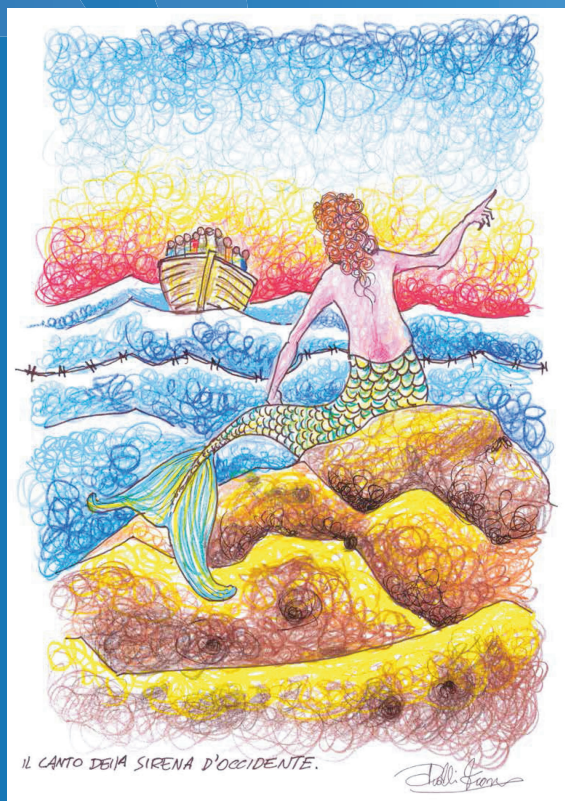


# NEWCOMERS AS AGENTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: LEARNING FROM THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE

A Recourse Book for Social Work and Social Work Education  
in the Field of Migration



IL CANTO DELLA SIRENA D'OccIDENTE.

Jolly from

Edited by  
Hannah Reich, Roberta T. Di Rosa



Fondazione  
Nazionale  
Assistenti Sociali

**FrancoAngeli** 



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collana della Fondazione Nazionale Assistenti Sociali/FNAS

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La Fondazione, dunque, cura e promuove questa collana per valorizzare le ricerche, le proposte culturali e le pratiche progettuali che animano e concretizzano la disciplina di servizio sociale, per sostenere i professionisti nello sviluppo di nuove competenze, per portare ad evidenza le notevoli potenzialità di produzione disciplinare già presenti e provocare criticamente ulteriori capacità.

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Cover image: *Il canto della sirena d'Occidente*, by Francesco Piobbichi

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## **Images in the text by Francesco Piobbichi**

*Welela*

*Chi salva una vita salva mondo intero*

*3 ottobre*

*Noi e loro*

*È il capitalismo bellezza*

*Tu!*

*Ciao mamma, sono vivo*

*Esodo*

*Senza nome (onorare la memoria)*

A special thanks to Francesco Piobbichi, who has made drawing his weapon against the indifference and violence that permeate the world of migration in the Mediterranean and, unfortunately, sometimes also the reception system. He, a witness to the times in which we live, with a notebook and his pencils, offers us chronicles and memories of stories that the sea has bequeathed to us, so that they are not completely lost in that sea.

Thank you, Francesco, for generously sharing your drawings, and for helping us to honour the lives and memories of so many people we will never know.



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**Part I**  
**Facing the realities on the ground:  
systems and structures**



*Welela*

# **1. Scrutinizing the situation on the ground in Sicily**

by Giuseppina Tumminelli

## **1. Introduction**

Conditions of refugees and migrants in Sicily are very difficult because there are a lot of implications, variations, observations, problems, difficulties.

In recent years, migration has become one of the most debated issues in public opinion because of its political, economic, social, and cultural implications. In addition to defining problems, doubts, epistemological errors, conflicts that the categories used (e.g., regular/irregular, refugee/asylum seekers) trigger.

The focus on migration has become the topic for the clashes among political forces and to justify the difficulties that the country complains about. In this frame there is a gap between “reality” and its “representation”: as it happens for example, to select some of the actors of migration, such as refugees, and to neglect others; or not to distinguish between asylum and migration; to establish continuously a ranking between who has rights to stay and who has not; to support the rhetoric of the “unstoppable invasion” recently aggravated by the risk of the Covid-19 virus (Tumminelli, 2020).

In this paper, the situation of migration in the Sicilian territory will be presented in a national framework also with the aim of starting reflections on the theme and to think about adequate inclusion policies.

