43, See Annex 2).

Such sessions are also functional to intercept preliminary special needs or important vulnerabilities that therefore require the activation of **psycosocial support service** as soon as possible.

Nevertheless, UNCHR survey data show that despite psycosocial assistance service offered by all the universities or local partners in UNICORE 3.0 and 4.0, after their arrival, students do not benefit from it as much as they could or, in some, should.

➢ *Entry requirements*

Entry requirements for study visas are often set at a challenging level for non-refugee applicants. Even non-negotiable standards such as providing official and valid travel documentation (i.e. passport) may be out of reach for refugee students. Every academic year, the General Secretariat of the Italian Ministry for education issues an administrative circular which contains in detail every aspect related to the procedures for entry, stay, enrolment of international students and recognition of qualifications, for higher education courses in Italy[22].

"Documentation for sure was an issue, having all of them in place was a mammoth task. From visa application to translation of all my documents and declaration of value was also required by the university. Non came easy as part of the process also required a financial muscle."
(UNICORE former student)

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[22] See the circular for A.Y. 2023/2024 https://www.studiare-in-italia.it/studentistranieri/moduli/2023/Circolare_2023_2024_EN.pdf

As refugee students reported in interviews, **the most difficult documents to collect are the Travel Document (TD) and the Declaration of Value (DoV)[23].**

This latter is delivered with an original document that comes from the university; however, many students do not have it and have to be obtained and translated, which can require months of processing.

In fact, once the application selection process is finalized and even before proceeding with the visa request, universities can require the DoV and the selected students are informed about the need to request this document to the competent diplomatic representation as soon as possible, which is the one present in the country where the academic qualification was obtained. It can be easy to obtain in few cases, for instance when student obtained her/his degree in a specific high education program for refugee in camps.

"This leads to late arrivals and therefore if you see other students who have already started you feel anxious about catching up. **There aren't many books**. *In Africa we cannot read many documents: e.g.* **We cannot log in with a gmail account, we need the University address.** *Internet access (in the refugee camp there are not many PCs to connect to and the internet is not too fast - application can be downloaded onto an offline mobile phone)".*
(UNICORE student)

> **Pre-departure activities**
>
> a) Pre-registration of students on the *www.universitaly.it* portal and confirmation by the universities.
> b) Validation of academic documents by the competent authorities on site.
> c) Request for a convention travel document from the competent authorities of the country of asylum for refugees not in possession of a valid travel document.
> d) Organization of appointments for the request of study visa and Declaration of Value (where required)
> e) Contacts between university tutors and students for academic orientation.
> f) Pre-departure Italian courses (Since UNICORE 4.0)
> g) Pre-departure information sessions and cultural orientation.
> h) Collection of travel documents and visas and request for exit visas (if any).
> i) Flight booking
> j) Fit to travel / COVID swabs (where required: UNICORE 3.0 and 4.0) and departure
> k) Reception at the airport (and quarantine where necessary: UNICORE 3.0 and 4.0).
> l) Arrival at the destination university.

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[23] The Declaration of Value is a document which attests that a degree earned in an educational system other than the Italian one, is valid on the Italian territory. It is released by the diplomatic representation in the foreign country, and it is written in Italian. It is required to apply for certain type of visa. Some consulates issue the DoV quickly, within 2 weeks. In the worst case, it can take you up to 2 months to prepare the documents required by the Consulate before you can submit your DoV application. Then once the Italian consulate accepts your DoV application, it can go again up to 2 months for them to process it.

Conversely, the request can lead to **incompatibilities and/or protection concerns where the country coincides with the Country of origin of the refugees**, with which having contact could expose the refugees to possible risks to their lives. This aspect should be taken carefully into account by the universities; broader bearing in mind that confidentiality and respect for refugees' right to the protection of their personal data are relevant principles in the design and implementation of education pathways[24].

UNICORE, MoFA and Embassies agreement

Reported below are some **facilitation procedures on visa application procedures** for study purposes for the UNICORE selected students and the related benefits that have been in place with MoFA and Embassies (updated in 2023):

1. Exemption for UNICORE students from payment of visa fees.
2. Exemption for UNICORE students from the presentation of health insurance: the agreement specifies that students will not be required to present private health insurance that would cover them for the first period of their stay in Italy, considering that students will be enrolled in the National Health System immediately after they enter into Italy.
3. Exemption from the requirement to present an airline ticket when applying for a visa: students will not be required to present a departure ticket to Italy, but only a flight reservation (free of charge).
4. Possible issuance of *Laissez-Passer* in case it is not possible for some students not to have a Convention Travel Document (CTD)[25]: all students should be able to apply for and obtain a Convention Travel Document. In cases of trouble, it should be possible to issue a laissez-passer where the CTD or ETD (ICRC) is not available.

➢ *Italian language courses*
   All beneficiaries have been offered an Italian language course from the partner uuniversities (Figure 9), both in the pre-departure phase - since the University for foreigners of Siena has freely prepared and shared the package Italian course to be exploited in the UNICORE program - and soon in the post-arrival phase.

Italian language courses are also provided after the arrival of the students, most of the time in presence mode. In some cases, this service is provided out of the university walls, counting on the support of the local partners involved in specific network that every university *ad-hoc* created for the UNICORE

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[24] See the Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR, https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/55643c1d4.pdf.
[25] It refers to the United Nations *laissez-passer*, issued by the Secretary General of the United Nations to UN staff and staff of its specialized Agencies and organisations under the Convention on Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations adopted by the UN General Assembly in New York on November 21, 1947.

project. Notably, the University of Verona is supported by the Cestim association, University of Piemonte Orientale by Action Aid (but also Italian classes are organized by Pastorale Universitaria).
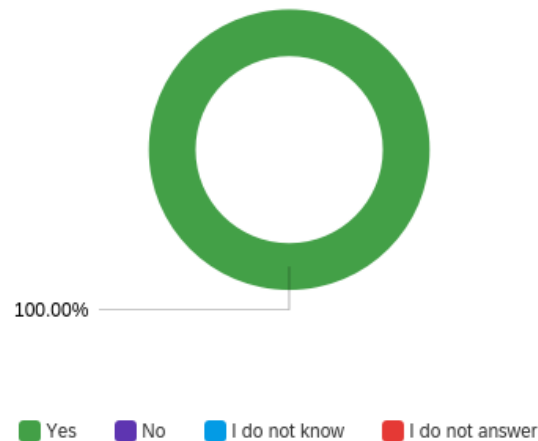
Despite these efforts put forth by the partner universities, the **data on the preparation of the Italian language by students is disheartening**. Figure n. 10 shows that most of the students do not obtain an "intermediate" (level B1 of CEFRL) meaning a proficiency in the Italian language for everyday interaction to live, study, and work in the community.

This is due to multiple factors of different nature:

- Most of the courses chosen by students are held in English, thus during their academic career they study and take exams in English;
- In highly international and/or internationalized academic environments (Bologna, Perugia, Siena), and/or also in big cities (Milan, Turin, Rome) the English language is spoken even with Italian peers;
- The time dedicated to studying to pass exams and prepare for graduation thesis is perceived by students as having priority over the effort to learn the Italian language.

*"Education in Italy is completely different. 5 years had passed since my graduation, and it was hard to go back to studying in a different system. **I need more hours and if I have to choose between studying 2 hours of Italian or dedicating myself to courses, I choose the latter**. I have never heard of "oral exams" in my life, in higher education". (UNICORE alumna)*
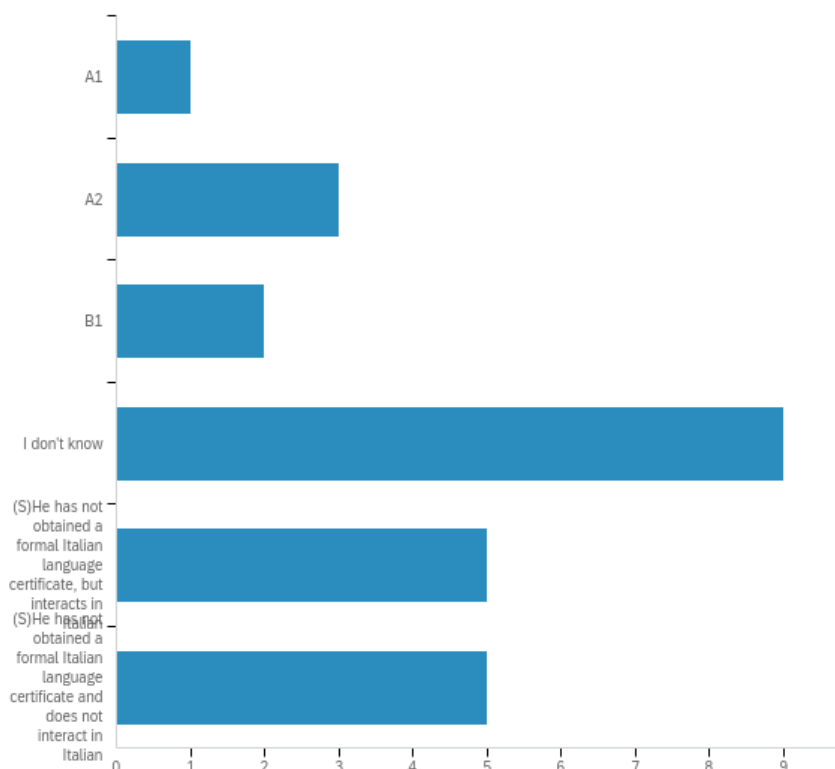
Another finding is the low grade of awareness of the Universities representatives about the language issue of the refugee students. Since 9 out of 25 respondents do not know whether and which level of Italian their students have been obtained. This suggests better **monitoring and follow-up action**, as it has the potential to strongly affect the student's future employment and social inclusion, as it will be explored in the section on the post-graduation phase.

Overall, it would be recommended to explore opportunities and risks of considering the obtaining of the A2 (at least) certification as mandatory before the graduation. In addition, as some universities have been experienced, it would be useful to make some *ad-hoc* adjustments to meet the students' need. For instance, thanks to external local partners, the provision of **full immersion Italian classes for UNICORE students during the summertime** could not interfere with their academic routine and duties.

4.3 Extent to which ARRIVAL AND STAY phase is implemented

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The phase of arrival requires several collaborations with local partners. The implementation of the arrival registers one criticality: the timing. In fact, since fourth edition data has shown that several students arrive late for the started classes (from 1 to 3 months later) and full immersion to catch up

academically with the aggravation of all the administrative paperwork and settling into the new environment generated an overwhelming and stressful situation upon the student.

