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Internationalisation of Tertiary Education. Comparative  
study of Italy and Germany as receiving countries in the  
context of international academic mobility

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# **Abstract**

Internationalisation of higher education has long been one of the main vessels of globalisation. This thesis examines the internationalisation of tertiary education through a comparative lens, focusing on Italy and Germany as receiving countries for international academic mobility. The aim is to analyse the policies, practices, and challenges associated with attracting and integrating international students in these two nations, especially for those arriving from non-European Union states. Most importantly, the demographic impact of youth emigration from these countries is discussed in length in the context of outbalancing labour markets and population shortages. A mixed-methods approach is employed, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses. Qualitative methods include reviews of migration policies, higher education systems and scholarship networks available to local and international students. Quantitative analysis involves the examination of statistical data on enrollment patterns, citizenship of students, choice of academic programs, and changes of migration status, with a focus on the most popular sending countries in the past decade. The research identifies key drivers that shape the attractiveness of Italy and Germany as study destinations. Factors such as educational quality, language barriers, cultural integration, scholarship availability, and employment prospects for international graduates are explored in depth. By comparing the approaches adopted by both countries, this study uncovers similarities, differences, and best practices in managing international academic mobility. The findings highlight the significance of effective policies and support mechanisms in enhancing the experiences of international students and attracting new ones, as major educational hubs are moving towards developing countries.

Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of the complexities surrounding the internationalisation of tertiary education, offering insights into the experiences of international students in Italy and Germany. The comparative analysis provides a foundation for policymakers, higher education institutions, and stakeholders to enhance their strategies for accommodating and integrating international students effectively.

# Extended Summary

L'internazionalizzazione dell'istruzione superiore è da lungo tempo uno dei principali veicoli della globalizzazione. Questa tesi esamina l'internazionalizzazione dell'istruzione terziaria attraverso una prospettiva comparativa, concentrandosi su Italia e Germania come paesi riceventi rispetto alla mobilità accademica internazionale. L'obiettivo è analizzare le politiche, le pratiche e le sfide associate all'attrazione e all'integrazione degli studenti internazionali in questi due paesi, specialmente per coloro che provengono da stati non appartenenti all'Unione Europea. In particolare, si discute ampiamente dell'impatto demografico dell'emigrazione giovanile da questi paesi nel contesto di sbilanciamenti nei mercati del lavoro e carenze di popolazione.

Si adotta un approccio misto, combinando analisi qualitative e quantitative. I metodi qualitativi includono revisioni delle politiche migratorie, dei sistemi di istruzione superiore e delle reti di borse di studio disponibili per studenti locali e internazionali. L'analisi quantitativa coinvolge l'esame di dati statistici sui modelli di iscrizione, sulla cittadinanza degli studenti, sulla scelta dei programmi accademici e sui cambiamenti dello status migratorio, con un focus sui paesi di provenienza più popolari dell'ultima decade. La ricerca identifica i principali fattori che plasmano l'attrattiva di Italia e Germania come destinazioni di studio. Fattori come la qualità dell'istruzione, le barriere linguistiche, l'integrazione culturale, la disponibilità di borse di studio e le prospettive di impiego per i laureati internazionali vengono approfonditi. Confrontando gli approcci adottati da entrambi i paesi, lo studio scopre somiglianze, differenze e migliori pratiche nella gestione della mobilità accademica internazionale. I risultati mettono in luce l'importanza di politiche efficaci e meccanismi di supporto nel migliorare le esperienze degli studenti internazionali e nell'attrarre di nuovi, mentre importanti centri educativi si stanno orientando verso i paesi in via di sviluppo.

In generale, questa ricerca contribuisce alla comprensione delle complessità che circondano l'internazionalizzazione dell'istruzione terziaria, offrendo approfondimenti sulle esperienze degli studenti internazionali in Italia e Germania. L'analisi comparativa fornisce una base per indirizzare le decisioni politiche, orientare le istituzioni di istruzione superiore e gli stakeholder per potenziare le loro strategie per ospitare ed integrare gli studenti internazionali in modo efficace.