## **2. The collective imagination of migration**

In recent years, the theme of immigration has taken on a structural and structuring value for our society to the point that social conflicts are largely coagulated around this theme which has radically changed political spaces,

as well as the collective imagination, which rarely manages to correctly perceive the real dimensions of the phenomenon.

People fleeing by persecution, the “transnational clandestine actors” (Andreas, 2003), are not free to move and access legally other states.

These movements involve both refugees and those who are called economic migrants, who are also unable to take other legal ways of entry into the countries. For this reason, the inflows are considered “mixed”, because they include those fleeing both persecution of various kinds and hunger and poverty.

The reasons to escape are different: economic inequalities in access to primary goods (such as water and food) or even for land grabbing (Mateos, 2015, pp. 693-694), i.e., the increase of environmental disasters caused by climate change. The escape is not linked to the choice of the country where to go to live but is driven by the choice of the country where someone is able to escape and ask for protection<sup>1</sup>. Travel is always dangerous and deadly, and the identification of refugees is particularly difficult. As already emerges at the global level, recent years have been marked by the arrival of refugees who, despite the difficulties and obstacles, have undertaken the journey and overcome the “walls” of demarcation between States, but also by the deterioration of their living conditions because of reception and protection systems in the countries of arrival, not adequate to meet the needs of migrants.

Consequently, the presence of refugees raises numerous questions related to both their agency and the social responsibility of the country of arrival in ensuring an adequate reception system and helping to activate processes of accompaniment, integration, and growth. The use of the refugee agency (Bolzoni, Gargiulo, Manocchi, 2015) is used to counter the images and approaches that would see refugees as passive subjects. The actions that refugees take, despite the difficulties and limitations of a system that does everything to close itself instead of opening up, go towards the activation of forms of resilience.

However, it is necessary to consider that the image of refugees oscillates between two poles that feed knowledge traps: on the one hand they are seen as victims unable to act and on the other as profiteers. We lose sight of the fact that refugees, if they have the ability to act independently, are subjected by the system to limits that can hardly be overcome. An example is the application of the eternal label of “victim” and the regulatory constraints that would limit the ability to move freely, decide, act and could also have repercussions on the refugee’s emotional balance. The consequence would

<sup>1</sup> See the contribution of Iason Apostolopoulos.

lead to situations of marginalization and difficulties in social, economic and housing integration.

A further prejudice to be debunked is that refugees arriving in the new country can fit into predefined paths by understanding, joining, and adapting to them. The picture, as one can guess, is complex and seems to threaten the resilience of refugees and weaken agency, i.e., the set of psychic and social qualities that allow a social actor to achieve intentional states of the world (Bruun, Langlais, 2003), in which the refugee realizes of his own behaviours.

### **3. The situation in Italy**

The increase in the number of entries in the national territory must be included in a broader dynamic affecting Europe, which is one of the main destinations of migration at global level. The presence of migrants has contributed to changing scenarios. In 2019, the ten countries of origin of foreign citizens in Italy are: Romania, Albania, Morocco, China, Ukraine, Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Egypt, and Moldova. The first three nationalities represent 40% of the foreigners residing in the national territory.

In line with the progressive stabilisation of the foreign population, the number of acquisitions of Italian citizenship has grown, with an increase from 2013 to 2018. This picture has to deal with other aspects. One cannot overlook the flows of foreigners crossing Italy to reach other European countries, as well as the internal migration from the southern regions to those in the north of the country, which are reminiscent of the differences within the territory in terms of labour supply and demand, for example.

The main problem is the lack of adequate legislative instruments to ensure legal channels of access for employment, as has become apparent over time in the number of irregular migrants. This figure decreased during the amnesties for irregular migrants and increased with negative opinions on applications for international protection and the expiry of residence permits for humanitarian protection.

Migration flows to Italy take place via dangerous routes managed by ‘human traffickers’ from criminal organisations. The conflicts that have erupted in the areas of sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, the worsening of economic conditions in sub-Saharan African countries, and the reduction in the possibility of regular access to the territories draw an alarming scenario in terms of the consequences both for relations between countries and for the health and safety of the people themselves. International protection is the only possibility of entry in Italy.



On a global level, even for 2019, Italy is not the country that has taken on the responsibility of welcoming and protecting refugees. There are three routes to cross the borders: the western route (Morocco, Algeria), the central route (Tunisia, Libya) and the eastern route (Turkey, Greece, Balkans).

