

Language learning and educational inclusion in Calabria

Key findings and recommendations

Executive Summary

In Italy, the acquisition of the Italian language is considered a fundamental means to guarantee access to local services and the beginning of an integration process. The teaching of the Italian language is entrusted with two providers: on the national government side, it is provided by the Centres for Adult Education (CPIA); from the third and private sector, these courses are supported by additional hours within the SPRAR/SIPROIMI (Protection system for beneficiaries of international protection and unaccompanied foreign minors) and in some CAS (Extraordinary Reception Centres), for refugees who are part of an integrated reception project. The CPIA are a type of autonomous teaching institution, with a specific teaching approach and organisational structure, divided into territorial service networks, usually on a provincial basis. They provide training for adults and young adults who have not completed compulsory education or have not obtained a final qualification of any level.

The Italian language courses within the SPRAR/SIPROIMI system are autonomously managed and respond to the needs of service users, to increase the number of hours tuition provided and also ensure continuity of learning during the summer period.

There is sufficient integration of the governance within the system between the state, local government and third sector levels. However, the Italian GLIMER team argues that more funds (economic, but above all human resources) are needed to improve language learning, as well as to strengthen educational staff training and dialogue between the public and private sectors.

This Policy Brief by the Italian GLIMER team puts forward recommendations for how these issues can be addressed.

Methods and empirical research

The GLIMER project is based on a combination of rigorous policy analysis, qualitative research with stakeholders and secondary analysis. This policy document is based on ethnographic field work and in-depth semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from local and decentralised administrations, the third sector and community groups. We have worked in different locations covering the territory of Calabria, focusing on two main cities (Cosenza, Catanzaro), and on places with a high density of non-Italian residents (Lamezia Terme).

The GLIMER (Governance and the Local Integration of Migrants and Europe's Refugees) Project is jointly funded by JPI Urban Europe and Horizon 2020. Bringing together researchers and practitioners from five lead institutions – the University of Edinburgh, the University of Glasgow, Università della Calabria, Malmö Universitet and the Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies – it researches how issues relating to governance impact displaced peoples' experiences of integration in contemporary Europe

Web-page: glimer.eu



Context

Overview

The CPIA adult education centres are open to adults, including migrants, who have not completed compulsory schooling as well as those who have completed the first cycle of education and who want to complete a second cycle. For foreign nationals over 16 years of age, they provide access to literacy, especially for those who cannot attend courses during the day.

How does the educational system work in Calabria?

All migrants who intend to stay for more than one year have to sign an integration agreement, a 'compulsory integration process', which includes a credit attribution. In two years, the applicant must demonstrate a level of integration corresponding to 30 credits, obtained by activities carried out within two training systems:

1. The CPIA, self-governing institutions divided into territorial networks, usually on a provincial basis. Since 2015, six CPIA networks have been created in Calabria (Catanzaro, Cosenza, Crotona, Vibo Valentia and two in Reggio Calabria) with 30 different secondary locations.
2. Alternatively to the CPIA lessons, migrants can enjoy a personalized course within the ordinary reception projects (SPRAR/ SIPROMI) or in some extraordinary reception centres (CAS).

Literacy and language-learning paths are designed for students to reach A2 level of the CEF for Languages (Council of Europe). Second-level education is focused on technical, professional and artistic studies. The A2 level (or higher) courses of the CPIA are the only qualifications recognised by the Interior Ministry to obtain long-term residence permits.

How does the migrants' educational system operate?

Most of the migrants are encouraged to attend classes within the CPIA, especially those who are hosted in the SPRAR/SIPROIMI system. These courses are free and cover 2/3 hours a day in mixed classes. In some cases, a gender balance is maintained.

In the SPRAR system (which was in force until December 2018), asylum seekers were also accepted. Everyone was guaranteed additional hours of Italian language, free of charge and personalized according to their nationality. The reformed SIPROIMI system (which is gradually replacing the SPRAR) should maintain the same services but with a clear downsizing of users who, therefore, will only be able to use the CPIA path. Calabria is actually one of the regions with the highest number of SPRAR/SIPROIMI projects.

What are the implications?

The CPIA teaching system is very widespread throughout the region and allows easy access to courses. The training paths are more effective for integration when a partnership with the SPRAR/SIPROIMI centres operated by third sector organisations is formalised. However, school drop-out is one of the main problems, combined with the lack of lifelong education for teaching staff. The presence of mixed classes accelerates the social integration of migrants but makes it very difficult to implement efficient educational models. The CAS Centres, which are not equipped to accommodate migrants on a long-term basis, frequently have problems in providing appropriate educational services.

GLIMER stakeholders have indicated that the SPRAR system reform could potentially lead to a reduction in economic commitments to language services and a smaller number of beneficiaries achieving full integration.



Findings

GLIMER research has identified several gaps regarding language teaching systems, which concern the following topics:

1. CPIA system and language standards

The territorial structure of the CPIA helps linguistic inclusion, but is affected by the lack of educational policies aimed at modernising language pathways and by the limited possibility of training for teaching staff.