Once they arrived in Italy, the students are enrolled at the university and hosted in apartments and student residences. The universities are responsible for introducing students to the campuses and practicalities. Moreover, universities are required to closely follow and monitor, together with local partners, the students' course of study and inclusion through regular meetings and to intervene, if necessary, with corrective measures or more specific support actions in coordination with UNHCR and national partners. Early-stage relocation services, such as legal counseling, healthcare, psycho-social support and language training are well provided for the beneficiaries. In most cases, there is a "buddy service", tutor and/or mentor, supportive families to support them in their student life and hopefully beyond. It is recommended to facilitate formal and informal opportunities to meet students in person to increase their awareness of the services available; particularly, ensure that the psycho-social service is effectively accessed by students, where specialized personnel in multi-cultural environments and refugee related issues should be required.

The finalization of university enrollment does not show any relevant criticalities unless there is no discrepancy between the recorded data. Conversely, the payment of the scholarship was in most cases difficult since Italian banks require lots of documentation to open a bank account. However, this issue was overcome thanks to an agreement between UNICORE and one bank corporate; and in many cases also thanks to the support of local partners.

➢ *Timing of arrival and courses attendance*

Every six months, the national partners organize **coordination meetings** to get a precise picture of the progress of the project, of territory needs and specifically of individual needs, to follow and monitor their path up to graduation and the subsequent post-graduation opportunities. Specific attention is paid to their legal stay in Italy with a request for asylum or renewal or conversion of residence permit for study or work (See § 4.5).

After the regular entry, several administrative and legal obligations and documents have to be obtained in a short time (e.g. the request for the residence permit for study purposes). As data shows, at the arrival the main issues have arisen from the residence permit, Tax code and the opening of a bank account (Figure 11). Overall, according to universities respondents reported it seems that the issuing or achievement of the documentation and the fulfillment of some obligations related to the arrival have not represented concerns, since the positive responses are lower than the negative ones.

As already given to the pre-departure phase analysis, initial difficulties concern the travel from the country of asylum to the receiving country, including **delays in obtaining the travel document** and other documentation within the Consular competence.

Indeed, this is one of the main reasons for the delays on arrival in Italy. This is also confirmed by the UNHCR data surveys, showing the students concerns for the documentation (TD, visa, residence

permit, etc.) (37), financial support (21) and dissemination (16) of the project through the refugee population, as main areas of improvement for the project, followed by support in the integration in the receiving community (15), academic and orientation tutorship (14) and psychosocial support (12).
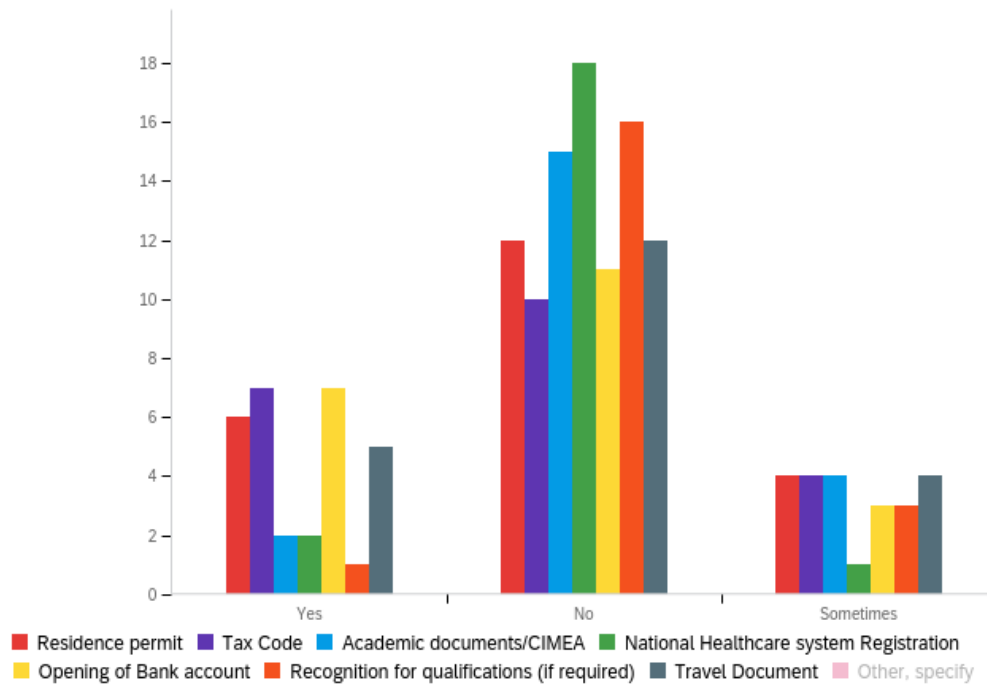

Figure 11 - Q30 of the Survey. "Have been any issues regarding…"

Although a large number of students arrive on time for classes, in all editions delays were very frequent, ranging from 2 weeks (Bari) up to 4 months in the worst cases (Parma, Bologna) (Figure 12).

Arriving late entails various consequences that negatively impact the academic performance (frequently reported), and that even make people stop continuing the course of study (rarely reported).

To tackle this inconvenience, some mitigation measures were put in place, like recording the lessons of the first part of the first semester to give the student the opportunity to recover them.
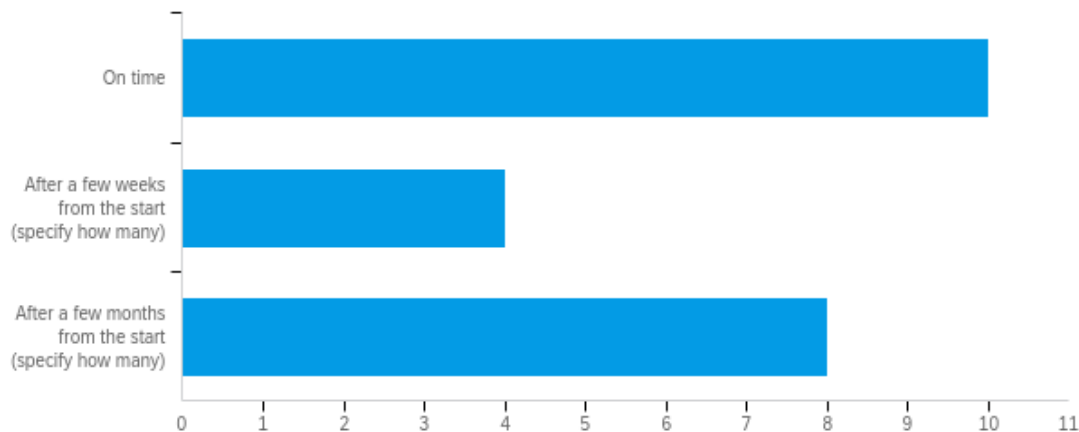
Figure 12 - Q37 of the Survey: "The student who arrived in Italy attended the courses:"

"The class started on 22nd of September 2021, the same day I arrived".

(UNICORE student)

Thanks to interviews and consultations, it has been noted that even arriving on time for the start of classes does not constitute per se a positive value because it does not consider the need (and the time) for settling in and what comes from catapulting one into a new social and academic structure as a student who until the day before was in a refugee camp.
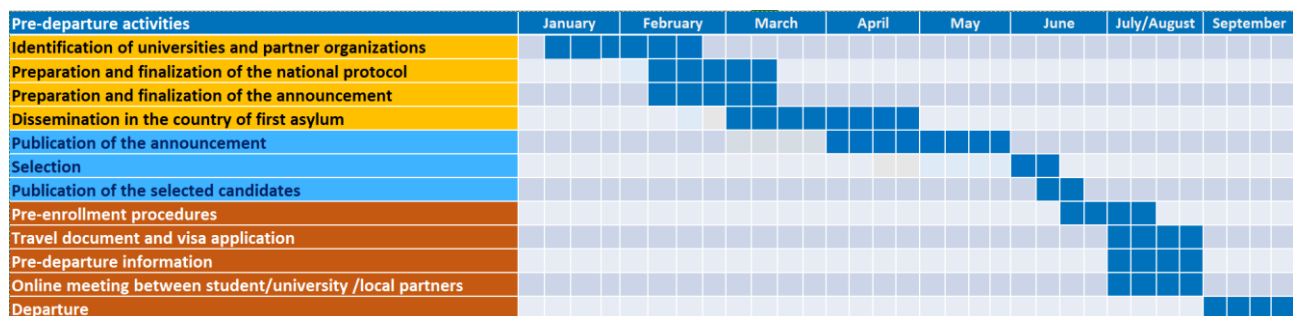

Figure 13 – Timing of Pre-departure activities. (Source: UNHCR)

In some calls for applications (for instance, in Emilia Romagna, see Table 4 below), housing is made available from August, precisely because the expectation is to accommodate students in a reasonably useful time to allow for the acclimatization necessary to counteract the physiological disorientation they face.

Yet, in the UNICORE activities timeline, the departure is set at September (Figure 13, orange part), because it is from September that potentially the organizational machine has finished its bureaucratic duties and students are free to leave.
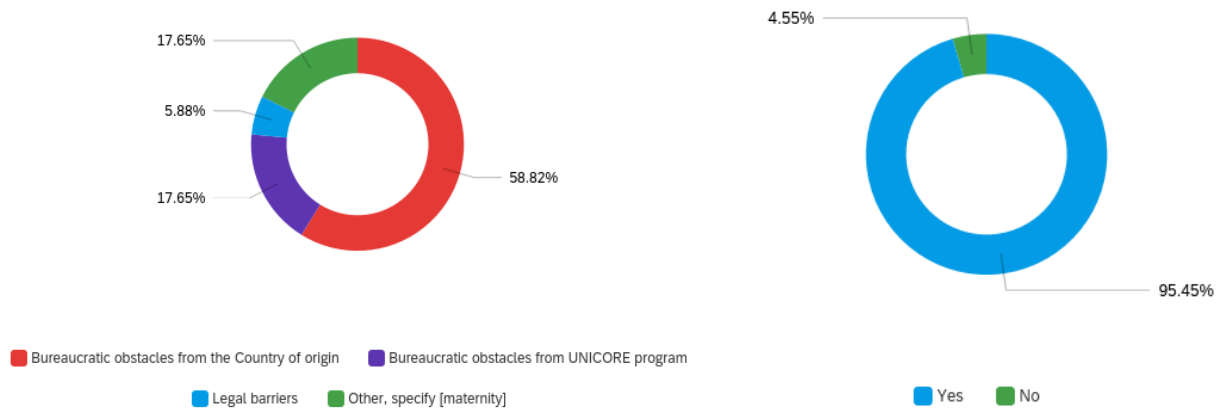
Figures 14 and 15 – Q14 of the Survey: "What have been the main reasons of delay?" – Q29 of the Survey: Was the first-year student able to enroll correctly?"