# **Abbreviations**

BAMF - Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge - Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

DAAD - Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst - The German Academic Exchange Service

EMN - European Migration Network

ISM - International Student Mobility

ISTAT - Istituto nazionale di statistica - The Italian National Institute of Statistics

MAECI - Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale - The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

MIUR - Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca - Ministry of Education, University and Research.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Current international education trends were rightfully described as an “explosive” by the OECD in 2017. Taking into account all the recent crises, including COVID-19 lockdowns, and a number of active military conflicts across the world, the number of international applicants does not seem to go down in the foreseeable future. While the crown of the most popular destination for students in the world remains the USA, as well as other English-speaking countries, this trend also holds true for European institutions.

The internationalisation of education has become a trending topic in the past few decades, as the shift is difficult to avoid with the trend of globalisation playing in the background. The blurred lines in terms of language of instruction, physical borders and access to education have become instrumental in the aim to liberalise education as it was known. Such aims were reinforced by the Bologna process of 1999, in an attempt to unionise the European continent and its diverse school systems.

Under the term “internationalisation” it is understood that there are deliberate efforts performed by main policymakers as well, in this case, educational institutions towards incorporation of international context into research activity, teaching and learning practices and services, in general (Larsen, 2016). The transnational mobility of students, as well as academic staff becomes the cornerstone of such cooperation techniques, as bilateral agreements between universities, collaborative research opportunities or joint degree-programs.

The motivation behind such efforts, however, could vary. Starting from recruitment of talent for understaffed industries to filling the gap created by the on-going brain drain migration, that is usually a result of unstable economic conditions, political turmoil or lack of funding of education.

However, it would be dishonest to claim that the rise of international education is just another sign of the times. The most prestigious universities have built up their reputation upon international collaboration and inviting foreign researchers to take an active participation in faculties.

In this research, the comparative study of Italy and Germany as receiving countries for international students will be presented. As two major economic players in the heart of Europe, these states draw attention by their liberalised education systems, vast cultural landscapes that are intertwined with the long history of university-level education, complex migration policies, as well as trends towards shrinking populations, that are in the forefront of political discourse today. The foundation of this research is built upon the visible similarities that are presented in the educational systems of both countries and the juxtaposition of migration and demographic policies that provide the context for internationalisation of higher education, as it will be discussed later in this paper. It is important to

have an idea of the reasons behind choosing these countries as main destinations for academic mobility, the efforts put into welcoming students coming in, and how the countries, and individual universities are keeping up with the growing demand.

## State of the art

Research on international education is at the crossroads of diverse humanities-oriented fields, such as migration, sociology, history and only now emerging mobility studies. The focus on the theory of push and pull factors still remains, yet it is crucial to give a full perspective, taking into account historical reality, migration policies patterns regarding low-skilled migrants and high-skilled specialists, as well as anthropological research regarding migrant perception in various societies, that include interviews from migrants themselves, as well as migration officials and members of those societies, in order to be able to give a wider scope of the situation. The challenges that students might come across come up quite frequently, especially in discussions of linguistic challenges, financial implications of studying abroad and differences between the education system back home and the country of destination.

The Bourdiean approach to international education mobility as a means towards socioeconomic mobility, or a way to get social and economic capital, comes up frequently in the scholarship regarding international education, is becoming more relevant especially since the average profile of international student has been gradually changing and the main target of promotion of international courses within public universities are people with middle class upbringing, thanks to wider scholarship networks, demographic issues as well as labour shortage in high-skill sectors. However, the neoliberal approach, that led to the commodification of tertiary education, therefore becoming a product one can invest in, anticipating profit, has changed attitudes towards education. As this trend continued, coinciding with the technological advancement of the 21st century, technical degrees became more demanded among employers, while humanities and creative specialisation lost their value on the job market (Busch, Lawrence, 2010).

