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HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERCULTURAL ISSUES IN ITALY

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ABSTRACT

Over the past 10 years Italy saw a rapid increase in the number of migrant students, especially in upper secondary schools. The field research carried out by UniSi Team shows that intercultural relations go well beyond the classroom. This is particularly important for teachers as they acquire knowledge and skills useful on the job even in their daily life. However the awareness is not matched by an equal knowledge of the legal framework of Human Rights. A strong asymmetry between the knowledge of treaties and conventions and the real and human rights education emerges. In the students' responses confirm that school and society are in fact fully multicultural realities. Most students have no particular problems with foreign students, but it is not clear if close relationships are formed in the classroom (the case of homework is a relevant clue for students), whereas sport remains a relevant opportunity to get together when not at school, allowing many students with different experiences to meet.

1. INTRODUCTION

The main educational system

The Italian Schooling system is divided into 3 main cycles, that are consecutive and compulsory: i. primary school (5 years);ii. first-grade secondary school (3 years); iii. second-grade secondary school (5 years).

Primary school, also called elementary school, allows children to acquire and develop knowledge and logical-critical skills. Secondary school is aimed at the growth of autonomous capacities of study and social interaction. Once the school education is completed, students have the necessary qualification ('diploma di maturità') to enrol in a university course. The current system envisions enrolment on a three-year course for the graduation ('laurea'), followed by a further two-year course to obtain a 'laurea magistrale'. Graduates can also continue to be formed by pursuing either a PhD or a specialization course or a Master, providing the necessary skills to undertake high-qualification activities at universities, public entities or private subjects.

Current strategies promoting integration at school

Over the past 10 years, Italy saw a rise in the number of foreign students with non-Italian citizenship. In 2005/2006 their number was just over 400,000. In 2014/2015 it almost doubled, reaching about 830,000 units. The increase has been steady and concerns all levels of education. However the number of accesses to upper secondary schools is rapidly growing, due to the gradual stabilization of a large part of the immigrant population, with the consequent progressive transition to the next level of education of foreign pupils attending primary schools.

In 2014 the Italian Ministry of Education has issued the "Guidelines for the Integration of Migrant Students", stating that foreign minors are first and foremost people and, as such, they have rights and duties no matter their national origin. In accordance with this principle there are no statutory requirements for refugees nor for minors arriving in our country for access to the education system.

The Law n. 107/2015 'Reform of the National System of Education and Training' (so called 'La Buona Scuola') stated as a priority "the development of skills in active citizenship and democracy through the enhancement of the intercultural dialogue, peace education, respect for differences and dialogue amongst cultures" (art. 1).



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2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Methodology implemented

In line with the provisions of the IHR project, at this stage it was decided to implement a sample survey designed to capture some of the dynamics on the macro issue of human rights, multiculturalism in the world of education and, more generally, on the issue of availability to build a society capable of facing cultural diversity and respect for others. The research objective is to provide the most appropriate information to improve the skills of secondary school teachers, who are dealing with the challenges posed by multicultural classes. In the face of a multicultural redefinition of society and, consequently, of schools, it is essential to acquire new skills through educational and training programs that are able to build on that complex system that revolves around human rights and non-discrimination values.

Students' and teachers involved

As planned, two distinct groups of subjects were investigated: a) secondary school teachers and administrative staff; b) students in their first two years of secondary school. In the first phase five schools in the Tuscan provinces of Arezzo, Grosseto, Prato and Siena were selected, as a representative sample both by type of institution (from high school to professional institutions) and by geographical distribution: two schools in county towns (Prato and Siena), two in medium-sized towns (Colle di Val d'Elsa and Cortona) and one in a mountainous area (Arcidosso) have been involved. In each school entire classes of students were targeted, according to teachers' selections, thus ensuring "a posteriori" representativeness of the sample investigated. At the end of the administration, which took place between Jan 10th and 22nd 2017, 674 students questionnaires and 168 teachers/staff questionnaires were collected.

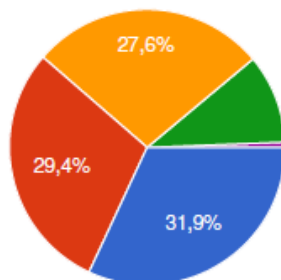
3. MAIN FINDINGS

3.1 TEACHERS

Implementation of human rights at school

With regard to the analysis of the 168 Teachers/Staff questionnaires, the first aspect to note is the marked gender difference: in fact 75% of respondents were female. Fairly balanced, in contrast, is the breakdown by age group which, as can easily be seen in the chart below, shows all the working age groups well represented, except the youngest.