Furthermore, the first days or weeks of arrival are filled with duties linked to the double track of the right to study and the right to stay in the territory. Therefore, arriving early before class - at least one month earlier - allow students to settle in the new environment and become aware of new spaces, new reference figures, as well as satisfy their first individual needs, fulfill their duties as international students and therefore prepare themselves at the beginning of the courses.

This milestone could be reached by putting effort into anticipating each stage of the program of one or two months earlier, compatibly with the time constraints linked to the tender deadlines for public university selections. From a deeper reading of this timeline, compared to the main reason of the delay (Figure 14), bringing forward by two months (to November of the previous year) the start of the design activities (Figure 13, part in yellow) would allow to arrive at the publication of the call for proposals in February/March (instead of April/May), and thus allow to start the pre-departure procedures earlier solving any bureaucratic obstacles that may arise timely.

Finally, despite the time challenge, for the vast majority of the university's administration offices, the first-year enrollment procedure was carried out correctly (Figure 15).

➢ *Scholarships, study services and other benefits*

The amount and content of scholarships awarded, the choice of benefits and services, the typology of reception, and the typology of local partnership rely on each university's governance, individual attitudes, and strategic dynamics and are set according to the local partnership that each university independently creates with agreements and protocols. Indeed, as for the reception some minimum standards are given to the universities by the national partners, together with some additional advice on what should be considered mandatory and what is optional.

The minimum standards of reception for (refugee) students sheet provided by the UNICORE national partners to the universities.

Scholarships

Even if basic services (such as accommodation and canteen) are covered, it is mandatory that scholarship shall be funded taking in consideration other basic expenses that are faced by the refugee student (personal hygiene, phone top-ups, clothes, shoes, study materials, miscellaneous). The advice is to refer to the amount of the commuter grant offered by the Regional Bodies for the Right to Education and consider the cost of living.

Accommodation

It is preferable to provide accommodation within university residences (student houses) to encourage the integration of male and female students; it is necessary that (if the service is contracted to another partner) the university is responsible for the adequacy of the structure and distance from the study location(s). (Sometimes students reside 1h -1h30 away from the university they attend). If there are no essential supplies (pillows, blankets, sheets, towels, pots, dishes, etc.) it is advisable that this is communicated to the partners in time so that they come appropriate funds allocated.

Canteen

Since access at the price of around 4 or 5 euros per meal is still prohibitive for male and female students, universities ensure free access to the canteen, otherwise, the university or other partner would have to allocate some budget for the purchase of food - making sure that in the facility where the male and female students can cook.

Administration and legal service

a. identify a partner to support students in dealing with administrative procedures (especially those to be completed within the week of arrival);

b. ensure that the costs of issuing (118.26 euros) and subsequent renewals (118.26 euros) of the residence permit are covered.

Healthcare service

ensure coverage of the annual National Health Service enrollment fee (around 151 euros annually) and provide a fund to cover any medical expenses (students are not exempt from the co-pay).

Psychological care service

Identify a psychological listening and support system within and/or outside the university to be activated when needed.

Social support

Identify an operational figure for orientation to area services and who can serve as a point of reference for non-academic life and social inclusion (different from the university tutor).

Study tools

Laptop; sim card for smartphone

Public transport

University fee exemption
Cimea documentation cost
It is essential that universities share in advance whether the Cimea documentation it is necessary (and whether it is necessary for the purposes of registration itself) since the procedure takes more than 60 working days.

As for the **local network**, across the editions, universities have been experienced in good and less good partnerships, whose division of activities and benefits (who does what) are expressly indicated in the respective Calls for Applications. Table 4 shows an example of the benefits and the local network created by University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, in which it is worth highlighting the engagement of the **Regional Body for the right to study** in the Emilia Romagna region (ER.GO) – which has been playing a key role in providing housing and other benefits - and the engagement of the Municipality of Modena that could take actions to facilitate universal, equitable and safe access to city services and related information and services for refugee students regardless of migration and/or residence status.

Table 4 – Example of content of the benefits offered by University of Modena e Reggio Emilia and local partner in UNICORE 3.0 (Source: the Evaluation team)

Benefits	Offered by
Scholarship in the amount of 5400.00 euros annually, paid in annual installments and will be subject to the achievement of merit requirements Tuition fee waiver for the whole duration of the master's degree	University of Modena and Reggio Emilia
Reimbursement of 420 euros for regional tax Free accommodation place in university residence starting in August or September Annual contribution of 300 euros for food service Free accommodation place in university residence starting in August or September Annual contribution of 300 euros for food service Welcome kit Bicycle PC on loan for free use Contribution of 1500 euros for possible postgraduate internship	ER.GO (Azienda regionale per il Diritto agli Studi Superiori dell'Emilia Romagna)
Contribution of up to 300 euros per month for two years for socialization and integration actions Availability of a supportive family with attention to the student's well-being and personal journey	Caritas Diocesana
Accompaniment at socialization and integration meetings	Caritas Diocesana Modenese

	Casa delle Donne Migranti Semira Adamu entities adhering to the CRID Migrant Observatory Interdepartmental Research Center on Discrimination and Vulnerability Arci
Contribution of 300 euros for student management expenses upon arrival	FederManager
Contribution of 300 euros for student management expenses upon arrival	Manager Italia Emilia Romagna
Italian language course (in partnership with House of Migrant Women Semira Adamu) Guidance and legal assistance Medical and psychological assistance Contribution for public transportation subscription	Municipality of Modena
Psychological support	Approdi

A good practice reported in this sense is to **sign long-term agreements** (3-5 years), not annually, to optimize time and resources and strengthen local relationships which, as shown, can lead to initiatives of Third Mission and other joint initiatives, also towards the community and many international students.

Box n. 2. The strong and broad multi-sectoral local network created by the University of Verona

The University of Verona brought out the similarities and common needs that may exist between male and female students with refugee status and other international students, while at the same time considering the peculiar situation of the former in relation to the plurality and specificity of needs. Cooperation at local level was based on a broad multi-sectoral network consisting in **twelve (12) partners**, including nonprofit organizations, institutions, legal and cultural associations, foundations and religious bodies. Specifically: Caritas diocesana of Verona, Chamber of Immigration Lawyers of Triveneto (Cait), Center for Immigration Studies (Cestim), Waldensian Church of Verona, Municipality of Verona, Jewish Community of Verona and Vicenza, Esu Verona (Regional Body for the right to university study), Fondazione Nigrizia, Istituto della Carità del Sacro Cuore - Sisters of Don Nicola Mazza, Migrantes, One Bridge To Idomeni (OBTI), Union of Islamic Communities of Italy (Ucoii) and Union of Italian Jewish Communities. For the 5.0 edition, two new partners have

been added (OBTI and Collegio Don Mazza). Finally, it is worthy stressingthe collaboration, also in terms of financial support, received from the **Student Council of students** on behalf of the scholarship recipient has begun. As a whole, this partnership shows a concrete expression of a concern for interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

*"The presence of numerous partners, as well as enriching, should **facilitate the sharing of the contribution loads required to meet needs and help in the case of situations that cannot be planned** until the arrival of the student/ess, or even in the longer term.*

*However, **it requires a considerable coordination effort for the university**. The support provided by each partner, spelled out in a letter of commitment, is indicated in the call for applications, but may vary, when the student is already in the area, or about to arrive, to take into account specific needs that require more support than budgeted"*. (University of Verona contact person for MUI)

➢ *Inclusion paths: academic environment, student life and local communities*

It is relevant to highlight that in some universities the Call for Applications mentions as a benefit the "***Support in the integration of student life and assistance for any problem met during the studies***" **offered by local students, under the supervision of the university** (Padua, Cagliari). This positive approach represents one of the added values of the UNICORE program and undoubtedly deserves to be promoted, since it shows how universities – Academia as a community – can be effectively inclusive and find new approaches for the inclusion of their students, contributing to increasing their awareness on the services available, ensuring that all the students manage to access them as key aspects for their decisions concerning their daily life and future (i.e. post-graduation).

The vast majority of respondents confirmed to have received means and resources adequate to conduct their study (61) showing a good level of support and listening in the hosting environment in terms of ease in informing the university and the UNICORE project partners about problems and difficulties encountered in the study or in the inclusion process (67).

> *"I am a speaker on the issues to do with displaced communities and I am always available to volunteer and accept to take part and in conferences and contribute my thought the importance of investing in displaced communities. I am also a rugby player, I play for the university team where I have Italian friends' majority and lastly, I am Luiss university student ambassador".*
> *(UNICORE Student, University of Luiss Guido Carli of Rome)*

For what concerns relationships within university and local communities 63 students expressed good level of appreciation while 3 reported to not agree (2) and strongly not agree (1), while remaining neutral in 15 cases. (See Annex 2).

The state of conflictuality and in particular the perception of bully dynamics and unfair behaviors against refugee students has been perceived by 12 responders (9 agree, 3 strongly agree) out of 81, complementing with further details reporting rudeness from local partner operators (1), specific bully

episodes and discriminatory language and attitudes in the residencies where students are accommodated and employing institutions (3).

"I was volunteering at the Centro Astalli kitchen by arranging and serving the homeless migrants during my free times. I didn't participate in any academic social life, but I did participate outside the academy. I don't have Italian friends, but I have friends from other nationalities. I didn't feel welcomed at all because once they put you in your accommodation no one would come and visit you or take you outside for a walk or walk you around the city. So, no one helped me integrated or, and to be honest I am not integrated because without the help from the host community a person can would not feel integrate" (UNICORE Student, University of Rome "La Sapienza")

When the university cannot provide accommodation, local communities and foundation and civil society organizations give support by volunteering and funding, above all when some individual situation about the students changes during their stay. This also means redesigning course-related profiles, making them possible in the new scenario. This requires an effort of flexibility, daily support based on listening, even greater collaboration with and among all partners to share difficulties and achievements, and within the university, with different bodies, committees, and organizational areas, to weave a network of support, co-responsibility and integration, as well as to design appropriate tools and processes.