The focus on anglophone countries as main destinations remains. However, new student hubs in developing economies cannot be ignored, as, for instance, Chinese international student community grows, so does the research into migration patterns of those students and their perception within Chinese society and education system. The scholarship on the overarching demand and supply of English language based courses, especially within tertiary education, and the status of English as the lingua franca for “international spaces”, or the aspect that make the space “international” has been criticised recently, as even though it leads to a wider diversification of perspectives, there is a danger of incidental westernisation even in contexts that are not “western” by spatial limitations, or

borders, hence, narrowing down the perspectives (Saarinen and Ennser-Kananen (2020)). However, the scope of literature on non-English speaking countries as receiving countries is limited, when experiences of international students in the US, the UK, Canada or Australia are well-documented. The shifting patterns of educational mobility have been in depth explored in works by Sidhu (2018), that focuses on the emotional and cultural geographies, especially in China and Japan as receiving countries for students from neighbouring regions. A distinct focus is also given to the relationship that stretches between space and time between students and their families back home, a topic widely discussed in the wake of COVID-19 quarantines and travel bans, that led to that imagined proximity, or its accessibility of the family disappearing. Yang (2018), simultaneously, talks about the importance of having regional educational hubs, choosing to focus on Chinese students in Singapore. Nevertheless, the European-oriented approach has been largely ignored, despite Germany becoming the most popular destination among non-English speaking countries in the past decades.

The theories of mobility are a focus of a variety of studies nowadays. In the academic realm, Zelinsky's theory is rightfully back in focus. While migration theories like push and pull theory are beneficial, they frequently fall short in facilitating a comprehensive discussion on mobility transition and the evolving landscape of migration trends. Zelinsky's approach considers interconnected factors such as economic cycles, political arrangements, and individual aspirations of students, providing a more holistic understanding of the pivotal role these elements play in shaping student mobility<sup>1</sup>. However, it is important to distinguish student migration as a distinct type of migration, and not as a part of more “traditional” types of mobility practices, such as labour migration. Another striking tendency that runs like a common thread in the field of mobility, is the focus on the crisis-driven type of migration, such as climate migration, linked to the Sustainable Development Goals, or the impact of the 2015 refugee crisis, that led to a number of bureaucratic measures such as the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. It is argued these documents and alike are “non-binding wish-lists of policies” have completely taken over the discourse that feeds in into the political tradition of presenting migrants and refugees as those who create the crisis mode, even if that is not the intention (Naujoks, 2022). However, most migration patterns, including student migration, happen within higher economic and social classes, regardless of place of origin.

Developing types of education have also played their roles in underestimation of traditional education patterns. Today, one can receive a certificate, a qualification or even a degree while

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<sup>1</sup> Wilbur Zelinsky, “The Hypothesis of the Mobility Transition,” *Geographical Review* 61, no. 2 (1971): 219–49, <https://doi.org/10.2307/213996>.

staying within the comfort of their own home. The sudden shift towards online education that has been registered in the past decade, and was highlighted out of sheer responsibility to perform contractual obligations universities had to their customers, i.e. students, during the COVID-19 crisis had tricked people into believing that maybe physical presence in educational facilities, and therefore mobility, was old-fashioned, not practical and time consuming. Nevertheless, the critics of digital education practices brought about the discussion on the cookie-cutter, the one-fit-all approach, frequent lack of personal communication regarding students and their needs, and lack of training of the academic staff. Moreover, those practices, while deemed useful in the moment, highlighted lack of accessibility of technology experienced by the students, the inability or unwillingness of universities to accommodate such inaccessibility as well as general drop in quality of education that was already in the crisis state for the past decades. In his work, Marko Teräs, et al “Post-Covid-19 Education and Education Technology ‘Solutionism’: a Seller’s Market” (2020), has extensively explored the idea of “broken” education, the “technologization of broken education that is closely connected to educationalization”, as neoliberal concepts that have become stumbling blocks on the path to high quality education.

A short, yet important section of this study will also be devoted to the outbound migration from Italy and Germany, that is closely connected to the demographic issues experienced in the developed western countries, where the ageing of the population has become a fast-paced process, coupled with low birth rates and growing life expectancy, in the case of Italy. As for Germany, while the situation does not seem as drastic for now, in the coming decades the tendency to fast ageing of population will become a number-one issue in the face of demographic policies, which will inevitably contribute to the in- and outbound migration trends.