2. Age (birth year)



a) 1950-1959	52	31.9%
b) 1960-1969	48	29.4%
c) 1970-1979	45	27.6%
d) 1980-1989	17	10.4%
e) 1990 and further	1	0.6%

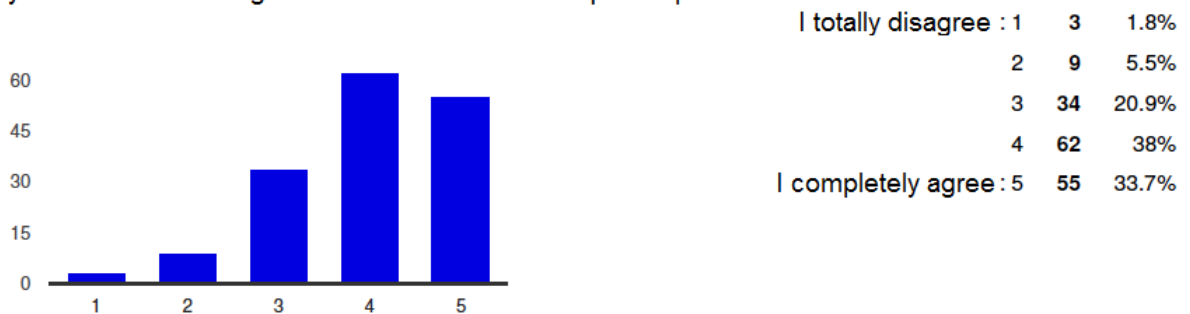


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In this context, 34% of respondents have gained more than 25 years of teaching experience, and still more than half of them (about 55%) have more than 15 years working experience, mostly gained in schools of different cities (81%). However only 10% of respondents attended a training course on intercultural matters in 2016, a figure that appears in contradiction to the highlighted strong awareness of the importance of specific skills to teach in a multicultural reality (not so much with regard to specific competences as compared to a more general understanding of how to deal with the complexity of the situation).

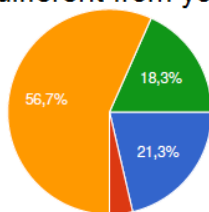
22. Do you think that teaching in a multicultural context requires specific skills?



Multicultural issues at school

A first fact that emerges from the questionnaires is definitely that teachers experience a sort of double multicultural dimension. On the one hand the school world, or the workplace, now transversely affected by the presence of students of foreign origin (92% of teachers say they have had students of foreign origin in their classes) and therefore their lives are multicultural. On the other hand, in their social lives in general, or their time off from work, teachers associate with people of foreign nationality, being part of sports or cultural associations and, above all, in their circles of friends (86.9%) with relatively higher proportions.

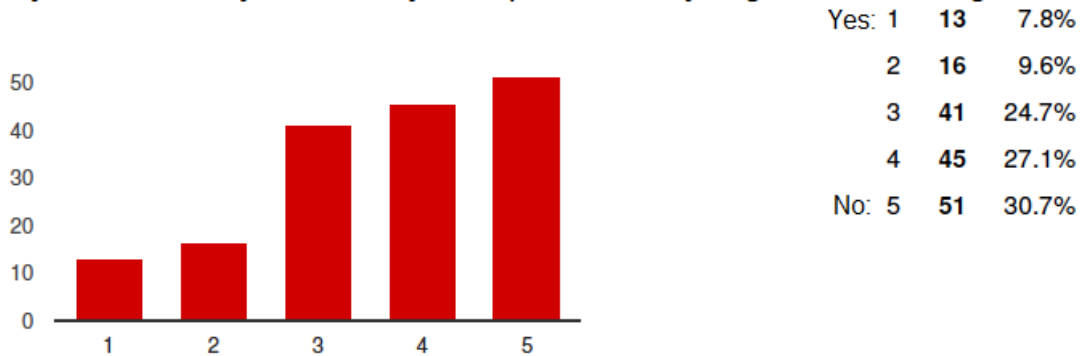
12. Do you ever spend your spare time with people/students whose families come from a country different from your country of residence?



a) Never	35	21.3%
b) Yes, but only in the past	6	3.7%
c) Seldom	93	56.7%
d) Very often	30	18.3%

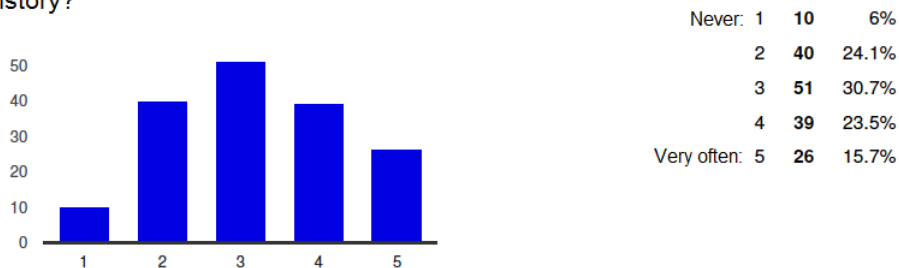
This is a very interesting data, which we will need to cross better with other variables in the continuation of the analysis, because it shows a two-way integration process, currently under way and very advanced (in which it is not the foreign who has to integrate into the host society but it is the foreign and the native to mutually redefine and change themselves in the new relationship). Moreover, other indicators in this direction can be highlighted. For example, respondents had mostly neighbours of foreign origin in recent years (67%), they developed very positive relationships with them (about 76%) and are strongly convinced that school is still a tool vital to the integration of foreigners and, more generally, the diversity they bring (71%). A further indicator of this tendency to favour the diversity is the answer to the question posed by the graph below, which, as you can see, has the highest percentage in the scale as we move towards a negative response.