In UNICORE 4.O it was registered a notable example of this **flexibility and transformation of tailor-made reception** provided by the university. The case of a female student apartment into one suitable for a student with a **newborn baby** born shortly after arrival. The University of Verona, in its coordinating role, would not have been able to adapt the planning in a sudden timeframe to make it

Box n. 3: Good practice at the University of Tuscia in Viterbo

The #UNITUS4 REFUGEES project

The #UNITUS4Refugees project aims to create and enhance synergies between the University of Tuscia's initiatives designed to build virtuous pathways for the inclusion and engagement of refugee students providing a network of support and solidarity that contributes to the full realization of the potential of UNICORE (extended also to another similar projects addressing students from Ukraine). Thanks to the solid infrastructure of the Alumni Network (WeUnitus Alumni Association), UNITUS4Refugees has the ambition to extend its reach to interdepartmental and third mission initiatives, to become an incubator of good practices with widespread implementation, involving civil society and representing a model for other Italian universities that adhere to the "Inclusive University Manifesto". Among the main activities organized by the Alumni Association, there are: mentoring, fundraising, solidarity parties, trainings and workshops and city life activities. To do this, on the dedicated website it is possible to support them, donating by a quick bottom click, opting also for a monthly standing donation.

appropriate to the needs that the student, who became a mother of her first child three weeks after arrival, had and has as a person.

During the stay, one of the biggest difficulties reported (see Figure 11) was related also to the way in which the scholarship amount how was paid. It was solved in different matters. Some of the universities (e.g. Viterbo) decided to shift in three payments: the first payment paid in cash at the arrival, the second and third will be paid as soon as the student opens a bank account (see Box 4 below).

Most of the universities have been able to help students in opening an Italian bank account or other valid account (i.e at the post office).

Box n.4: UNICORE and BANCA ETICA agreement

Since the edition of UNICORE 4.0, it has officially been active an agreement with a bank (Banca Etica) that allows UNICORE students to open a bank account at a subsidized cost of €1 per month for three years.

This agreement has been issued to the offices of the bank corporate (Banca Etica) through an internal circular dated 21 October 2022 in which it specifies that "UNICORE students are entitled to the Foreign Euro Account at the cost subsidized cost of 1 euro per month for 3 years, with a free debit card".

Document required:
1. Convention Travel Document
2. Refugee ID card
3. Italian Fiscal Code
4. Receipt of postal kit about the residence permit application (so called "assicurata")
5. Enrollment to the Course of Study with proof of accommodation since the address indicated must be used as domicile.

➢ *University enrolment and local factors*

The enrollment is managed by universities without any significant obstacles, unless all personal data related to the students are correct.

The following quote is an example that is worth sharing, reporting on how an initial error on the transcription of personal data - copying down the wrong residence of the student - and unfair practices by the local authorities - refusal to accept the receipt of the residence permit application - can generate a chain of administrative impediments, slow down procedures and, above all, capable of undermining the right to residence, the right to health.

*"Although she has been arriving for 7 months now, the student does not have a primary care physician, and has not yet obtained a residence permit or civil registration. All the offices we have approached, either me directly or the project partners, have placed insurmountable obstacles with respect to completing the procedures. The Italian Revenue Agency did not associate the CF [*Tax Code] *with the*

home address but with the foreign residence address. For this reason, the ASL could not complete the National Health Service enrollment procedure, despite the fact that the enrollment was paid for six months ago. The municipality refused to register her in the registry of residents because the student lacked a residence permit (it deemed the slip insufficient). The police headquarters blocked the file because the student appears to have been born in one country, resides in another, and holds the citizenship of a third state. Therefore, she is asking for consular attestation from the state of citizenship. We are currently attempting a dialogue with the management of the Police Office. If this does not succeed, we will proceed through legal means". (Survey respondent, professor).

In cases like the mentioned above, it would be essential to be **supported by a legal partner**, to ensure student rights in an effective way.

Box n.5 The key actors within the University who have ensured the smooth running of the refugee student reception and inclusion process.

University Governance

It guarantees the right to pursue an academic career for people with a background of forced migration. The university is involved in regional tables to address, discuss and plan solutions under current legislation and collaborates with other universities to improve offerings and create new opportunities. For instance, in Bologna key figures include the *Delegate for International Agreements and Networks and for University Corridors for Refugee Students,* an expert who is in charge to awareness-raising, advocacy and academic policy activities, to expand the model of university corridors at country and international levels.

International Desk

The main actor in the reception of refugees, asylum-seeking students and students and scholars at risk (when the university is partner of SAR network). The office deals with a variety of issues, including supporting all international users in orientation and matriculation, reception and registration, intra- and extra-mobility of students, visiting professors, doctoral students, and post-docs.

In Bologna, for instance, the staff consists of 3 officers engaged in exchange mobility and 4 who follow students in the enrollment process. These latter are also in charge of supporting refugee students in all stages of reception, from the first interview to the evaluation of qualifications, remaining available for clarifications during the master's course.

Regional Institution for the right to higher studies

The regional institution for the right to higher studies (*Ente regionale per il diritto allo studio universitario*) serves to all those enrolled in the universities, conservatories and institutes of higher

education in each Italian region. Specifically for international and special protection holders and depending on the human and financial resources of each region, together with a mature awareness raised in this field, the institution manages scholarships, university residences, dining services, recreational initiatives and ad hoc support services including career monitoring, support for life in the new context and job orientation activities. It should be included among the most relevant and key local partners by all universities.

In Emilia Romagna Region, for instance, to carry out these tasks and ensure otherwise difficult personal attention, ER.GO (Azienda regionale per il Diritto agli Studi Superiori dell'Emilia Romagna) has hired a full-time person, who has recently been joined by a colleague experienced in postgraduate guidance.

Departments

Departments can open and fund positions for researchers and visiting professors, coordinators propose solutions to accommodate refugee and displaced students particularly in numbered courses, and faculty can adopt concrete strategies for greater inclusion during classes.

Peer students /Alumni associations

Peers are aware of that practical and specific information regarding courses, classes, and services, and can thus prove to be an agile and direct channel for understanding the new study system.

For instance, at the University of Viterbo, the AUCS (University Association for Cooperation and Development) supports UNICORE students in their integration into the academic environment and assists them with any problem encountered in their student life.

The "buddy" service is active by UNHCR at the country level, and it is structured as a service in many partner universities.

Tutor/Mentor

This is still not present and/or well-structured in every University. In some cases, the role of mentor does not impose himself; it is chosen by the students themselves.

A UNICORE student pointed precisely to the person in his support as a key figure in the project: "Professor (...) was basically our mentor. When we had any difficulties, anything that we were not aware of, like education or how to base ourselves on the system, she was at the top of the list to contact." [26]

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[26] For an overview and mapping on the role of mentor, see G. Casati, Refugees in the system of Higher Education (HE): the role of the mentor for inclusion and the development of new intersectional programs for refugees/asylum-seekers, 2021.

Another service that can be activated from the universities is the **Refugee Desk.** Refugee desks or other similar ad-hoc services - differently named - are something different from the international office and are intended to assist and support this specific group of international students coming to study, since among the primary needs of refugee students, in addition to those more related to the right to study and integration into the university environment, are housing, social and psychological support and sometimes of any family members dependent on them.

Half of the survey respondents (11 out of 22) have declared that their university has an *ad hoc* service or desk for refugee students, e.g. refugee desk, etc. (Figure 16). Among the positive responses, are mentioned: CAP desk (Bari), Inclusion service (Bocconi, Milan), Welcome Desk (Luiss), Just Peace advanced desk (Siena). However, these reported – except for the latter – seem to target diverse groups of students, whilst the Just Peace advanced desk seem the only more structured and exclusively service committed to fostering the inclusion of female students/researchers seeking international protection and/or from crisis areas.
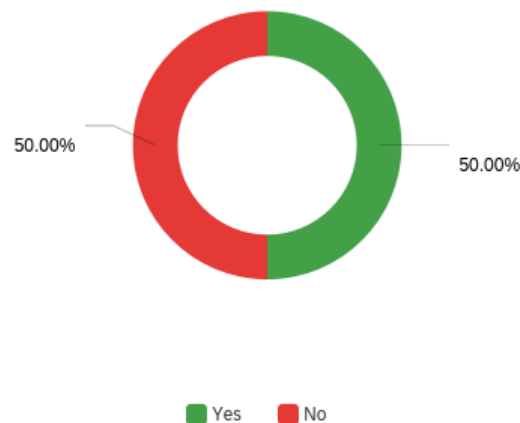

Figure 15 – Q39 of the Survey: Does the University have an ad hoc *service or desk for refugee students (e.g. refugee desk, etc.) [Source: evaluation team]*

4.4 Extent to which POST-GRADUATION phase is implemented

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Post-graduation is not a formal UNICORE's core phase. Yet, job inclusion and post-graduation avenues should be strictly related to the whole program's success, as higher education and job placement or the need to retain international master graduates are strongly connected.

One aspect that deserves further attention is the post-graduation phase of the students, for what concerns their legal status and documents. Since the fourth edition, UNICORE program has been putting effort into implementation at this stage.

There are two main challenges posed and stated by UNICORE graduate students: finding a regular job, preferably in line with one's course of study in Italy or in another country, including that of first asylum; and housing. As a preferable third point, the need in some cases to have their families close by, and thus to reunite with them.

There is an appreciable number of student beneficiaries overall who, after graduation, found a job in line with the course of study they had attended. However, since there is no system for monitoring this stage of the pathway in this sense, both by UNHCR and partner universities, the data remains clouded. The questionnaire sent out, while claiming this objective, failed to quantify all students because of the partial responses that were provided.

Some factors can determine positive outcomes of this phase. On the one hand, endogenous factors regarding: possession of Italian language proficiency, participation in job orientation events, counseling services. On the other, exogenous factors are the territorial environment where the university is located (small, large, peripheral, central, northern, southern and islands) and the type of studies pursued; whether internships (in companies, associations or governmental and non-governmental organizations) are mandatory within the course of study or not. Data collection and flow, monitoring and follow-up actions on this stage should be enhanced.