## Research questions

The guiding research questions that this study aims to answer will be the following:

1. What are the key driving forces behind making Italy and Germany attractive destinations for international students and what are the pull and push factors informing their choices?
2. What role do the migration policies of Italy and Germany, especially those concerning foreign students and skilled immigrants in attracting transnational tertiary education students, and what are the socioeconomic and demographic factors behind the policies?
3. How is mobility of students connected to other forms of migration? What impact can it have on the demographic dynamics that characterise the considered countries?

4. What are the challenges that international students face upon arrival in Italy and Germany, including bureaucratic issues that are encountered, linguistic barriers imposed, etc.?
5. How do internationalisation efforts affect the existing governmentally-funded scholarship schemes, including both, the sending and receiving countries?

The overcompensating nature of the aforementioned questions sets the tone for the upcoming research, as it aims at generalising the contemporary trends in the field of international education as migration paths change alongside the political and economic landscapes, especially in developing countries.

## Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the trends that lead to the internationalisation of higher education, by taking a comparative lens with a focus on Italy and Germany as popular receiving countries in the context of student mobility. By doing so, it is the goal to analyse the education system of these two European States.

In order for the said analysis to be overarching, a mix of methodologies are to be employed. On the one hand, a full-on quantitative approach, backed by available data will be presented. On the other side of the scale, there will be a comprehensive review of the migration policies followed in both countries, along with scholarship networks available for locals, as well as foreigners, and financial aid schemes targeted at citizens of specific countries.

As a sub-goal of this research, it is important to identify the driving forces behind making a country an attractive destination for international students, taking into account educational traditions, reputation of local universities, financial accessibility, as well as language barrier and cultural integration management, and, most importantly, employment prospects for foreigners. By focusing on a comparative perspective on approaches, adopted by both Italy and Germany as a whole, as well as individual universities, this study allows for the similarities to be highlighted and the differences to be discovered.

Moreover, the push factors, which force the young specialists to choose a highly mobile international education path in foreign countries will be discussed, as full context - economic, social, and political of sending countries - will be given in order to paint a profile of students who come to these countries to fulfil their academic goals.

Overall, this thesis aims at making a contribution towards understanding how immigration policies help shape student migration networks and sustain the existing ones through national and university-centred schemes and opens a discussion on issues of demography and labour shortages in

the Western Europe. The comparative analysis provides a foundation for the development of international education in the face of ever changing migration trends

## Methodology

It is important to explain the reasoning behind the choice of both countries that will be under the comparison in this research: Italy and Germany. Having inspected public tertiary education systems across European nations, it became evident that both countries boast quite liberalised admission policies as well as wide scholarship network, or general financial accessibility, where the cost of tuition (or fees in Germany) per semester is proportional to the average local income, while in the both cases there are wide opportunities for exemption from the fees, for locals as well as for international students. According to Azarian, *“Comparison possesses the potential of revealing and challenging our less evident assumptions and conceptions about the world, especially the familiar one of oneself”* (Azarian, 2011), which is why we would like to offer a comparative analysis of these two countries, that on the first glance look similar. However, as Kocka points out, in such analyses, the cases are never expected to be symmetrical, yet are rough sketches that allow for the basis of the further research (Kocka, 1999). .

In this research, as we are not aimed to employ a contrastive approach, but rather taking an attempt at profiling both cases to highlight the most striking parts and the least noticeable ones as well, and by doing that there is an expected outcome to identify biggest weakness that these systems showcase (Tilly, 1984). Tilly calls this effect a “clarifying power”.

In order to answer the aforementioned research questions, a mixed approach, with a focus on a comparative analysis has been employed. While a quantitative, data-based approach has been instrumental in giving a foundation for this study, the qualitative review of migration policies applied in both countries, alongside the political and economic factors that force students to choose international student mobility (ISM) have allowed for the opportunity to give a full picture of the state of international education efforts in Italy and Germany.

The research was based on data analyses that I carried on using datasets compiled by various statistical agencies, some national, some international. In order for the quantitative data to be fully explored, the explanatory design had to be reached. The scale of comparison was established to be dated from 2011 to the present day, however, sometimes the data was either unreliable or unavailable. When the research does not go further than the year 2015, it is indicated in the data description. While we do not claim that correlation always implies causation, the trends that are followed by some policy changes, have some potential to prove otherwise. The quantitative data

and the results of qualitative research, in this case, are introduced in order to complement each other, as frequently some correlations can be tracked.