27. Do you think that your country accepts too many migrants and refugees?

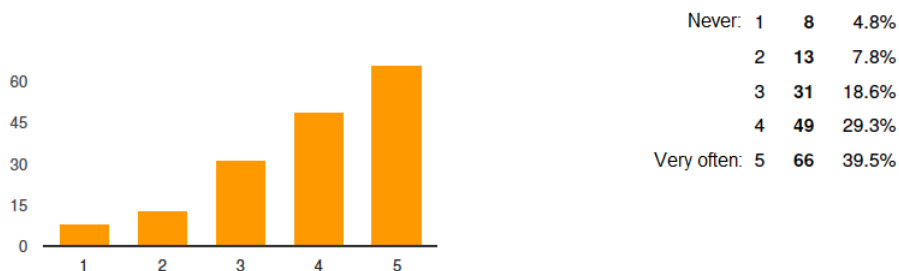


Or, in more general, the open-mindedness that results not only from their profession but also by the continuous and direct contact, physical and intellectual, with students of foreign origin. In short, a willingness to discuss that is independent from the known difficulties faced by the daily work as teachers in particularly complex contexts, such as classes with a high number of foreign students.

25. Do you usually ask students, whose families come from different countries, for information about their history?

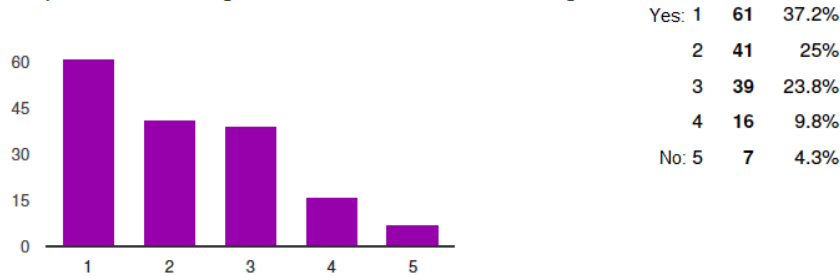


26. When people tell about places you don't know, do you wish to visit them?



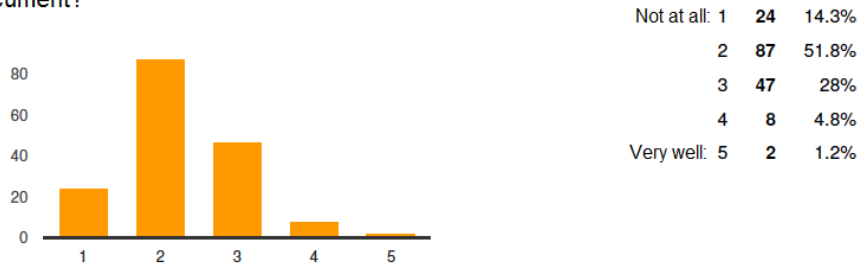
This willingness to discuss is confirmed by the teachers' considering to change their teaching methods following their experience with students from different countries (although a better understanding of how this is expressed into a real choice is needed).

30. Have you ever reappraised your methods of teaching / your approach with the students, as a consequence of having students from different backgrounds and cultures?



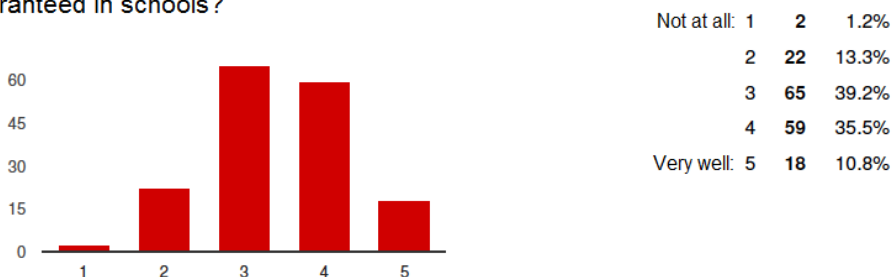
A specific part of the Teachers questionnaire addressed the macro-theme of human rights and their dissemination in school. In particular, we tried to deepen the teachers' level of human rights knowledge, their connection with educational objectives and methods, and, in more general terms, with the pedagogical objectives. The picture that emerged shows the need to continue investing in the promotion of human rights, too often taken for granted in Western countries but definitely still little known, starting from their reference documents, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

14. Do you think that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a very well known document?



The lack of knowledge of the Convention does not necessarily determine, according to respondents, the non-application of its guiding principles in schools, which remain sufficiently guaranteed.

15. Do you think that the respect of the United Nations on the Rights of the Child is sufficiently guaranteed in schools?