As premises of this section, quantitative data show that a considerable number of UNICORE students who are taking longer than expected to graduate. For the first three UNICORE editions that supposed to finish, respectively in 2021, 2022 and 2023, until last February (See Figure 17) only 6 UNICORE students have been graduated. As the vast majority is still studying beyond the two-year course (notably in UNICORE 2.0), so far quantitative data on employment are few.

Significantly, in UNICORE 3.0 (2021-2023) it was registered that none of the 34 who are still participating in the program have not been graduated; however, other relevant data shows that they are not attending any internships[27].

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[27] According to what has been recently referred by UNCHR Italy (October 2023) on these data, all six students graduated in UNICORE 1.0; 12 out of 17 graduated in UNICORE 2.0; and 4 out of 34 graduated in UNICORE 3.0.
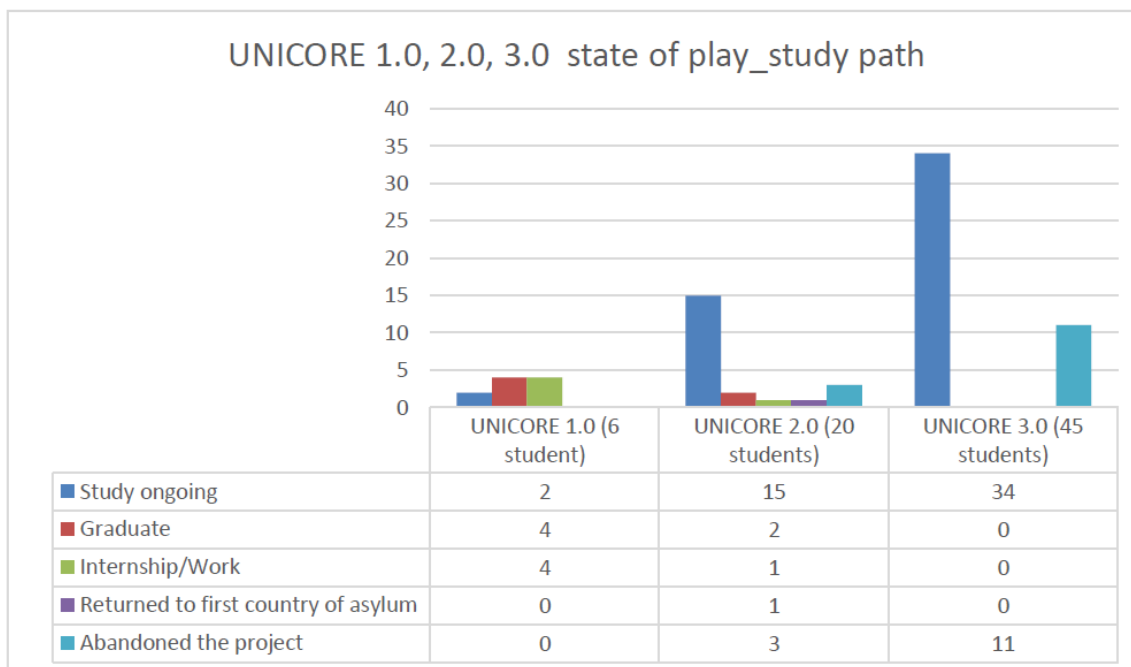
UNICORE 1.0, 2.0, 3.0 state of play_study path

	UNICORE 1.0 (6 student)	UNICORE 2.0 (20 students)	UNICORE 3.0 (45 students)
■ Study ongoing	2	15	34
■ Graduate	4	2	0
■ Internship/Work	4	1	0
■ Returned to first country of asylum	0	1	0
■ Abandoned the project	0	3	11

Figure 17 – UNICORE 1.0-2.0-3.0 Students state of play_study path. (Source: UNHCR February 2023)

The vast majority of the master's degree courses offered do not provide internships as mandatory part of the study program. Indeed, despite their elevated level of motivation and resilience, refugee students may find it difficult to successfully balance between studies and internship/work obligations. As experienced by data, adjusting to new study programs and meeting academic requirements are challenging for beneficiaries of education pathways. Considering this, for one hand, adding extra pressure in terms of employer expectations could be detrimental rather than empowering for some refugee students. For the other hand, internships in master's degree program provide an opportunity for students to engage in integral hands-on work experience that complements the knowledge they gain through coursework and can increase the possibilities for refugee students to be prepared for their future career. To balance between these two aspects, providing optional internships as a part of the study program or after graduation through specific agreements between universities and companies or other private or public entities should be recommended.

In some UNICORE editions, **dropout decisions** occurred. Overall, 14 out of 111 (12%) have dropped out of the program, with the highest number by far being in UNICORE 3.0 (11 out of 45). As shown by the university respondents, many students decided to drop out by the end of the first year, likely because of poorly motivated and/or discouraged students already in the enrollment phase (Bari), or of excessively stressful impact with the new environment, or migration reasons (Bologna), as well as for unknown reasons (Figure 18).
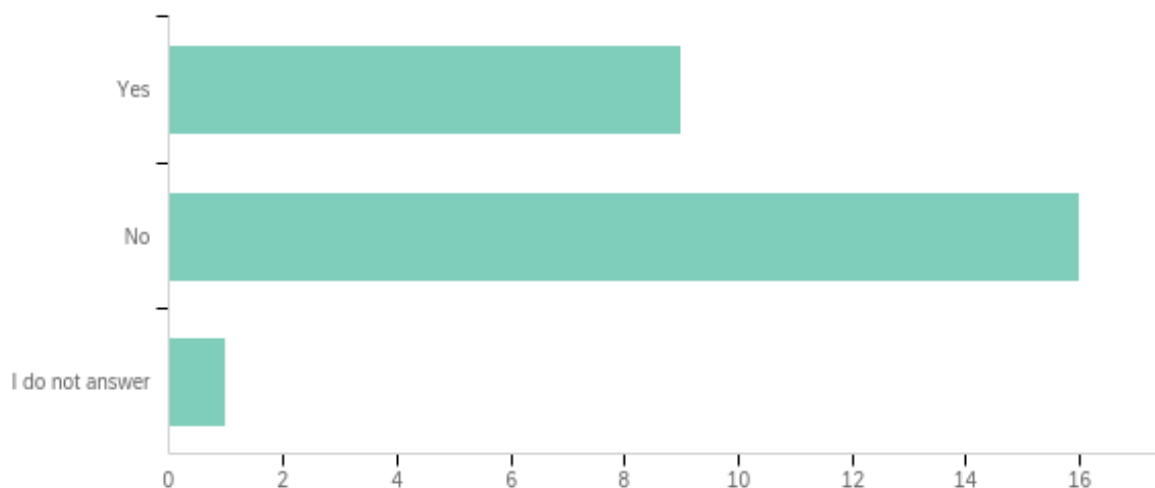
Figure 18 – Q39 of the Survey: "Have there been drop out decisions? If yes, specify how many students, the period and the reason if known" (Source: the Evaluation team)

Notably, two female students escaped (Padua and Verona). Monitoring the progress of the first settling-in phase and keeping the dialogue with students updated can be crucial for an effective protection of those, especially female students. According to this, lessons learned are also identified in providing favorable conditions to attract students while preventing the abuse of the student route for other migration purposes.

➢ *The hard transition to the job inclusion*

UNICORE program offers **post-graduation counseling** always bearing in mind that students could decide not to stay in Italy but rather to go to another country (if the travel document allows it) or return to the country of first asylum (if the conditions allow it). This last option has been little used given the latest events in Ethiopia (the first three editions), but it acquires a more credible alternative if we look at the subsequent editions. To be clear, through a modular approach UNICORE program seems to not intend to offer a lasting solution *per se*, but a temporary solution (two years of study) that can become lasting (for instance, if the students seek asylum in Italy after their graduation).

Since students start studying to learn but also to optimise their chances of employment, all interventions stressed the need to foster early job inclusion, already at an early phase of the program. This can be enabled through the provision of (mandatory or not) internship opportunities via partnerships and other kinds of agreements with the private sector.

Most of the respondents declare that UNICORE students have been able to potentially benefit from the services of job counseling (Figure 19) and job orientation (Figure 20) provided by dedicated offices, and/or from the support, in some cases, of local partners. For instance, at the University of Padua, in the call for applications. the "*Post-lauream job placement facilitation and orientation*

through the support of an OML (Labour Market Operator) responsible for evaluating the beneficiaries' access to active policy measures or path", offered by IRPEA foundation is expressed as benefit, among others. In addition, the fact that 11 (Fig. 19) and 13 (Fig. 20) out of 26 who responded to these questions are unaware or do not respond confirms the need to improve this aspect through data collection and data flow, monitoring and follow-up actions.
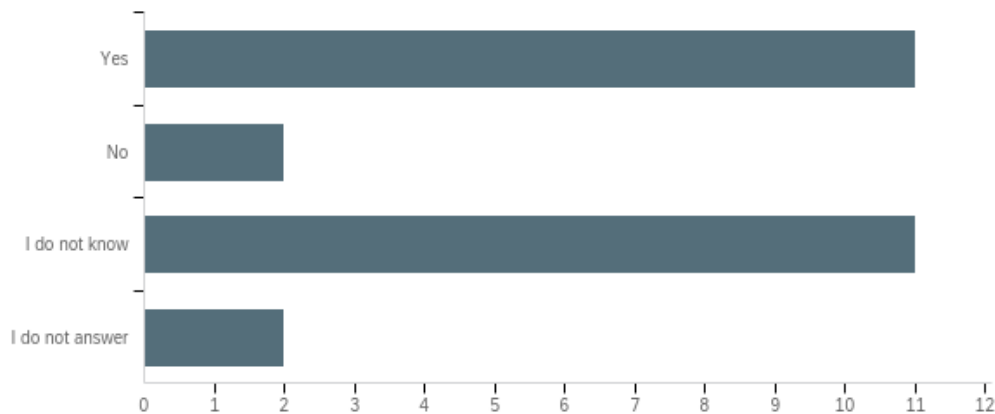

Figure 19 – Q15 of the Survey: "During the course of study, have been the students provided job counseling services?" (Source: The Evaluation team)

"In our student house, between 2020 and 2021, Approdi association organized every Saturday afternoon from November until April/May meetings on Italian language on useful skills to search for jobs by making use of company managers. However, participation has not been assiduous by everyone. After the graduation of the first student, still with residence permit for study, counseling was facilitated by ER.GO in collaboration with the CAF ACLI on the types of residence permits that were most appropriate to convert for the purpose of activating an internship or hiring".