## Data and Sources

As this research is also data-driven, it was important to pay attention to reliable sources which provide raw data regarding international students. The comparative analysis, which consisted of education systems of two countries - Italy and Germany, was based upon data coming from various databases. First and foremost, the statistical agencies of each country play an important role in quantitative research presented in Chapter III. As for agencies based in Italy, the data with important variations on countries of origin of international students, their chosen degree subjects as well as average duration of study in the higher education system was provided by ISTAT - The Italian National Institute of Statistics, as well as databases of MAECI - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and MIUR data portal - Ministry of Education, University and Research.

In order to cover part of the research regarding Germany and international students there, Statistisches Bundesamt - the official statistical office of the country was addressed. However, the main and the most important source of data was extracted from the DAAD database portal and annual reports, released by the agency. In the next chapter the history of DAAD and its importance in promotion of international education for German institutions will be explored. That is why thorough research done by employees of the agency, which includes the main office in Germany, as well regional offices, releasing country-specific reports, have been used extensively to showcase the growth rate of the number of students, their subjects of choice, as well as study duration and dropout rate comparison for German and foreign students, while the official statistic agency was instrumental when talking about the legal status of those students.

Another type of source that should be discussed is databases compiled and funded by international organisations, such as UNESCO, driven by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, that allows for a deeper understanding of inbound and outbound mobility and general landscape of education in any given country. Another official resource that was crucial for the research of migration patterns in both countries discussed was Eurostat, which is powered by the European Union, and is a reliable source when there is a demand of data about people's mobility within the EU and their official status, such as numbers of residence permits recipients or asylum applications.

## Defining the scope of study

First of all, some limitations of who is considered an international student as well what subjects will be considered for this particular comparative study. To do that it is essential to define international students not to put them in the same basket as foreign ones, as not all foreign-born students are counted as international. For that we will refer to the official definitions provided by international organisations such as UNESCO:

1. Foreign students - refers to non-citizens who are currently enrolled in higher education degree courses. This definition does not distinguish between students holding non-resident visas and those with permanent resident status. The former usually arrive and stay independently, while the latter usually migrate with family, frequently underage, making them 1.5-generation immigrants.
2. Credit-mobile students - refers to “study-abroad” or exchange students, such as those in the EU’s Erasmus programme. These students remain enrolled in their home countries while receiving a small number of credits from foreign institutions (Van Mol and Ekamper, 2016). Due to their fluid enrollment status, most statistics on international students do not include credit-mobile students (Migration Data Portal, 2023)
3. International students - typically hold a non-resident visa status (sometimes called a student’s visa) who moved to pursue a tertiary degree in the destination country. These individuals are also called “degree-mobile students”, to emphasise the fact that they would be granted a foreign degree, and to distinguish them from “credit-mobile students” on short-term exchange or study-abroad trips.

In order to diversify this research, the terms “foreign” and “international” will be used interchangeably. However, on occasion, data does not specify the legal migrant status of students, which does leave space for speculation. As to avoid confusion on that front, data provided by the migration office regarding first-time residence permits recipients of each country will be useful in the upcoming Chapter III. However, in the section devoted to the investigation of popular majors and study fields for international students, that limitation is close-to-impossible to avoid, or compensate for, as there is no available data on the migration status, as most of the information is reported by universities themselves, and not migration officials. It is important to note that the focus will be held on students from non-EU countries, due to EU open borders policies for its own citizens, foreigners originating out of the economic union are easily traceable as they are required to present themselves to migration officials, starting back home with complex visa procedures, unlike citizens of EU countries.



The scope of this study will apply to tertiary education students, including Bachelor's, Master's and PhD degree students. Other forms of post-high school education, such as vocational training or language courses will not be regarded for a lack of data and sustainable research on such types of usually short-term mobility.

To add up to the previous point, the data on only public universities will be applied, as a sub-question of this research is concerned with governmentally-funded scholarship opportunities that are not applicable in the context of private higher education, neither in Italy, nor in Germany. The main chronological scope of this research will be devoted to the past decade, that will restrict the potential impact of the data, as it will not take into account the socio economic reality of the preceding decades, but rather focus on the contemporary states of the nations that will be discussed.