Three-quarters are found in countries bordering their own, 85% in middle or low-income countries. Turkey is the first country with 3.6 million refugees (mostly Syrians), followed by Pakistan and Uganda with 1.4 million each, Germany with 1.146.700 and Sudan with 1.055.489. Italy is in 24th place with 208 thousand and 47 thousand (IDOS, 2020, p. 45).

In recent years, Italy has faced the arrival of migrants with different modalities according to the characteristics of the territories of arrival, but the number of immigrants is not compatible with the image of an invasion of Italy.

In 2019, 11.471 migrants arrived in Italy by sea, 49.1% of those arrived in 2018 who were 23.370. If we compare the data with that of the previous year 2017, the detectable decrease is 90.4% (IDOS, 2020, p. 14).

The presumed end of the landings is not motivated by the choice of people to undertake the migratory path, but in the consequences, for example, that the agreements between Italy-Libya have determined in terms of a 90% decrease, already starting from 2017, in the number of departures from Libya. 72% of those who arrived at 31/12/2019 are men, 10% women and 18% minors.

The most significant data is the number of migrants arriving from Tunisia (23%), Pakistan (10%), Ivory Coast (10%), Algeria (9%), Iraq (9%), Bangladesh (5%), Iran (4%), Sudan (4%), Guinea (3%), Somalia (2%).

The unaccompanied foreign minors were 1.680, 50% less than the number recorded in 2018 (3.536) (IDOS, 2020, p. 165). The issue of unaccompanied foreign minors is quite complex and deserves attention, on the one hand because of their needs, desires, expectations, and projects and, on the other hand, because of the lack of protection caused by being alone. Unaccompanied foreign minors are a particular target that becomes a challenge for host societies for the protection and accompaniment interventions to be implemented. In this direction, Law 47 of 2017 (known as *Zampa Law*) aims to introduce a series of interventions including the “Voluntary Guardian” that place the supreme interest of the child at the centre.

91,421 are the migrants included in the hospitality system in the national territory. The most interested regions are Lombardy with 12,680 presences and Emilia-Romagna with 9,406.

According to data from the Ministry of the Interior, the number of asylum seekers had already decreased in 2018. An increase was recorded in

the number of applications submitted by women (23.8%). Citizens from Asian countries recorded a higher incidence (41%), and the number of people from the American continent increased (17% from Central and South America).

### **3.1. Some points about presence of migrants in Sicily**

In 2019, in Sicily, resident migrants are 200,022, 4% of total residents (ISTAT, 2020). The foreign presence on the island is linked to the possibilities offered by the territory.

The main citizenship present is Romanians (58,480), followed by the Tunisians (20,839) and the Moroccans (15,457). Migrants are young and 9% are still minors. In 2018, 2,408 foreigners were born in Sicily, with a constant growth trend over the last five years in absolute terms, but in relative terms, as a propensity to procreate, foreign families are approaching the lowest rates of Italians: the birth rate in Sicily goes from 12.9 per thousand in 2014 to 12.3 per thousand in 2018.

There are 14.815 new residence permits issued in 2018 in Sicily, a value up by almost 10% compared to the previous year. As many as 56.2% of these new residence permits are issued for asylum or humanitarian reasons, compared to “only” 26.8% at national level.

More than 70% of new residence permits are issued to men, Bangladeshis, Nigerians, and Gambians. There are differences at provincial level. In Trapani, the permits issued to Tunisians prevail, in Catania only, more than 20% of the new residence permits were issued to US citizens residing at the Sigonella air base.

A characteristic that highlights the greater vulnerability of non-EU citizens is the lower share of long stay permits, which allow them to maintain their presence on the territory and have access to welfare protection. These are 46.5% of the total, compared to 62.3% of the national share.

Considering residence permits valid but expiring (not long term) on 1 January 2019, in Sicily, humanitarian or asylum reasons account for 38.0%, family reasons for 32.2% and 24.0% for work.

In 2018, 2,433 foreigners acquired Italian citizenship, the majority of whom were women (1,300 female citizens or 53%). The province with the most “new Italians” is Catania, with 790 new citizens, followed at a distance by Palermo (390) and Ragusa (380). The main reasons for obtaining citizenship are marriage and *jus sanguinis*. The latter case represents 22.1% of acquisitions compared to only 8.6% at national level.