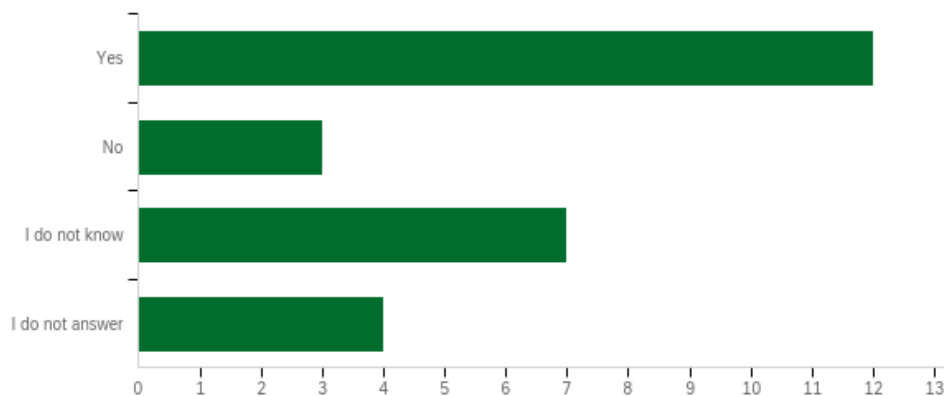(Survey respondent, administrative staff of the University of Bologna)

Figure 20 – Q16 of the Survey: "During the course of study, have the students been provided job placement service/events?" (Source: the Evaluation team)

Moreover, most universities have a dedicated office that is open to all their students and where initiatives are conducted in Italian; however, few UNICORE students actively participate or are engaged, among other reasons, it is reasonable because of the Italian language barrier.

Among other strategies, supportive and/or sponsoring families can help with this language challenge. Some universities (e.g. Salento, Verona), in this sense, provide as a benefit the seeking of "*a supportive family for opportunities to meet and socialize*", offered by local NGOs or foundations.

Box n. 6 Career Service at the University of Florence

Career Service is entirely dedicated to the job orientation and placement needs of students, graduates, doctoral students at the University of Florence, with the aim of providing solutions to the needs and expectations of its users. Career Service has the specific function of providing a targeted support for the career choices of our growing youth. **<u>Activities are held in Italian</u>**.
The offer includes:
Assessment Center Simulation: To get to know with specific cross-skills demanded by employers and to be able to face this recruitment tool.
Career Day: It consists in the official University of Florence job fair days aimed at matching graduates and employers.
Course on Effective Communication
CV check: To individually scan the effectiveness of the CV and to improve awareness about personal and professional skills.
Training at work*:* building your future, a series of workshop to accompany students, graduates, PHD students and PHDs of the University of Florence in the process of building their career project thanks

to the acquisition of knowledge and skills for a targeted and effective entry into the workforce. The workshop is structured in 3 modules.

Campus Enterprise

Job offers

Meeting with Employers

Entrepreneurial Gym*: organized in a real workplace context, to improve entrepreneurial skills and to focus on business challenges proposed by the company. It is a training program aimed at fostering the entrepreneurial skills of students and junior workers. The focus is on the idea generation process to solve real problems through innovative products, processes or solutions.

Job Orientation Seminars is a two-day event dedicated to students, recent graduates and doctoral candidates offering useful information to improve awareness about the transition towards the labour market. It introduces aims and contents of career services and it offers the opportunity to directly meet with representatives from the world of work.

Mock interviews: Meetings are held on Google Meet and are targeted to specific Degree Courses; the registration form includes the specification of the target audience for each meeting.

Skills map: To help students planning the career path in an entrepreneurial way through Personal Business Model Canvas. The service is aimed to accompany the reflection in terms of value proposition and to develop self-awareness about career goals, working on cross-skills like communication, proactivity, enterprise.

Soft Skill Lab: involves a mix of synchronous and asynchronous experiences. On the one hand, engaging classrooms that use gaming as the main training and comparison tool to understand one's soft skills, and on the other, hand micro-learning that can make learning interactive and fun.

The service is open to students, graduate, doctoral and postgraduate students at the University. Eight two-day editions are planned in the second half of 2023.

"Other offers" page*: there is a dedicated website page in which are collected the placement initiatives promoted by organizations outside the University of Florence.

"It is very difficult for us to look for our own way after graduation. For me it was stressful during the thesis writing period, in passing the last exams. It is really difficult to look for a job on your own. Many disappear after graduation and we don't know where they are. It's stressful also because with the residence permit expiring and the travel document expiring after 2 years you have to meet all the legal requirements to stay regularly". (UNICORE alumna)

To improve the completion rates of refugee students and encourage them to explore the existing opportunities the role of academic tutorship and mentoring is meaningful, as well as providing soft skills training for an effective labour market inclusion path.

As already recommended by the European Education Area (EEA) strategy to make higher education systems inclusive and connected to society [28], to this end, **student mentors** are in the right position to follow and support their mentees through all the difficulties they encounter but most of all, thanks to their successful relationship of trust, to encourage the mentees in their inclusion.

"I currently live in Rome and I hope to work in Rome. I bring a unique perspective and a deep understanding of the Italian culture and society. My education in Italy equips me with valuable skills and knowledge that can contribute to the local workforce, fostering diversity and innovation. Additionally, my integration into Italian society can help bridge cultural gaps and promote inclusivity, enriching the country's social fabric". (UNICORE alumnus)

One of the critical issues was found even before graduation concerning the activation of the curricular internship that could have facilitated both the writing of the thesis and the search for at least a post-graduation internship. In the narrative of the survey, a professor stressed that "*in the 3.0 edition a student has been facing difficulty with postgraduate placement (he is expected to graduate in December 2023) as he does not know the Italian language. Despite being sent several times to take an Italian language course he has stopped at A1 level and has never interacted in Italian. Now this is a serious handicap for his job search*".

➢ *Legal aspects*

Longer bridging permits can help ease the transition to a work visa and, eventually, long-term residency, providing a durable solution to refugee students.

At the European level, the **EU Students and Researchers Directive** requires EU Member States to grant international student graduates permission to stay in the country for at least nine months on a job-search visa. In Italy, it is only 1 year, not renewable (see below § 4.5). Some countries have gone further: Germany issues an 18-month job-search visa, and in Ireland, students with graduate degrees may stay up to two years. Most of the Member States established measures to facilitate entry into the national labour market following graduation.

Some factors that significantly contributed to student attraction did not necessarily benefit student retention. For example, programs taught in English had a positive impact on the number of international students but did not facilitate their long-term integration into the labour market[29].

In addition, it is relevant to mention a **proposal to reform the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the status of third-country nationals who are long-term residents** that is on the ground[30]. It aims to create a more effective, more coherent and fairer system for acquiring

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[28] Read more about the strategy: https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education.

[29] European Migration Network, Attracting and Retaining International Students.

[30] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A52022PC0650.

EU long-term resident status. This system should constitute an essential tool to promote the integration of third-country nationals who have established themselves legally and on a lasting basis in the EU. *The proposal aims to facilitate the acquisition of EU long-term resident status, in particular by allowing third-country nationals to accumulate periods* of stay in several Member States in order to fulfill the requirement regarding the duration of stay and by clarifying that all periods of legal residence should be fully counted, *including periods of residence for study purposes*, which is currently counted for half time in the Italian legislation.

Ways forward

- Enhance Italian language training and *ad hoc* adjustments
- Creation and/or strengthening of synergies with other labour mobility pathways
- Engagement of private sector in each Universities' local network
- Pre-graduation internships/trainings, post-graduation fellows
- Facilitation of co-housing experience, families sponsorship, etc.
- Link universities admissions policy to student and labour market demand.
- Longer residence permit after graduation
- Data collection, monitoring and follow up of this stage.

Photo: Henok, an Eritrean refugee, completed his master's degree at the University of Palermo in July 2023 (Source: website)

4.5 Findings related to the cross-sectional issue of legal status and the right to higher education

In the UNICORE program, refugees are welcomed as international students. This legal status of "international student" enables them to stay in Italy during their studies, under certain legal conditions. This gives them the possibility of going back to their countries of asylum if they desire to, and it also gives them direct access to universities.

However, the status of these people has a '*domino effect*' on their studies and future careers. Since they enter the country with a student visa, at the end of the university career they are exposed to residence

permit renewal or conversion, depending on the circumstances, effective perspectives and students' aspirations.

In case of no opportunities of a job or to continue their academic career (e.g. apply for a residence permit for awaiting job, convert or renew their residence permit) UNICORE student decides to seek international protection in Italy. However, if you apply for the international protection in Italy, you cannot enroll into a university until the decision on the asylum application is taken by the Italian authorities.

This is the only **regulatory gap** and people who is formally an international protection seeker cannot enroll until the recognition of a form of protection. Three scenarios are visualized from the university perspective: (i) enrolling them anyway; (ii) enrolling them under conditional admission that is confirmed when they officially receive the international protection and (iii) enrolling them in single courses that will be transformed into an official study course enrolment with career reconstruction.

Table 5 - The legal path of the UNICORE students and the Italian immigration regulation.

Entry to the territory *Is the stay based on the need for international protection or on a 'complementary' criterion such as studying?*	Refugee students are admitted to the Italian territory through visas for study purpose (art. 39. D.lgs. 286/98 – Consolidated Immigration Act (*Testo Unico dell'Immigrazione* (T.U.I.), art. 46 DPR 394/1999, Regulation of implementation of rules of the T.U.I.). The requirements and procedures to issue a visa are indicated in a special provision, published annually by the MiUR, in agreement with MoFA and the Ministry of the Interior.
Residence Permit *Is the person issued a residence permit or other document granting the right to stay and at what stage?*	According to Italian immigration law, within 8 days of their arrival in Italy, they must apply for a residence permit for study at the Italian Post Office (or authorized Patronages and Municipalities). This requires a series of documents to be attached: - filled out and signed request for a copy of the CTD (Convention Travel Document) - a copy of the certification attesting the course of study they will attend, endorsed by the Italian Diplomatic/Consular Representation when issuing the entry Visa - a copy of health insurance policy or the registration with the National Health Service (Servizio Sanitario Nazionale) - 4 passport size photos

How long is the right to stay valid and can it be renewed?	- a University Enrolment Certificate with the related duration or pre-enrolment form issued by the Diplomatic Representation - a self-certification or certificate of residence or documentation regarding the accommodation. During their stay, the students are issued a residence permit for study reasons **1 year, renewable.** There is the possibility to **renew/convert** the residence permit, but it depends also on the duration/validity of the **travel document/national passport.** The permit is renewed only if the condition of being enrolled in the course of study and having passed **at least 1 exam in the first academic year,** two exams thereafter. - A residence permit for study cannot be renewed for more than three years beyond the duration of the multi-year course of multi-year studies. Under certain conditions, it is possible to continue the duration of the permit with the continuation of studies by enrolling in another course of the same level or of a higher level.
Access to rights *What rights does a person arriving through the arrangements receive?*	**Intra-EU mobility** → Students can travel to all the countries in the Schengen Area for a maximum period of three months without an entry visa (in any case, UNHCR advises students to first contact the diplomatic/consular representation of the country they want to go to, in case of temporary restrictions). **Extra-UE mobility** → Students can travel outside the Schengen Area, but in most cases, students will need to apply for a visa at the diplomatic/consular Representation of the country they want to go to. **International protection** → At any time during their stay in Italy, it is possible for students to apply for international protection if they cannot return to their country of origin for fear of being persecuted or for the risk of suffering serious harm. In the framework of the UNICORE program, students are recommended to apply after the graduation, since the parallel status of being student and asylum seeker may have several consequences (see below).