## Structure of the thesis

The subsequent chapters of this thesis are organised to delve into various aspects of the internationalisation of higher education in the countries of choice:

Chapter I - Introduction - specifies the context of internationalisation from the point of view of Mobility Studies and higher education, cements the research questions for the upcoming research, that allows to develop objectives for the study. The methodological approach is discussed at length, too. Most importantly, the scientific resources that helped shape the study through the critical lens as well as the data archives that were instrumental in supporting the mixed approach, and making this study truly data-driven are described.

Chapter II - here, the historical context is given, leading up to the contemporary education and migration policies regarding international students and high-skilled immigrants in Italy and Germany. A special section is devoted to the international university ranking systems, and where Italian and German universities stand in such rankings.

Chapter III - Data and case studies - the most data-driven part of this paper. Here, we give a rundown of the international students arriving to Italy and Germany, according to their citizenship. For the most popular sending countries, an overview of the local communities and reasons to choose international education over local universities are given.

Chapter IV - Subjects of choice and job opportunities for graduates - students' disciplines of choice will be discussed along with their paths in local job markets, following the graduation.

Chapter V - Italian and German students abroad - a short overview of long and short-term student mobility programs, popular for Italian and German students.

Chapter V - Dropout rates - in this chapter we discuss the issue of high dropout university rates in both countries, among local and international students, the political stances taken against it and reasons it became a concern in the first place. The topic of academic resilience shown by migrants will be highlighted.

Chapter VI - Conclusions - a chapter devoted to the overall discussion of all issues presented above, relying on the data discovered in the course of this research. Here we give recommendations for further research into internationalisation of higher education and offer final conclusions to this study.

By exploring the internationalisation of tertiary education through the lens of transnational student mobility, this thesis seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on creating inclusive, globally cooperative higher education systems.

## Chapter II: Historical Context and International Education in Germany and Italy today. An Overview of Migration Policies. International Ranking Lists as Mobility Determinators

### History of international academic mobility

The stories of students who travelled abroad are part of the world's intellectual history. With their experiences and records we can track down their reasons for travelling that are frequently closely intertwined with the history of the countries that sent them, or sometimes allowed to leave and also those that received them and widen our more general understanding of the world around us. The political, geographical and sociological landscape plays a big role here (Perraton, 2020).

While the ways to travel, the cost of tuition fees, the demographic of students who choose to study abroad, all these aspects changed over time, one thing remained: the choice to move to a foreign country to receive a degree is frequently motivated by blocked opportunities back home; or, even in event of an accessible education system in the home country, international education is seen as a mean used in order to increase chances to profit from exclusive opportunities that might be available only to a fraction of the population. Even in societies striving the most towards equal opportunities and a liberalised education system, the experience of studying abroad is a sign of status increase and an invitation to broader opportunities in the homeland, too.

Both Germany and Italy were always considered attractive academic hubs, with what is considered the oldest European university established in 1086 in Bologna and German language once being the lingua franca of the region the spread up north to the point that some members of Russian nobility were unable to speak Russian yet spoke fluent German (Dahmen, 2015).

While it is true that academic mobility always existed, it truly began becoming more mainstream so to speak, in the mid-19th century for reasons that will be explored in this paper. The shifts that happened in the context of international education could easily be tied to the changes of political nature. Since the statistics regarding these periods might not always be reliable, there is a need to pay close attention to the social landscape of the time to paint a bigger picture.

### Germany at the end of the 19th century in the context of student mobility

In the profound analysis done by Hilary Perraton, which focused on the development of academic mobility practices across the globe, the author delves into the historical growth and transformation of German universities. First, primarily exposing the period from the early 19th century to the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Here, it is important to credit the philosopher Wilhelm von

Humboldt for a pivotal moment in German higher education: the establishment of the University of Berlin in 1810. Admittedly, it was not the first university in the country, nevertheless, this event marked the commencement of a period of change in the intellectual robustness and global reputation of German universities.