The labour market is increasingly segmented along ethnic lines linked to the condition of the migrant and the structure of opportunities. Positions in the agricultural sector are growing, reaching 27.7 thousand positions, while domestic workers are falling to 19.3 thousand, with a loss of over 11 thousand positions. In 2018, the component of self-employment, at least for the part detected by the INPS observatory limited to artisans, traders, and self-employed agricultural workers, shows a growth.

In 2018, foreigners living in Sicily sent 223.6 million euros abroad, 3.8% of the remittances sent from Italy. Also, 2018 was characterised by the collapse of Chinese remittances; the first position in the regional ranking in 2018 is occupied by Romania (€ 42.4 million), followed by Bangladesh (€ 34.4 million) and Sri Lanka (€ 26.8 million).

Sicily is the sixth region with 6.307 immigrants in reception<sup>2</sup>. Of these, 78 are present in the island's hot spots, 3.316 in reception centres and 2.913 in SIPROIMI.

As in previous years, Sicily is the region where the largest number of unaccompanied foreign minors are present (1,164, or 19.2% of the total), coming from Bangladesh, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Eritrea, Mali, Gambia, Senegal, Nigeria, Somalia, and Tunis.

#### **4. Food for thought**

The processes of integration of refugees in the country do not respond to homogeneous logics but are heterogeneous. The reception system has been linked to solving emergencies rather than proposing structured interventions, as shown by the choice of large reception centres.

The socioeconomic inclusion of refugees is a central challenge for integration in order to enhance their knowledge and skills and determine their economic autonomy through access to employment.

Integration can only be achieved when refugees are enabled to realize their potential, to use the same services as the natives and to contribute to the development of the territory.

The integration paths of refugees must take into consideration, on the one hand, objective factors such as the social, economic and cultural conditions of a context and the length of stay of a refugee in the territory, on the other subjective factors such as the individual approach to the society of arrival, the quality of relationships with natives, previous skills, the degree

<sup>2</sup> See the contribution of Giuseppe Platania.

of resilience, the capacity for autonomy and personal development, family history, expectations towards the new country (Mannino, Cuccia, Schiera, 2017). The integration process, involving the two poles, that is the migrants and the arrival community, can take place if the arrival community is willing to insert the migrants through the reception and the provision of social behaviours, such as respect and if the migrant is interested in entering the new context by adapting his lifestyle to the new circumstances.

There are a lot of experiences of labour inclusion that, starting from local characteristics, try to respond to the needs and opportunities of the territory. An in-depth analysis has shown that the support offered to migrants in the early stages has been fundamental for the start of the process of social and occupational inclusion, as you learn the language, acquire the patterns of behaviour, orient yourself among the services and you can begin to plan a possible path of occupational integration.

The knowledge of the Italian language is the basis for inclusion in the local community, for the construction of social relations, to access to services, for the start of training and work pathways.

In 2018, 22,347 were the beneficiaries who attended language courses. 8,081 were in 2018 training promoted by territorial projects, especially in tourism sector (more than 90%), agriculture and fishing (54.1%), crafts (46.0%), industry (42.0%) and personal services (41.1% of projects). 1,758 were the work placements. Another aspect is the accompaniment to independent living because housing is the condition to overcome social exclusion. Among the difficulties emerge the job insecurity and the difficulties to rent a house, for example. The issue is very complex, it must be addressed at an international level, and must refer on the one hand to the issuing of permits and, on the other, to find adequate solutions to allow refugees and their families to live with dignity and security. In pursuing this objective, it is not possible to think of exceptions regarding respect for human rights and the dignity of all migrants.

Migrants living in increasingly divided, polarised societies where individualism is rampant and often the basis for conflict and the climate is increasingly uncertain. Ethnicity, socioeconomic elements, religion mark divisions. Anti-immigrant positions become the expression of populist rhetoric that sees them as competitors in the labour market and as rival recipients of welfare services. Fear of the other, especially of those who arrive and bring different cultures, triggers false representations such as invasion, loss of identity, insecurity, and job loss.