	Family reunification → The study permit enables students to apply for family reunification, if they meet the legal requirements: (i) availability of accommodation; and (ii) minimum income (no less than the annual amount of the social allowance (for 2023 equal to €6,542.51 per year, or €503.27 per month), increased by half of the resulting amount for each family member to be reunited). Students can work part-time for a maximum of 20 hours/week. The residence permit for international protection enables the student to apply for family reunification under favorable conditions, with no need to provide evidence of the mentioned requirements. Benefits planned in UNICORE are only for the beneficiaries and no support is planned for any other family members who may come to Italy.
Post-graduation *On what grounds does the right to stay cease and how is the need for the person's international protection taken into account here?*	After the master's degree, students can: - **Return** to the country of first asylum. - **Convert** the residence permit for study **to** a **permit for "awaiting employment".** In this case, the permit has a duration of one year, and is not usually renewable. If they are successful in finding a job, they can then apply for a residence permit for subordinate work. - **Convert** the residence permit from study **to work purposes** if students have a regular job. The residence permit for work reasons cannot be more than: (i) 9 months for seasonal work; (ii) 1 year for study or training, for fixed-term subordinate employment; (iii) 2 years for self-employment, subordinate, indefinite term (art. 5 T.U.I.). - **Renew** the residence permit for study if students can continue their academic career with a Specialization or a PhD, for the overall duration of the course. In this case, the permit has a duration of one year, and is renewable. - **Ask for international protection in Italy**

The beneficiaries' legal status as international students may pose a challenge. As described above, the study-related residence permit is valid for 1 year, but the master's program they are enrolled in is 2 years. In order to renew the permit, the student must have passed at least two exams.

It seems not to represent a big issue; however, the situation where students cannot renew their residence permit and thus lose their scholarship could occur. In this case, the student can either return to the

Country of first asylum or apply for asylum in Italy. Since there is no economic safety net for the beneficiary beyond the scholarship, this situation could be financially very difficult for the beneficiary afterward.

During studies, some legal situations may further occur, which trap the student in the legal tangles of the national immigration law and its regulatory gaps for which each police station adopts different (and often not good) practices.

The first legal case study that occurred and here analyzed is the situation in which a **UNICORE student applied for international protection before the end of the program**. (Figure 21). Apparently, in most cases, universities did not report any negative consequences on the student's right to study, concerning the scholarship or the enrolment[31].
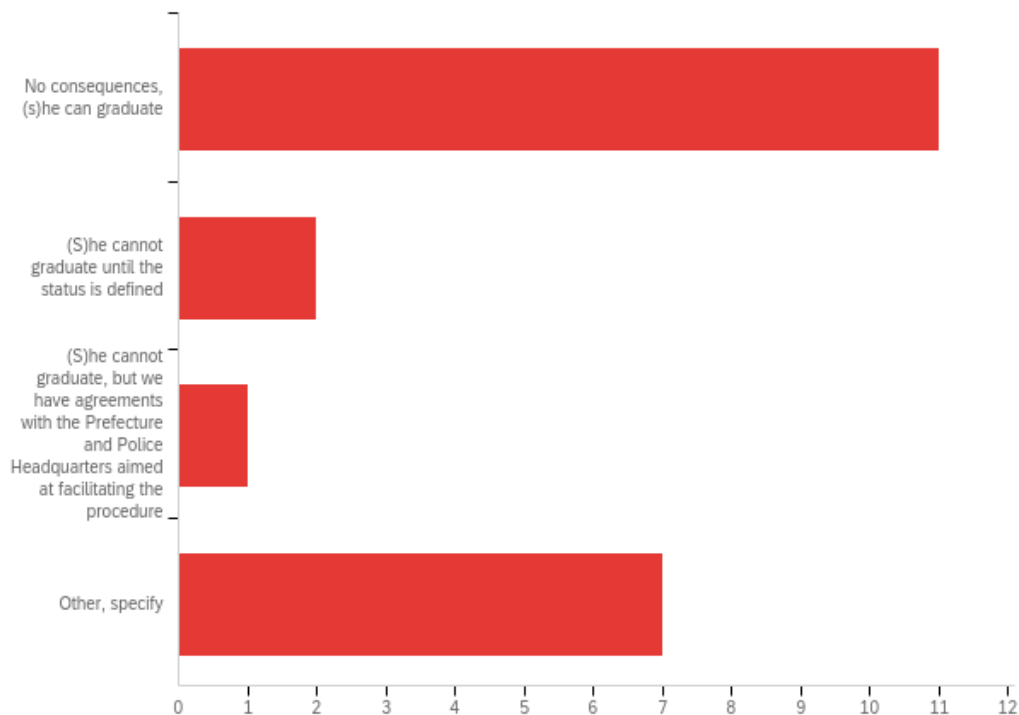

Figure 21 - Q30 of the Survey: "What are the consequences of an asylum request on the achievement of the qualification at the end of the second A.Y.? (The case of the asylum-seeking student who must graduate but whose refugee status is not recognized yet)?

Indeed, sub "other, specify", some universities declare to not have had direct experience. Many others declare that if the student requests asylum and the study permit is still valid, there are no consequences (Politecnico of Turin). However, **once the students apply for asylum, they must renounce their**

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[31] It is Worth noting that Italian legislation doesn't state an applicant's right to be enrolled at a university. In this "grey area", some universities allow full enrollment, while others plan an enrollment under reservation (connected to the outcome of the RSD procedure). In contrast, the last ones allow the possibility to have a single exam.

residence permit for study. This occurs because it is not possible to keep the double status pending, according to the police headquarters which gives rigid interpretation to the legislation and regulation.

Hence, if you are an asylum seeker in Italy, most of the universities (12) declare that the career has been maintained, in some other cases (5) the career is "frozen" and registration for individual courses is permitted; in one (1) case, there is a specific local agreement between University and Police Office (Questura) and Prefecture. Students whose career is blocked due to lack of a valid residence permit in some universities (Bologna) cannot conduct activities related to their university career (registration and recording of exams, printing of certificates, etc.). While in other universities it is without negative consequences on study services (Bari). The latter situation is feasible because an exemption and enrollment regulation was issued at the University of Bari which also concerns asylum seekers. There is a specific University action line on which a professor is delegated.

In brief, this situation leads each academic staff across the territory in different orientations and *modus operandi*. Some are declaring that the enrollment in the second year is admissible only under condition ("con riserva"), so that once the protection is recognized, the reservation is dissolved by proceeding with regular registration. By contrast, others do not recognize the admissibility of enrolling in the entire course, allowing the student to be enrolled in single courses, effectively freezing the career gained. In this case, only upon successful recognition of protection, it is possible to proceed with the reconstruction of the curriculum to complete the two-year degree course. This latter orientation, the majority one, poses several concerns about the effects of administrative operations, since the international protection procedure can take several months or more than one year, and it would thus produce delays in the possibility of graduating on time, as well as some difficulties in ensuring the benefits linked to the right to study, as already mentioned above. None enroll them anyway because of the lack of specific regulation.

Box n.7: The triple dimension of the status of UNICORE student: as an international student, as an asylum seeker, as a beneficiary of the higher education pathway (refugee)

There are three distinct levels of observations and transversally different governance disciplines (and practices) of the legal condition of non-EU citizen students in Italy.

On the one hand, we must look at the relationship between the non-EU citizen in his/her status as an "**international student**" and the Academia.

On the other, exists the relation between Academia and the non-EU citizen in his/her status as an "**international student seeking asylum**".

Asylum seekers cannot enroll full degree courses offered by universities until they are granted international protection. This choice, attributable to the precarious condition of the procedure, can undermine the right to education. However, as seen above, the administrative offices have searched

for and found useful tools to at least not hinder the exercise of this right, to which benefits, and other subsidies are linked.

To give a recent example, after enrolling in a university course of study, the Ministry of Education Circular valid for the academic year 2021-2022 invites students to request the Police Office of the District in which they are located to renew their residence permit for the entire year, at least sixty days before it expires. In this case, if all the requirements are met, we proceed with the renewal. However, the circular specifies that "underline the renewal of the residence permit is not permitted for the attendance of single courses", even though a Circular of the Ministry of the Interior of 22 February 2011 clarified that only the case of a foreign citizen who initially enrolls in a single course can be renewed – for which entry was requested – and request renewal for enrollment in a pertinent degree course.

To this dual dimension, there should be considered a third one: the peculiar (strengthened) condition of being a **UNICORE student**, the relation with the single university joining the UNICORE Consortium and as a recognized refugee in his (or her) Country of first asylum; hence subject with specific needs and vulnerabilities.

Furthermore, in this triple dimension are intersected relations between the Universities and the competent Police Offices; between the Police Offices and other institutional and UN agency partners of the UNICORE project (Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and UNHCR). Bearing in mind that the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Education are not formal partners in UNICORE programming even if the students' pathway interacts cross-functionally with one and the other for their respective areas of expertise.

Since their role can function as administrative facilitators, they should be strongly involved to help in building bridges and not barriers as mentioned above.

