

# NEW KNOWLEDGE about

# Italy

This briefing note highlights NEW KNOWLEDGE about Italy. We present here new knowledge and key messages for policy makers and civil society.

On-going project

February 2013 – Issue 2013/06

## ACCOMMODATING ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN ITALY

Traditionally a country of mass emigration, Italy did not realize that its status had changed on the map of international migration until well into the 1980s. For decades, migration was an internal matter of population transfers from the poorer regions to the richer ones, mainly from the country's South to its North. Italy became an immigration country about 25-30 years ago. It was unprepared to manage the arrival and rapid settlement of third country nationals, so immigration policies and citizenship legislation were late and reactive in their formulation and implementation. During these past three decades years, immigrants have been integrated in the labour market, however, the cultural and religious dimensions of their integration have tended to be ignored.

In the ACCEPT PLURALISM project, we investigated how ethnic, religious and cultural diversity is accommodated in two very important areas: education and political life:

- We examined the accommodation of religious and cultural diversity of students of foreign origin as regard **school curricula and everyday relations in public schools**;
- We studied the existence of **faith schools** (paying particular attention to the case study of the via Quaranta school in Milan);
- Finally, we investigated **local policies of exclusion** i.e. direct or indirect measures introduced by local administrations under the pretext of guarantying urban safety and protecting general interests which essentially exclude all immigrants.

### Evaluation of discourses and practices in our case studies:

	<b>Institutional and legal framework</b>	<b>Public and political discourses</b>	<b>Practices in everyday life</b>
<b>Accommodation of religious and cultural diversity of students of foreign origin at schools (curricula and everyday practices)</b>	Acceptance and recognition	Only declarative recognition at political level, actual recognition at public level by educational staff	Between recognition to tolerance to resistance, according to the situations and funding
<b>Faith schools</b>	Acceptance and recognition	Between intolerance and minimal tolerance	Between intolerance and tolerance
<b>Local policies of exclusion</b>	Open to public and institutional expressions of intolerance (not radically intolerant).	Intolerance in public discourses in specific contexts (Northern regions), recognition in some public discourses (i.e. those of civil society actors)	Recognition by civil society actors Provision of public services (education, health), even in contradiction with declared policies

## ACCOMMODATING DIVERSITY IN SCHOOL CURRICULA AND EVERYDAY LIFE

There are several documents on interculturalism and intercultural education enacted from the 1980s, and aimed at the integration of students of foreign origin. A legal framework of acceptance and positive recognition is therefore in place focusing on recognising the importance of dialogue and exchange among culturally diverse people in order to avoid conflict, prevent racism and intolerance, while supporting democratic values and coexistence.

In practice, however, the situation is much more challenging. Recently, there have been very political debates on the presence of foreign students and the consequences of their concentration within schools and classrooms. Two positions have been identified in the public sphere. At the political level, we can discern an acknowledgment of the educational challenges posed by high numbers of foreign students. High concentration of foreign students in some classrooms and schools is seen as a challenge for their integration while there is also an underlying concern about the quality of education received by native Italian students from 'too much diversity.' Educational staff appear to be critical of intercultural policies promoted by the national level of government which does not provide the adequate resources and funding for intercultural education to be meaningfully implemented and essentially burdens educational staff with the task.

At the same time, teachers recognize that Italian schools are by now multiethnic and some changes should be made to accommodate diversities. As a consequence, different educational practices are implemented by teachers. These practices are voluntary and they respond to the needs of a specific school/context (despite the scarce economic resources). Indeed in practice, there are a number of difficulties in accommodating students' religious and cultural needs due to the vagueness of the concept of interculturalism, the relative autonomy of schools which leaves much room for each school to decide how and whether to apply it both in the curricula and in everyday school relations, as well as the lack of funds.

Our research suggests that **teachers' attitudes oscillate from intercultural acceptance to toleration** and more rarely to an attitude of closure or resistance. Toleration or closure/resistance particularly emerge when immigrant families demand things that are far from or in contrast with the principles of the Italian pedagogic culture (e.g. gender equality, the value of PE lessons or school trips), or when parents' demands, wishes and attitudes are considered to be potentially harmful to children's rights and well-being.

## FAITH SCHOOLS

The Italian educational system is mainly based on public state schools. Private schools must apply for formal state recognition and once recognised, are eligible for modest state funding. Most faith schools which are formally recognised are Catholic. So far, there have been very few cases of linguistic and religious minorities of immigrant origin wishing to establish their own schools, so challenges arising with faith schools of other religious denominations are still a minor matter in the Italian context.

Against this institutional context, and on the occasion of the establishment of a Muslim faith school in Milan, we can identify two main discourses in the public sphere. Tolerance by the mainstream majority and the left, and intolerance on the part of local politicians of the Northern League Party and Milan's administration. Among public opinion, we were able to identify two different sorts of expressions of tolerance. The first was an acknowledgement that it is no longer possible to ignore minorities' claims and that therefore these need to be accommodated

in order to reduce the effects of exclusion and alienation, especially on foreign children. The second involved an expression of preference to encourage the attendance of foreign students in state schools rather than in minority schools. This was driven mainly by a desire to be inclusive.

However, it is relevant to point out here that different discourses are applied to different minorities. For instance, there is no objection with the establishment of Jewish schools, concerns were only raised as regards the establishment of Muslim faith schools. The case in point is the Muslim school of via Quaranta in Milan, the only case of Muslim school which asked for formal recognition. The alleged reasons the school was not recognised and was obliged to close were due to the lack of hygienic conditions; in reality however, this decision was motivated by hostility towards this expression of cultural diversity.

We thus find a situation of **selective intolerance towards some minorities and tolerance towards others**.