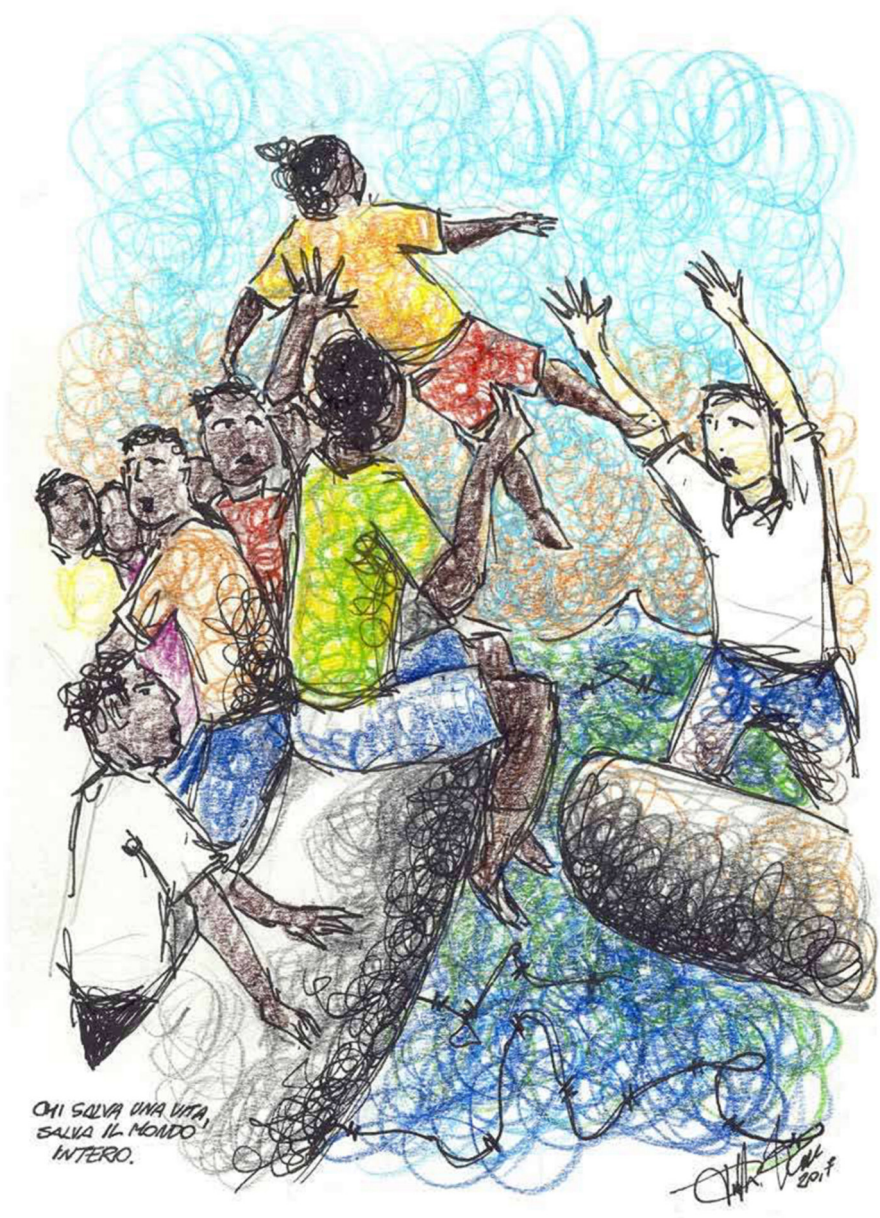
On the other hand, there are many reception initiatives that come from below and are financed by non-profit organisations (Caritas, Community of

Sant'Egidio, Evangelical Churches). One example is the experience of the “Humanitarian Corridors”.

While Sicily remains at the centre of the discourse on the reception system for migrants landing on the island, it is also facing difficulties in managing the phenomenon.

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CHI SALVA UNA VITA,  
SALVA IL MONDO  
INTERO.

2019

*Chi salva una vita salva il mondo intero*

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This publication is a resource book for Social Workers engaging in the field of migration. It aims to, on the one hand, display facts about the living realities on the ground migrants and Social Workers active in the field are facing, circumstances presented by experienced practitioners and researchers of this field. On the other hand, it presents methods and approaches, extracting them from these experiences and reflections insights, relevant for Social Work and consequently, also significant for Social Work educational practice. The new challenges of the 21st century ask Social Work education for a change, adapting curricula towards more experienced based teaching practices, intercultural, participatory learning sites and exchange, and future oriented personal empowerment and resilience training. International Social Work could take on a transformational leading role, as our global security and well-being of tomorrow depends on the educational foundations laid down today.

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