As for the University staff, in the absence of a valid residence permit, the University administrative office in any case must formally accept the enrollment application; then collect the documents and the application, issue a receipt (as an obligation for the administration), and keep the examination of the application itself suspended until the residence permit issue/renewal procedure, adopting some internal regulation specifying no consequences at all under the right to study. According to Italian jurisprudence, it is commonly recognized that the "receipt" and the residence permit must be considered equivalent.

This should apply with greater force when the offices approach students who are beneficiaries of the UNICORE program, who have already been given high attention of the United Nations Refugee Agency and recognized *prima facie* as refugees or in any case in need of protection under the UNHCR mandate.

As for the matured career, it is rather preferable to guarantee study continuity, especially within the chosen two-year path and following UNICORE's scope to which the partner Universities have joined, that is to guarantee, thanks to a shared sponsorship and strategy, the opportunity for international students to arrive in Italy legally and safely to continue – without interruptions – their higher education path.

5. Conclusion

"Our network is the strength of the program. All efforts are shared for the advantage of the students." (University of Padua representative)

The UNICORE project constitutes an innovative experience in the Italian and European panorama.

In few years, from a pilot it has been becoming a larger education pathway program, demonstrating positive results that have attracted the interest of new universities and actors willing to provide support, and then eventually expand to other places. Such transitions towards scale might benefit from a certain degree of centralization and coordination, which, however, comes with an additional price tag.

Its **strengths** include the synergy between institutional and non-institutional actors, coordination at central and local levels and the involvement of diverse multi-sectoral actors through the whole-of-society approach, level of social inclusion of refugee students and their active presence within the local environment, as well as the centrality of refugee's engagement and voice at several phases of the program.

Its main **weaknesses** include the lack of more structured funding to ensure long-term sustainability and delays in obtaining relevant documentation for the entry into the territory timely for the start of the master's courses, as well as the legal status that may affect the smooth progress of the students staying, also undermining in a sever way they choose to continue their life in Italy after graduation.

The main **challenges** lie in: the covering of all available scholarships (since UNICORE 4.0), gender equity, long processing times for Declaration of Value (where required) and Travel Document impacting on the visa procedure and residence permit applications, the precarious legal status, the insufficient level of Italian language, linked also to an effective job inclusion, shortages of student accommodation; and finally a more structured funding for long-term sustainability.

Its **added value** benefits communities, but above all the academic environments. UNICORE has contributed to creating a more sensitized, civic, inclusive and international university, which has led them to greater awareness of the refugees related issues; and consequently, to the creation of a reception model for refugee students, including the promotion and strengthening of local networks; similarly, to the expansion and improvement of services for the benefit of all international students and

potentially of other groups, such as scholars at risk, same national students with or without migrant backgrounds; finally, the diffusion of the culture of hospitality within the university.

In this example of multi-stakeholder cooperation, UNHCR coordinates work between 41 Italian universities, other organizations and national institutions. UNHCR-led coordination is viewed as effective in the context of the core's phases, which typically involve time-bound tasks, clear divisions of labour and well-defined objectives. However, institutional governance could be further enhanced.

To keep growing, a clearer structure needs to be set in place, for instance by **strengthening the engagement of the Ministry of Education**, to centralize some services and provide *ad-hoc* guidelines, **and the engagement of the Ministry of Interior** to facilitate the issuing or renewing of the Travel Document, when obtaining or renewing the Convention Travel Document from the relevant authority in the Country of Asylum is not feasible, which is directly linked to the possibility to renew or convert the residence permit and other related rights.

As noted in analog successful higher education pathway experiences, the government is often engaged in providing funding and it is involved in the implementation of some actions. As noted, in UNICORE, there is no clearly defined project budget, rather the partners contribute different sums to cover various parts of the project, so that it may affect the sustainability and the scalability of the program. In every edition, the universities have been provided the scholarships. Without a **structured financing channel**, it would be difficult to renew or even increase them for the following editions.

Similarly, the government can provide **sustainable solutions to regulative and legal issues**, particularly regarding legal admission and acceptance into national welfare systems. Hence, to expand programs and integrate them into national immigration policies, more extensive involvement of the governmental authorities is likely to be required.

The UNICORE program has expanded the number of African countries in which students reside; facilitated refugees' access to the pathway by removing, the obstacles they face; and mediated and solved conflicts with consulates and other institutions where possible.

Nonetheless, while on the individual case, such measures have also been taken with some diplomacy and flexibility, at the systemic level one should set as a primary goal the establishment of **more flexible legal and administrative procedures**, such as streamlined processes for dealing with the specific difficulties and risks they encounter before arriving in the country of study.

The provision of a **single Call for applications** for all universities is also a challenge on which the Consortium has been working on intending to harmonize practices at the national level, which respond also to a need for certainty and administrative efficiency.

In addition, the Call for applications is available annually on web and social channels, potentially allowing autonomous access by applicants. This has a direct impact on the program's ability to scale

and reach more refugees. However, referral tools and advocacy need to be strengthened and the program needs to be strategically promoted and supported on the field, also through refugees' engagement.

The involvement of **UNICORE alumni** in the form of committees and ambassadors can certainly help in promoting and encouraging thousands of young refugees who cannot access higher education. In this direction, since as pointed out the time to obtain status in countries of first asylum is long, it is recommended to start this dialogue already with school-age children, especially those who are in adulthood transition.

In the long-term, the big challenge of the program could be expanded **by type of educational offer** (bachelor's degree), **by nationality** (other countries of first asylum, not only in Africa), **and/or by category** (students and scholars at-risk, anyway who is not recognized *stricto sensu* "refugee"). These ambitions will contribute to scale the project results and enrolling as many international (refugee) students as possible, in line with the "Manifesto for the inclusive university" signed by the partner universities that everyday work for the student's retention. Current partner universities and new partners have critical roles to play in advocating for the development of such higher education pathways programs, but also in supporting their implementation and the development of welcoming societies, particularly at the local level.

For a lasting future of the UNICORE program, ensuring that resettlement and this type of complementary education pathway truly become sustainable and the whole-of-society endeavour will thus be an important goal going forward. The pledge submitted for the GRF 2023 constitutes another strategic 'piece of the puzzle' and leads new steps forward for universities that hopefully will achieve tangible benefits for refugees and host communities.

"UNICORE is a great project. UNICORE is an opportunity for many people who do not have access to higher education. There are so many students who have skills and/or knowledge without being able to continue their studies in African countries. It gives you opportunities and hope to help their country tomorrow."
(UNICORE former student)

6. Recommendations

The recommendations below are grouped into **five broad thematic areas**: (i) normative framework, policy and guidelines; (ii) operationalisation and programming; (iii) information management; (iv) coordination and partnerships; (v) external relations, resource, mobilization and budgeting. All overarching recommendations are pitched at the level of the relevant entity/stakeholder within the UNICORE program, and each is accompanied by suggested actions in support of the recommendation.

NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK, POLICY AND GUIDELINES

Recommendation 1: Enhance the institutional attention on University Corridors for Refugees and place greater emphasis on contextual realities, refugee needs and the principles of accessibility, safeguarding, and dignity in education pathways at all stages.

Suggested actions:
- provide input on specific legislative or regulatory language that could be adopted and encourage policy strategies to be developed in a participatory way, since removing the identified barriers will ultimately be the responsibility of governments, through legislation, regulatory changes, or soft policy such as amending guidance and training for visa officers.
- Empower more flexible or simplifying legal and administrative procedures, such as simplified processes for UNICORE applicants (one single digital platform, one Call for Applications), or with respect to requirements for refugees to the entry and stay to address the specific difficulties and risks they encounter, also by strengthening cooperation with Consulates.
- Ensure access to family reunification for refugee students departing on education pathways.

OPERATIONALISATION AND PROGRAMMING

Recommendation 2: In the design of the higher education programs and support interventions, place heavier emphasis on needs assessment and analysis. Ensure that the needs and vulnerabilities of refugees who arrive are accurately captured and reflected in assessments and program design.

Suggested actions:
- Collecting relevant refugee data in the countries of first asylum (including information on education, skills, certification, language capacity and, where possible, aspirations for future study).
- In countries of asylum, dedicate resources and devise modalities for better outreach and engagement activities aimed at refugees who are considering continuing their tertiary education, including those who are still in high school age, in view of assessing their needs and circumstances more accurately, also with training programs to help refugees fill language or skill gaps.
- Developing and implementing referral tools.
- Ensuring gender equality and parity of access by creating opportunities specifically for women and girls (in all their diversity) and people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.
- Increase inclusion of refugee-led organisations and alumni within the discussion.
- Bringing forward the start of programming by at least two months in the existing program timetable.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Recommendation 3: For the collection and dissemination of information relating to conditions in countries of first asylum, as well as for outreach activities aimed at the greater inclusion of refugee students in the higher education program, mainstream the use of digital platforms both online and offline and social media as well as improve the referral tools.

Suggested actions:
- Working collaboratively with other actors and establishing data sharing agreements to facilitate the flow of information.
- Developing communications strategies with Communities for sharing information and opportunities on pathways and for involving them in the design and feedback process of program development.

COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Recommendation 4: Create venues for coordinating and sharing learning among actors involved in implementing the program, including the private sector to identify opportunities to create links among education and labour pathways.

Suggested actions:
- Coordinate with relevant stakeholders such as credential evaluators, providers of language and standardised tests, etc. to facilitate admissions.
- Facilitating, among other things, documentation submission, interviews, biometric data collection, visa issuance and travel document collection; this means cooperation arrangements with Embassies and Consulates, if applicable.
- Addressing qualifications or language gaps for refugees during the attendance of degree courses to facilitate matching with a potential employer interested in hiring.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS, RESOURCE, MOBILISATION AND BUDGETING

Recommendation 5: Structure budgets and design funding instruments that support and expand more sustainable and scalable higher education pathways, spanning also mixed caseloads of refugees, students and scholars at risk.

Suggested actions:

- Engaging corporate sector/employers with building education to employment pathways and financing of Higher education pathways; meaning also developing study-work hybrid programs with employers covering the expenses.
- Utilising community sponsorship models to fund general and individual needs of refugee students.

- Expanding innovative financing options such as loans and grants, crowdfunding campaigns, via sports-linked scholarships, etc. to finance infrastructure and beneficiaries.
- Building refugee education/university fairs to showcase programs and explain opportunities and processes on the regular basis.
- Including beneficiaries of education pathways in the existent infrastructure for support for asylum-seekers and resettled refugees including cultural adaptation, language training, socioeconomic and legal counselling and support.
- Developing and launching student levy models at universities to finance refugee scholars.