Though, not immediately, the remarkable surge in student enrollment could not be underestimated. Starting off with relatively stable student numbers between 1830 and 1865, a dramatic shift occurred thereafter. Between 1865 and 1914, student enrollment multiplied fivefold. This remarkable increase signifies a growing societal interest in higher education during this era. Such an evident rise in popularity of higher education in a relatively short period of time could not happen without significant financial support from the government. Therefore, the government investment should be attributed to the development of German universities during this period. Local governments, particularly in regions like Bavaria, and Saxony, demonstrated a substantial commitment to develop the higher education sector. Expenditure in this domain witnessed an astonishing tenfold increase between 1877 and 1910 in these regions (McClelland, 1988). This considerable financial support likely played a pivotal role in fostering the growth and enhancement of universities and other higher education institutions.

Incidentally, the geographical mobility of this period was no different from today's trends: students mostly travelled from south to north and east to west. With a slight margin of error when it comes to American students, who travelled (and continue to do so) in the midst of the revolution to pursue German education, which already held a reputation as the most technologically advanced. By the end of the 19th century there were around 500 American students, which proportionally could be compared to today's numbers (Bonner, 1963).

Below, the statistics regarding American students in Germany and other European countries in the pre-First World War period is presented, according to a research study conducted by H. Perraton (2020).

Table 1. US students in Europe 1860-1914

US students in Europe 1860-1914		
Date	Category	Number
1860s	Estimated US enrolments for decade in Germany	250-380
1870-1914	US students in medical schools in German-speaking universities	15,000
1892	US students in Germany	415
1895/1896	US matriculations in Germany at their prewar peak	517
1895/1896	US students in Switzerland	65
1900	US Proportion of foreign students in Paris (9.7%)	170
1910	US/Canadians in Belgian, French, German and Swiss universities	388
1910	US matriculants in Oxford (18% total)	188
1912/1913	US Students in Germany	289
1913/1914	US Students in France	65

Source: Perraton, "International Students, 1860-2010", 2020; 1860, Diehl 'Innocents abroad', 323-4; 1870-1914, Bonner American doctors, 23; 1892, 1895/1896 Switzerland, 1912/1913, 1913/1914, Wheeler et al. Foreign student, 23, 27, 9, 54; 1895/1896 Germany, Jarausch 'The universities', 185, Moulinier 'Les étudiants étrangers', 98; 1910 continental, Karady 'Student mobility', 373; 1910 Oxford, Stone 'Size and composition', 101

As evident from the Table 1, German medical education was particularly demanded among American students in the end of 19th century, attributable to the proprietary system enforced in medical schools in the US, that presupposed that students would be required to buy "tickets" to each and every lecture that would attend, hence the professors' wage was dependent on the number of attendees. In the wake of the Civil War and the following economic crisis, men, as women were not allowed in higher education systems yet, being either unable to afford such education or being mobilised as a part of the Confederate or the Union's army. While American medical education was in a strong need of restructuring, German schools were welcoming students from the New World. Perraton also touches upon the creation of a novel category of institutions known as "technical institutes" or "Technische Hochschulen." Upon their establishment, these institutions might not

have enjoyed the reputation and prestige akin to traditional universities, they achieved equal status by 1900. This transformation became possible by the investment mentioned earlier, leading to a considerable increase in the number of students at technical institutes, which rose from less than 3,000 to an astonishing 12,000 by 1914.

Notably, these technical institutes also played a key role in attracting foreign students. In 1900, approximately half of all foreign students studying in Germany enrolled in this type of institution, a figure that remained substantial, when later a third of foreign students were still choosing these institutes by 1914 (Jaraus, 1982).

## Germany before the First World War in the context of student mobility

Friedrich Althoff, a key figure in Prussian university policy and a head of the University department in the Ministry of Education, played a pivotal role in advocating for the inclusion of international students for a particular reason. He viewed this strategy as a moral obligation, asserting that by embracing foreign scholars, Germany could amplify its global influence which would simultaneously undermine adversaries, i.e. other educational systems both outside of Prussia and on an international level.

Over time, however, the initial enthusiasm for admitting international students gave way to more protectionist ideology and nuanced perspectives. The voice of concern coming from certain authorities became louder, especially regarding economic implications of such open policies. There were worries that foreign students might gain access to German technological and industrial insights, which could cause potentially detrimental damage to German interests. These fears followed by the evolving attitudes and the economic factors played a significant role in shaping foreign student admission policies, which included advanced German language requirements, along with additional procedures that were put in place in order to evaluate the equivalence of foreign education qualifications to local German certificates and tuition fees increase for foreign students (Drewke, 2000).