## LOCAL POLICIES OF EXCLUSION

**Italian citizenship legislation is restrictive, as is legislation regarding the political participation of migrants.** Third country nationals do not have voting rights and citizenship may be acquired after 10 years of legal residence (or just four years if they are EU citizens). In addition, similarly to most other European countries, rules on immigration have become more restrictive with a heightened emphasis on urban security and the control of flow of irregular migrants.

Local policies of exclusion (e.g. restrictive rules for the opening of places of worship, the repression of irregular immigration by reinforcing police controls, welfare assistance 'bonus' is only accorded to babies born by Italian citizens, the ban on opening new kebab shops in the city centre, or the fact that immigrants with a low salary cannot register with the Registry office, etc.) have been mostly adopted by local administrations governed by centre-right coalitions and have been implicitly accepted by the national institutional level. This has rendered the Italian institutional framework vulnerable to public and institutional expressions of intolerance.

Naturally, this does not characterise the entire state system. Through our research, we identified a number of institutions which promoted expressions of tolerance and the positive recognition of diversities (e.g. the Office against the Racial Discrimination, some courts, some prefects, etc.).

Nonetheless, there has been **an increase in expressions of intolerance in the discourse of mainstream political parties, especially right-wing political parties** and particularly on behalf of the Northern League, regarding immigration and cultural diversity. The need to protect public order and security, to guarantee native Italians' social and welfare rights and to preserve Italian culture and traditions are repeatedly stressed. Civil society actors on the contrary have been very active in arguing and lobbying in favour of the recognition of immigrants' rights.

In many cases, local policies of exclusion have not been actually applied, or they have been applied for a limited period of time and then they have been **condemned in court**. Many practices of exclusion, therefore, have not been put into practice. However, their aim was above all political and rhetoric: to obtain consensus among the public, to impress on issues related to immigration. Attempts to discriminate against migrants have been fought by Italian civil society actors (Catholic organizations, trade unions, NGOs, non-profit and other voluntary associations), through public protests and legal action, exercising advocacy in favour of migrants. There is a sort of **'tug of war'** within the Italian institutional framework: the policies of exclusion were encouraged by the national government in 2008-2011, and they were

implemented by many local governments, but they were opposed by pro-immigrant lobbies within the civil society and by the judiciary.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Discourses and practices in the management of ethnic and religious diversity in Italy **oscillate between intolerance and respect and recognition. There exists a notable discrepancy between the policies and the practices, between the institutional level and what happens in everyday life.**

In the field of education for instance, solid and well-intentioned policies are in place and the legal framework is open to diversity. The principles of interculturalism based on respect and recognition of diversity are laid out, however, its implementation is more challenging as there exists a notable lack of intercultural curricula and textbooks and much is dependent on the individual attitudes of teachers and school staff.

Overall, immigration policies have become stricter and intolerant political discourses have been spreading and gaining an increasing support within public opinion. Nevertheless, everyday practices show discrepancies from these discourses and **civil society actors in particular are very active in the protection and promotion of immigrants' rights.**

Italian institutions and society were unprepared to deal with the management of ethnic and religious diversities of immigrants and even now they have not proposed or introduced changes, e.g. to the citizenship law (which is very restrictive).

In addition, institutions and many Italian citizens seem to be anchored to a monolingual, monoethnic and monoreligious understanding of national identity. **In contrast to the transformation of Italy in a multi-ethnic society, in its cultural self-representation it tends to reject its religious and cultural plurality.** Nevertheless, everyday practices of tolerance and recognition (at school, in the neighbourhood, at work, in the everyday relationships) could be the starting point from which to share new cultural views and influence the institutional and legal framework.

## FURTHER READINGS

To read more on the research findings presented here, see:

**Overview Report on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Concepts and Practices in Italy**  
By Maurizio Ambrosini and Elena Caneva (University of Milan)

Download your copy from:

<http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/23259>

Other relevant publications include:

**2012/02.2. Handbook on Tolerance and Diversity in Europe**

Anna Triandafyllidou (EUI)

Download your copy from:

<http://www.accept-pluralism.eu/Research/ProjectReports/Handbook.aspx>

## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>ACCEPT PLURALISM</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe</b>
<b>Short Description</b>	<p>ACCEPT PLURALISM questions how much cultural diversity can be accommodated within liberal and secular democracies in Europe. The notions of tolerance, acceptance, respect and recognition are central to the project. ACCEPT PLURALISM looks at both native and immigrant minority groups.</p> <p>Through comparative, theoretical and empirical analysis the project studies individuals, groups or practices for whom tolerance is sought but which we should not tolerate; of which we disapprove but which should be tolerated; and for which we ask to go beyond toleration and achieve respect and recognition.</p> <p>In particular, we investigate when, what and who is being not tolerated / tolerated / respected in 15 European countries; why this is happening in each case; the reasons that different social actors put forward for not tolerating / tolerating / respecting specific minority groups/individuals and specific practices.</p> <p>The project analyses practices, policies and institutions, and produces key messages for policy makers with a view to making European societies more respectful towards diversity.</p>
<b>Authors</b>	Maurizio Ambrosini and Elena Caneva, University of Milan
<b>Web site</b>	<a href="http://www.accept-pluralism.eu">www.accept-pluralism.eu</a>
<b>Duration</b>	March 2010-May 2013 (39 months)
<b>Funding scheme</b>	Small and medium-scale collaborative project
<b>EU contribution</b>	2,600,230 Euro
<b>Consortium</b>	17 partners (15 countries)
<b>Coordinator</b>	European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
<b>Scientific Coordinator</b>	Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou
<b>EC officer</b>	Ms. Louisa Anastopoulou, Directorate General for Research and Innovation, European Commission