2. Language-mediators and gender policies

The heterogeneity of migrants in the region as a result of landings on the coast, requires the presence of several language mediators able to help migrants with their linguistic introduction and in the acquisition of civic concepts required to complete the final test. In addition, with no gender-oriented programmes and support activities, language lessons can be difficult to follow for certain categories of foreign students (e.g. mothers or victims of trafficking and torture).

3. Inter-relationship between residence permits and school attendance

Difficulties in obtaining residence permits and procedures concerning the authorization to stay in the territory affects the frequency of language lessons accessed by migrants and also contributes to an increase in school drop-out. This is particularly evident for asylum seekers and refugees, considering the complex administrative procedures for granting international protection.

4. Institutional dialogue and collaboration between SPRAR/SIPROIMI and CPIA systems

Operational dialogue between the reception system for refugees and unaccompanied foreign minors and other language institutions is entrusted to individual conventions or declarations of intent, but these are not always constant and permanent in time, influenced by individual representatives' management abilities. This can create a lack of organisation in work and activities aimed at strengthening migrants' language skills.

5. Relationship between staff recruitment and enrolments

The recruitment of teaching staff is based mainly on the comparison between the number of enrolments and the amount of students completing the course successfully. The school drop-out rate of some foreign students has an influence on the staff count and may lead to a lack of adequate number of teachers throughout the school year.

6. Certification of the Italian language (L2) and teaching schemes

The Italian language is evaluated according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The lack of a national qualification system for the Italian language may create several disparities in the development of learning programmes and regarding the use of teaching materials for migrants within the different locations of the CPIA and other educational institutions.

7. Acquisition of Italian language skills and the effects on individual migration projects

Learning the language and completing the course of studies within the CPIA or high schools is tightly linked with each individual migration project. Calabria is one of the main destinations of arrivals but it is often a transit area where migrants stay only for an initial period and then end their journey in other Italian regions or territories of the European Union. This means there is often limited interest among foreign students in learning a language that they hardly imagined having to use, with a knock on effect for schooling of children.

8. Education system and legislative changes

The latest modifications introduced by the Salvini decree on immigration and security (Law no. 132/2018) have reduced access to the reception system, excluding asylum seekers from all the services that, in the integrated reception model, supported the migrant's personal independence. With this exclusion, migrants who are awaiting international protection could be deprived of the possibility to have direct and guided access to educational services.



Findings continued

9. Dialects, informal methods and language teaching
Several methods of informal education are used in the SPRAR/SIPROIMI reception centres as well as in the CPIAs, where migrants have to face directly the different situations in their daily lives with the use of the language. Despite this, in southern Italy there is a very high presence of dialects that are learned more easily by foreign students but which can also hinder the activity of mediation and the proper learning of the Italian language.

10. Relationship between educational policies and job inclusion
In the Italian educational system, the professional training schools follow the second-level primary education which, in any case, grants a diploma useful for a residence permit. The migrants who find work in a different way, leave the education system and do not refine their language learning, complicating even more the process of obtaining a permanent residence permit.

Recommendations

Below, we make ten recommendations designed to improve educational access to and provision for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Calabria. Recommendations are grouped in pairs into five distinct themes, and are as follows:

Encourage dialogue between the different educational spaces for migrants, to enhance the opportunities for continuous and sustainable training of the Italian language.

1. Create an activity network involving public and private actors with specific projects that increase enrolment in compulsory courses for migrants and refugees.
2. Design suitable and highly equipped spaces that allow the different requirements of migrants and refugees to be considered, with a special focus on a gender perspective.

Improve first reception and school integration practices. Actions include:

3. Adopt a specific and dedicated reception protocol for all educational institutions, to be distributed on admission.
4. Within the European Framework of Reference, identify common and univocal parameters for the evaluation of language skills and for the resolution of problems in Italian language learning.

Enhance the collaboration and networking of the CPIAs, in accordance with the guidelines provided by the MIUR for intercultural education, through the following actions:

5. Increase dialogue between the different regional fora of the CPIAs and identify joint resource management practices.

6. Stimulate the establishment of peripheral offices in the different parts of the territory, especially in areas with a strong presence of refugees and seasonal workers.

Improve local and national government engagement in the specific language issues related to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Actions include:

7. Identify new recruitment criteria for teaching staff, including demographic trends and the historical presence of migrants.
8. Introduce support for the CPIA and private bodies responsible to encourage dialogue and the recruitment of linguistic mediators and intercultural teaching support staff.

Fill the existing gaps in the policy and knowledge of the Italian language learning system for migrants. Actions include:

9. Reform the guidelines and promote the professional training and updating of the language teaching staff towards the resolution of conflicts and long-term educational problems.
10. Support dialogue with the SPRAR/SIPROIMI network, identifying viable options for the inclusion of asylum seekers into language learning.

GLIMER Italian Team: Prof. Donatella Loprieno; Prof. Anna Elia; Dr. Claudio Di Maio, University of Calabria.

This policy brief is supported by our full report into ESOL governance in Scotland, available at: glimer.eu/outputs | Further enquires: ellen.cummings@ed.ac.uk