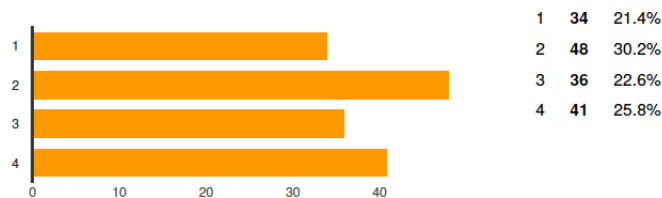
From the questionnaire, in substance a strong asymmetry between the knowledge of treaties and conventions and the real and daily human rights education emerges. Teachers in fact believe that human rights education is already included in the programs of several school subjects (91% of respondents), especially humanities, such as literature and history, and in those subjects related to law and social sciences. It is mostly an implied presence, given the



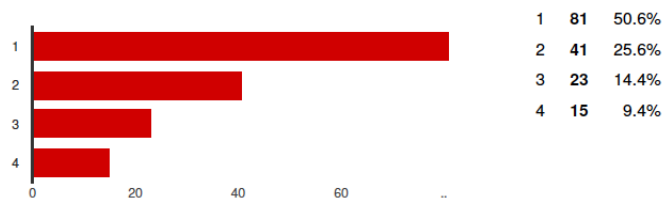
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disciplines. In their view, the real problem seems to be not so much the knowledge of national and international legal instruments (which should still be promoted) but the actual transfer of the principles of these instruments in the students' everyday life, or the importance of education to human rights especially with the objective of strengthening the individual's positive behaviour and opposition to discrimination and racism. In this sense, the school must provide students with core skills, such as to promote the full development of the person (about 70% of respondents); among these skills, a significant place is now increasingly occupied by the specific skills on active citizenship. Compared to the themes promoted by the UN Convention teachers assess as a priority the prohibition of all forms of violence against children, violence present in different ways in students' lives and that, in their opinion, lurks mostly in family life (over 60%) and in circles of friends (40%). Nevertheless, an important place is also occupied by the right not to be discriminated as a child or adolescent, a right that too often is overlooked in the West and mostly perceived as a problem in other parts of the world, but very real in schools, exacerbated by the increasing presence of students from other countries.

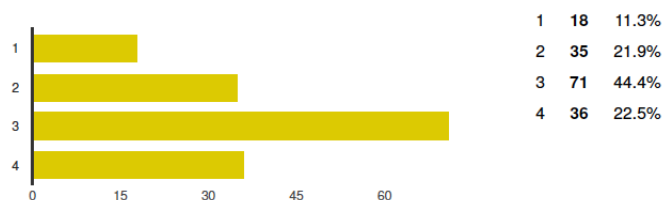
a) Non-discrimination [19. Evaluate in order of importance the following basic standards for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are:]



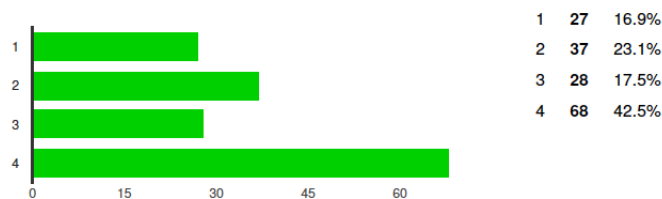
b) Prohibition of all forms of violence [19. Evaluate in order of importance the following basic standards for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are:]



c) The right to education [19. Evaluate in order of importance the following basic standards for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are:]

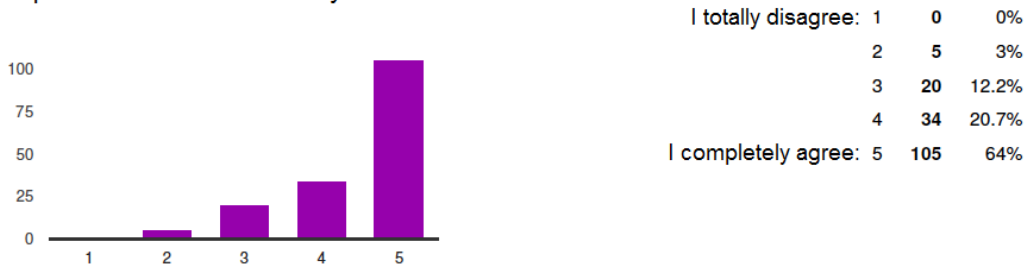


d) The right to an adequate standard of living [19. Evaluate in order of importance the following basic standards for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child are:]



In this sense, the vast majority of respondents favors integration in the list submitted to the legal assessment, including to be listened to in every context of their social and family lives.

19a. Would you also include in the previous list also: children's right to be heard in any context in which they express their social and family life?

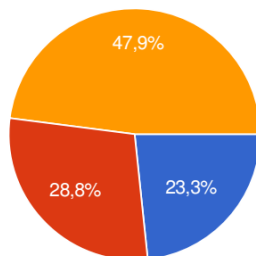


3.2 STUDENTS

Implementation of human rights at school

Analysing 674 questionnaires administered to students the first thing that catches the eye is the gender disparity: as much as 65% of respondents are female. A second element of great importance is the presence of about 10% of students born in a country other than Italy, confirming that now even secondary schools are characterized by a significant presence of foreign students and children of migrants. Interestingly, almost half of the students born abroad have been living in Italy for over 10 years, showing that the selected areas are characterised by long term and permanent migration.

