

Migrant families with disabilities: An Introduction

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Abstract. The importance of addressing the needs of persons with disabilities in the fields of human rights and development has been broadly recognized internationally. However, the subgroup of persons with disabilities in the context of migration has been historically overlooked. There are limited data available on the number of persons with disabilities among arrivals, on the prevalence of different types of impairments. Contrasting information are available about families living these experiences. Additionally, there are several aspects that support the relevance of addressing the experience of these families in the current Italian context. But before addressing main themes and issues, it is first of all important to highlight some key concepts and set a common background in the analysis.

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Individuals with disabilities

Under this heading we find individuals with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments; wheelchair users and people with other mobility impairments, blind and deaf people, people with mental health issues – or ‘psychosocial disabilities’ – and people with intellectual disabilities.

Two articles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (European Parliament, 2000) are relevant in this regard. Article 21 prohibits any discrimination on the grounds of disability, while Article 26 sets out the right of persons with disabilities “to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community”.

Migrating Individuals

Migration as defined within the United Nations Development Programme refers to both voluntary movement (e.g. migrant workers) and involuntary movement (e.g. refugees) of women and men, across geographic borders internationally or internally, with the search for a better life (UNDP, 2016).

Envisioning the future, the 2030 Development Agenda (UN, 2015) recognizes the importance of empowering people in vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities, refugees and internally displaced persons. In particular, Goal 10 on reducing inequalities embraces two separate targets to empower persons with disabilities, and to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people. As the global attention to the intersectionality issues has been increasing, it is essential to enhance the linkage between disability and migration in the future international dialogue.

Migrating Individuals with Disabilities

The Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2008) in Article 18, for persons with disabilities calls upon the rights of liberty of movement, freedom to choose their residence and to a nationality, on an equal basis with others. Migrants and refugees with disabilities must be a priority in new Global Compact on Migration-UN as experts have urged in Geneva on April 2017 (Behrman & Kent, 2018)., the need that dedicated human and financial resources are made available for persons

with disabilities in the new global framework on refugees and migrants, and an intergovernmental consultation is being launched.

The framework, which is called Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (Atak, Nakache, Guild, & Crépeau, 2018), due to be adopted in 2018, will set out a range of principles and commitments among governments to enhance coordination on international migration. In the current migration crisis, many countries lack formal procedures to identify migrants and refugees with disabilities and, consequently, fail to provide them with protection and essential services, such as shelter and medical care that are accessible and responsive to their needs. As Jose Brillantes, the Chair of the UN Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and members of Their Families said. “We need to be sure that, when world leaders commit to saving the lives of refugees and migrants, to protecting their rights and to sharing responsibility on a global scale, they don’t forget about persons with disabilities”.

Migrants individuals with disability and their families

There is the need to work for “the harmonization of the attitudes of States through the acceptance of basic principles concerning the treatment of migrant workers and members of their families”; by the awareness of the situation of vulnerability in which migrant workers and members of their families frequently-find themselves before and in their transition to the new living contexts. To this purpose the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, held the first session in March 2004. The Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (CMW) is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention (Chetail, 2013).

The potential contribution of current Italian experience

Several aspects contribute to make migration in Italy unique. First, it is dynamic and continuously changing. This contributes to widening the lack of recent reliable studies. A second characteristic is the diverse countries of origin of migrants and refugees which is challenging for professionals because it asks for a development in cultural awareness together with the need of cultural and language appropriate materials for the assessment and intervention. A third aspect deals with the variety of level of education of first-generation migrants that requires then diverse actions and more

articulated projects. An additional characteristic is the involvement of many different “actors” besides the institutions supporting migrant’s inclusion. This implies a wide heterogeneity of professionals involved and interventions carried out in our countries that supports the growing effort of the university both in research and training also as regard career counseling (Sgaramella, Ferrari, Ginevra, Santilli, & Nota, 2017)

Challenges and barriers migrants currently face in their journey to and in the country of destination are increasingly addressed in the literature. Issues faced by migrant families when one member has a disability are less known. The experiences they live, the challenges they face to inclusion and future life construction might be numerous and diverse in nature. In this issue, researchers from different background will address the main issues in this complex picture for both families, service providers and professionals, either with a review of the relevant literature and research data.

While addressing these issues in the Italian context, which is known for the long-lasting efforts in promoting inclusion, they will also provide suggestions for professionals interested in promoting inclusion and well-being of members of these families, either with or without disabilities.

A first paper provides a general overview of approaches to inclusion and fundamental dimensions with a detailed analysis of experiences migrant families with disabilities have within the Italian inclusive school context, with all “lights and shadows” which characterize school inclusion in Italy. Their project aims to combine research and action, involving parents, professionals, educators and teachers and to address various areas of investigation with the main objective of addressing *pedagogic aspects*, mapping of some positive experiences and inclusion/assistance strategies.

A second paper, underlines the complex and highly dynamic situation which characterize and influence either attitudes and beliefs about disabilities among migrant families, as well as challenges and supports experienced by migrant parents. By adopting a time perspective view authors also provide a glimpse into the future, into supports and barriers to inclusion that families with disabilities recently arrived in Italy foresee in their next future together with suggestions to professionals

A final paper is more oriented to professionals. After presenting results from a scoping review, specific problems immigrant families with disabilities face when dealing with services will be analysed. Suggestions will be also provided on what to do together with culturally sensitive intervention strategies effectively used by services.

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