5. If you were not born in the country where you live, how long will you be living here?



a) Less than 5 years	17	23.3%
b) Between 6 and 10 years	21	28.8%
c) Longer than 10 years	35	47.9%

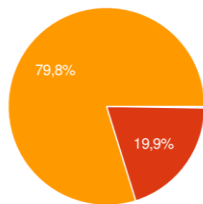
In contrast to the common place - though often supported by empirical evidence - describing Italians as lacking foreign language command, although including the presence of foreigners in schools, a class of young people juggling multiple languages emerges: they may not all speak English, but in addition to Italian they master Arabic, Chinese or Romanian, and this is certainly an added value for the future of many young people. However few students had the opportunity of a study holiday to learn a foreign language (only 5% of respondents) during the summer break; though many went on holidays, with friends or with their parents, over 40% of respondents said they stayed home, a clear sign that not everyone has the opportunity to not only recreation but also to see a 'bit of world' different from usual. As far as the level of education of families of origin is concerned, data not particularly encouraging emerge, 23% of the respondents' mothers graduated and only 12% of the respondents' fathers, not particularly educated families, in line with Italy, the country with the lowest level of education in Europe. By analysing the responses to the second block of the questionnaire, those dedicated to understand how young students see the multicultural society, data of some interest



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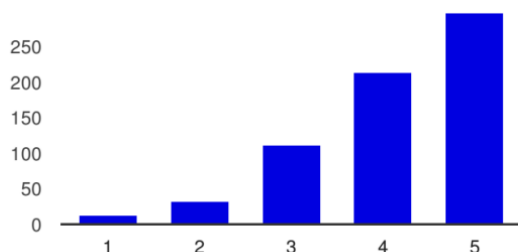
emerge. First we find confirmation of the fact that school and society are in fact fully multicultural realities: 80% of the classes of students interviewed record the presence of foreign students and in reality all students have foreign classmates in their student careers. The first, positive, consideration is that multiculturalism in school is not a problem: only 6.5% of students said they have had a bad experience with foreign classmates, while 77% evaluate these experiences in a positive or very positive way. At school students feel amongst "friends" first; the feeling of foreignness, or worse, the conflict does not emerge at all, and this is definitely a positive aspect, because it makes us understand that schools remain a safe harbour in a stormy sea, society! Foreigners, such only before the law, are fully part of the group of friends, considering that Italian and foreign students often go around together beyond school hours (in 37% of cases). However we can not neglect that, on the contrary, 44% of our respondents only "rarely" see foreign mates in their leisure time. In fact, examining the answers to the question "have you ever done your homework with students ...", some shadows come out: it is true, schools are multicultural, we have no particular problems with foreign students, maybe even we go out with some of them sometimes, but in the end it is not clear if close relationships are formed, if national and foreign students help each other out (the case of homework is a relevant clue for students). If anything, we can reflect on the fact that sport remains a relevant opportunity to get together when not at school, allowing many students with different experiences to meet.

10. Have you ever had classmates coming from a country different from your country of residence?



a) No, never had	2	0.3%
b) Yes, but only in the past, I have none now	133	19.9%
c) Yes, now I have classmates coming from different countries	534	79.8%

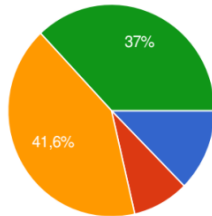
11. If yes, how did you rate your getting along with them on a scale?



Badly: 1	11	1.7%
2	32	4.8%
3	111	16.7%
4	212	31.9%
Very well: 5	298	44.9%

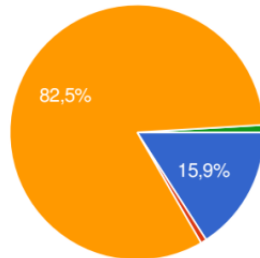


12. Do you ever spend your spare time with people/students whose families come from a country different from your country of residence?



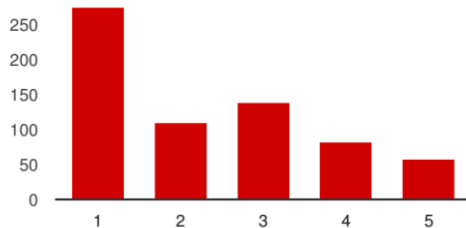
a) Never	84	12.5%
b) Yes, but only in the past	59	8.8%
c) Seldom	279	41.6%
d) Very often	248	37%

12a. If you answered yes at the previous question, in which context?



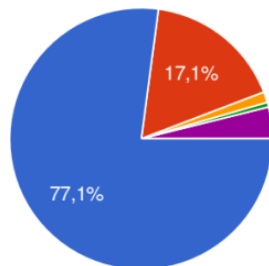
a) Sport	85	15.9%
b) Associations	4	0.7%
c) Circle of friends	442	82.5%
d) Place of worship	5	0.9%

14. Did you ever or do you do your homework with classmates whose families come from a country different from your country of residence?



Never: 1	275	41.4%
2	110	16.6%
3	138	20.8%
4	83	12.5%
Very Often: 5	58	8.7%

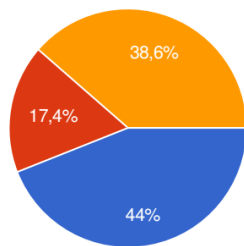
15. In your class you mainly feel among:



a) Friends	515	77.1%
b) Acquaintances	114	17.1%
c) Strangers	9	1.3%
d) Enemies	4	0.6%
e) I don't know	26	3.9%

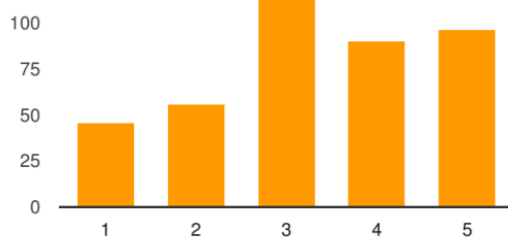
Even when not at school, the number of opportunities to meet people from foreign countries is constantly increasing, for example in the neighbourhood, as almost 40% of respondents actually live side by side with migrants ("only" 44% never had foreign neighbours). In a quarter of cases neighbourly relations are reported as not particularly positive, when not fully negative, but overall again "being neighbours" does not seem to create particular problems for young people. In conclusion, the data emerging from the students' questionnaires as a whole lead to think of a dwelling without confrontation, perhaps with little 'pathos', little mutual involvement, but without any rift as it happens in society and in politics. From this point of view, young people seem to have much to teach adults about, especially in Italy, more and more often reported as one of the European countries with the greatest difficulties to deal with migrants.

13. Have you ever had or have you now neighbours coming from a country different from your country of residence?



a) Never	293	44%
b) Yes, but only in the past	116	17.4%
c) Yes, now	257	38.6%

13a. If you answered yes at the previous question, how did you or do you get along with them?

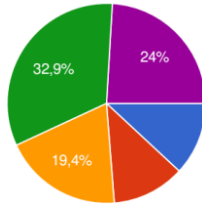


Badly: 1	45	11.2%
2	56	14%
3	114	28.4%
4	90	22.4%
Very well: 5	96	23.9%

Students are open to differences, they are curious, they are not too inclined to be judgemental, have prejudices and stigmatise. Contrarily to many negative reactions emerging among adults (as the results of many surveys and empirical studies show), students seem even to appreciate the visible difference in migrants' way of dressing. The difference between adult and students worlds also emerges in the ugly feeling of fear and mistrust that is leading a growing number of Italians to invoke stricter security and controls, maybe at the expense of freedom (as Bauman wrote). While half of the respondents think that the presence of migrants and refugees requires a stricter control by the police, a quarter (and this is not a negligible figure today in the current social climate) think that this is not required by returning implicitly a critical mode with respect to the easy equation migration = insecurity and crime. Indeed, in the end it is likely that diversity arouses some curiosity, some stimulus, the desire to know: 90% of respondents said that when they hear about a country other than Italy they

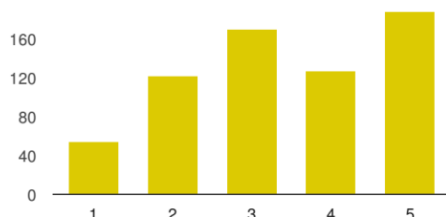
would like to know more, they would like to visit it to know it better and learn to appreciate different cultures.

16. Walking in the street, you see migrants and refugees wearing their traditional clothes: what do you think?



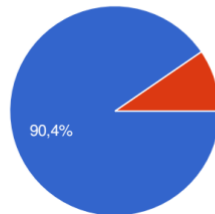
- a) If they wish to live here, they should get dressed like us **79** 11.9%
- b) They'd be more comfortable in western clothing, but they can do as they wish **79** 11.9%
- c) After all, it is nice to see people different from us **129** 19.4%
- d) After all, it is nice to see people different from us **219** 32.9%
- e) What people wear is not relevant / No opinion **160** 24%

18. How much do you agree with the following statement: "The presence of migrants and refugees requires stricter control by the Police"



I totally disagree	1	56	8.4%
	2	123	18.5%
	3	170	25.6%
	4	127	19.1%
I completely agree	5	189	28.4%

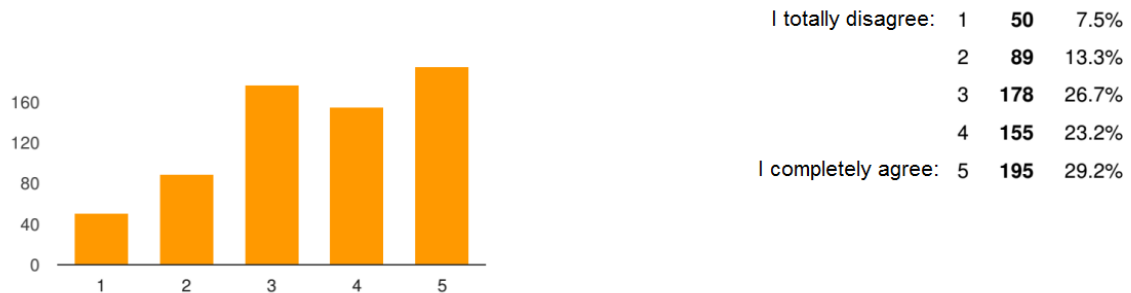
17. When you hear of different countries from your own, would you like to visit them?



- a) Yes **606** 90.4%
- b) No **64** 9.6%

The further confirmation of the lack of major misconceptions about diversity in young people emerges from all the answers to the last set of questions, aiming to find out what students think about a hypothetical presence of foreign teachers. In principle, it is not at all obvious that teachers should be an expression of the dominant culture of a country and, indeed, for many of the respondents in schools there should be teachers representing minorities. Per se the nationalities of teachers do not seem to be an issue and more than half of respondents would positively see the presence of foreign teachers.

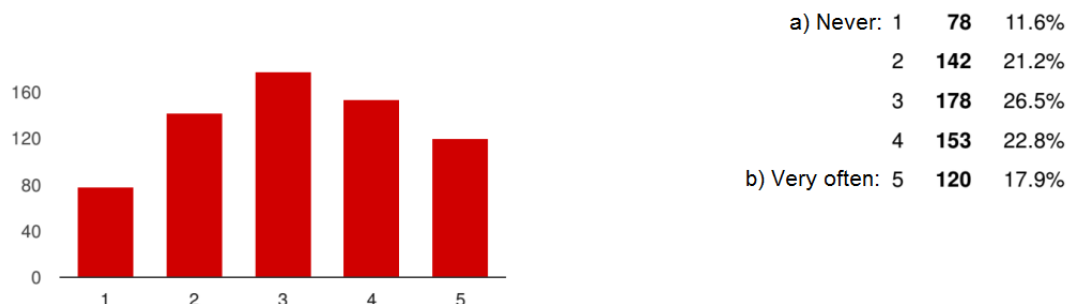
20. How would you rate your agreement on the presence of foreign teachers in your school?



Multicultural issues at school

The second block of the questionnaire was dedicated to understand the knowledge and the position taken by students on the big issue of human rights, starting from racism that, we know, is an ugly beast, difficult to tame. From this point of view, the school is not quite the happy island that the data from the previous section made us think of. Almost 38% of respondents said that in the last school year has witnessed racist incidents and 9% were directly involved; no shortage of fights at school (40% have witnessed at least one and 10% were involved) and bullying (witnessed by 34% of respondents and 5.5% suffered from), too. Yet it does not seem that in school we talk a lot of racism and discrimination: indeed one third of respondents said that at school they never or almost never speak of these ugly phenomena, that, already a serious problem in school, always end up to be amplified outside school. Even intercultural education, at least from the point of view of the students, does not seem common in Italian schools, thus returning a particularly not encouraging picture. Social networks seem to be a "place" where the theme of racism is pretty present: maybe a student does not surf specific sites (for or against racism) but it is easy enough to witness the phenomena of racism and discrimination, even though s/he often ends up not taking a stand or getting involved. However less than 10% of respondents think that cultural diversity represents a real threat; indeed for 66% of students diversity is a great opportunity to appreciate and enhance.

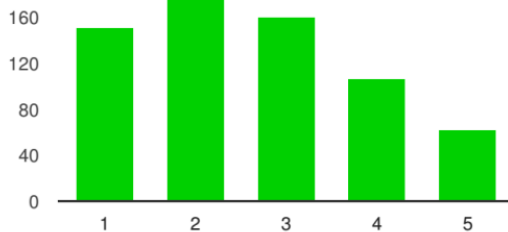
22. In the previous school year how often have you: a) talked of discrimination and racism





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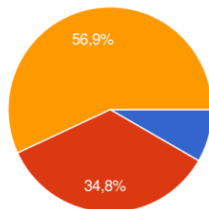
c) participated in intercultural education projects



a) Never:	1	152	22.8%
	2	183	27.5%
	3	161	24.2%
	4	107	16.1%
b) Very often:	5	63	9.5%

Overall, students have an egalitarian perspective so that they are firmly convinced that the word "rights" means 'equal rights and equal opportunities for all', although answers to a following question show that over 40% do not know of the existence of a UN Convention on the Rights of the Child... but this is not their fault. If we were to find who is responsible for this, we would point at those who have never passed this knowledge, not even a piece of information, such as families, media and schools. The latter to a lesser extent, as it is the only environment where students talk about it, at least 'a little'. Responses show also another very interesting aspect on the issue related to the lack of respect for the rights of the child: according to students, schools and groups of friends are the only environments where any "abuse" is committed. On the contrary, in their imagination families, religious groups, law enforcement units and sport groups are substantially quite safe environments. It is obvious that students personalise this, referring the representation of "bad" phenomena to personal experience, without any knowledge of the current social dynamics.

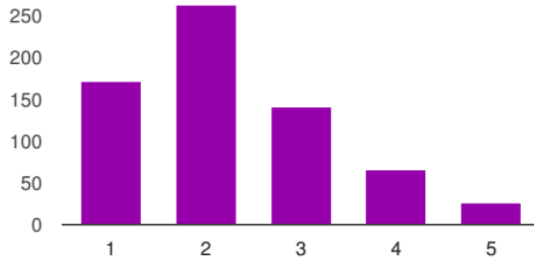
25. When you hear the word "right", you think of:



a) the law, I have to respect an obligation	55	8.3%
b) my right, I can assert my reasons	232	34.8%
c) we should all have equal rights	379	56.9%

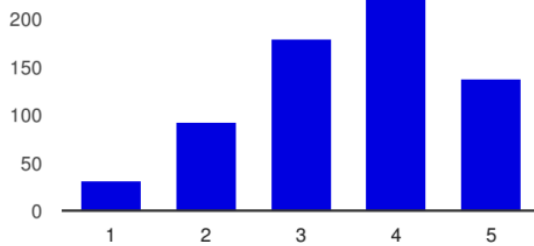


28. In which situations do you think it is more likely for children to be vulnerable to abuse, violence, threats, insults? a) At home



Never:	1	172	25.7%
	2	263	39.3%
	3	141	21.1%
	4	67	10%
Very often:	5	26	3.9%

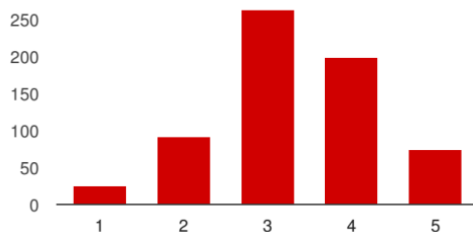
b) at school



Never:	1	31	4.6%
	2	94	14%
	3	179	26.7%
	4	229	34.2%
Very often:	5	137	20.4%

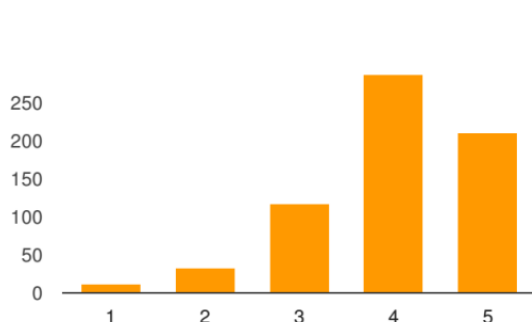
Related to what has just been described is the fact that when students witness incidents of violence or harassment at school do not inform teachers (32%) but they speak mainly among friends (72%) and maybe turn to their parents (47%): from this point of view a particular confidence in the school as an institution does not emerge. At school students feel free to "say" and "do", and they also feel respected, but then beyond the relationship with their mates, no particular relationship of confidence with teachers and the institution emerges. The language used is more often "neutral" than "conversational", the symptom of a certain detachment experienced in classrooms, and this perhaps does not meet the expectations of students, who, on the contrary, present themselves as particularly open to dialogue and discussion.

33. How would you rate the kind of language used between adults (teachers, administrative staff, etc.) and students at school?



Formal:	1	25	3.8%
	2	93	14.1%
	3	265	40.3%
	4	200	30.4%
Non formal:	5	75	11.4%

32. How would you rate your willingness to listen to what the others say?



Not willing: 1	11	1.7%
2	33	5%
3	117	17.7%
4	288	43.6%
Very willing: 5	211	32%

4. CASE STUDIES AND BEST PRACTICE

UniSi collected a total of 13 Case Studies in the 5 Italian Schools directly involved in the project. The detailed description of each case study is available in the portal, both in English and Italian. Out of the 13 Case studies the following are the 2 Best Practices UniSi selected.

BEST PRACTICE 1

Title: Colle-ga-menti

School: I.S.I.S. San Giovanni Bosco

City: Colle di Val d'Elsa (Siena district)

Description of the Multicultural Environment: 124 foreign students out of 943 total number of students (approximately 9%)

Motivation: The core idea of the case study is to create a 'community of practice', consisting of students, parents, teachers and institutions outside the school. We found this idea very interesting because, within the community of practice, members learn from each other, share tools and meanings. Thanks to this approach they manage to cope better with difficult situations. In this case the school has gone beyond the walls of the classroom, merging learning and real life. Definitely a great example of personalizing, that can be replicated in any country.

BEST PRACTICE 2

Title: "Is There Finally Justice in This World"? - Promessi Sposi Laboratory -

School: I.S.I.S. Da Vinci-Fermi

City: Arcidosso (Grosseto district)

Description of the Multicultural environment: 10 foreign students out of 197 total number of students (approximately 5%)

Motivation: The case study very clearly describes the learning unit, whose main characteristic is to have a multidisciplinary approach. The methodology adopted to facilitate the learning process is in line with the innovative educational settings, although still challenging for students. The activities described



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allow the active participation of students in the lab and the consequent development of soft skills (role-play, group work, storytelling), through the analysis of a masterpiece of the 19th century Italian literature, *I Promessi Sposi* by Alessandro Manzoni, an historical novel. The choice of this book is very interesting for it allows a human rights based approach to the discussion of the questions raised by the story. The experience can be replicated in other countries by selecting a piece of literature with similar characteristics.

5. CONCLUSION

From the survey and the analysis of the case studies it emerged that teachers are eager to learn more about intercultural issues and human rights at school. UniSi team had no problems to involve them in the project and extra activities have been organised in the IHR schools (i.e. meeting and focus groups in classrooms). This response was very satisfactory for the UniSi team, it proved the soundness of the project idea unveiling, at the same time, the need to elaborate strategies and tools to pursue the priority of developing “skills in active citizenship and democracy through the enhancement of the intercultural dialogue, peace education, respect for differences and dialogue amongst cultures” as in art. 1, law n. 107/2015.

A proper training for teachers in the field of human rights and intercultural issues will help students to enhance their awareness on the same issues, so that they can bring the knowledge and skills acquired in school in their daily relations outside school, to become a better citizen.



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