Policies pertaining to international student admission were not uniform across different nationalities and some of the policies were not all that inclusive. While, for example, the British students were encouraged to apply, as they were seen as potential "supporters of German culture," there was also a growing inclination to restrict the entry of Russian students of Jewish descent fleeing pogroms. The attempts of inclusion of these students became conditional and systematised. Chancellor von Bülow's stance in 1905 exhibited willingness to admit Jewish students from the Russian Empire, contingent upon their non-involvement in anarchist activities (Gousseff 1998). On the one hand, this decision seemed to be a step forward, on the other hand, the Chancellor simultaneously called

for the exclusion of Polish students, regardless of gender and origin. Conversely, the new Minister of Culture, August von Trott zu Solz, in 1912, aimed for a more balanced approach.

Although formal policies did not explicitly curtail international student recruitment, xenophobic and racially biased attitudes influenced the experiences of students, particularly those originating from Eastern Europe. The influence of such prejudices on the actual experiences of international students within Germany cannot be underestimated.

It is also important to explore how the movement of international students during this era was moulded by the policies enacted by both the countries sending students and the universities hosting them. It highlights the intricate interplay of factors that defined the landscape of international student mobility during this historical era.

## Germany after the First World War in the context of student mobility

Frequently, The Weimar Republic bears association with the plummeting economy, post-war depression, so-called “lost generation” and what later became the foundation for the creation of the Third Reich. While it is hard to argue with that particular image, it does not show the full picture. In fact, this decade, as any crisis, was also a period of creative development, with architectural movements such as Bauhaus and alike were on the rise, while influential artists such as Wasily Kandisky led the movement. Berlin, just like nowadays, was the artistic hub in the middle of Europe for creative minds such as Bertolt Brecht and Christopher Isherwood.

This creative energy was complemented by significant scientific advancements, particularly in physics at institutions such as Göttingen University. Renowned German philosophy and social science research also enjoyed a new golden age, with universities in Frankfurt, Berlin, and Heidelberg being major centres of academic innovation.

Germany, once again, became a popular student destination, and foreign enrollments into universities were substantial during this time, exceeding 4,000 between 1925 and 1930 (Grüttner, 2000). The geography of the sending countries was quite diverse. These students came from various regions, mainly eastern and central Europe, with Americans also increasingly choosing Germany for their studies. However, beneath this intellectual vibrancy that on the surface seemed open and inclusive, laid a complex political landscape that will soon become disastrous for everyone involved. Many German universities were critical of the Weimar Republic, and a significant portion of German students expressed support for the emerging Nazi movement. By 1932, as Nazi ideology gained prominence, a substantial percentage of German students identified as Hitlerites.

The government of The Weimar Republic had no consistent policy regarding foreign students, it changed from ministry to ministry. At times, there were efforts to reduce the number of enrollments of foreigners, often followed by reversals in decision. The Foreign Ministry, for instance, advocated

for attracting students as they believed they would improve Germany's international image and even argued for reducing fees.

In 1930, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) was established to welcome and support foreign students with scholarships and exchange opportunities, a program that persisted into the Nazi regime but faced purges and reduced influence. Having gone through tremendous changes in policy, the organisation still exists to this day and is crucial for this research.

When the Nazis seized power, quality education was not their main focus. Quite the opposite, they implemented policies aimed at reducing total student numbers, resulting in a significant decline in both national and foreign student enrollments. There were still some international students before the start of the Second World War, yet the geographic composition also changed during this period, with American students continuing to attend, but those from the Baltics, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, and Hungary being replaced by students from Norway, Turkey, Bulgaria, and China. Symbolically, the International Student Service of the League of Nations held the first half of its 1933 annual congress in Germany and the second half in Switzerland, signalling a shift in perception about studying in Germany.

Within less than a decade, as the Nazi regime's restrictions tightened, scholars and students began to flee or were simply exiled from Germany. Observers outside the country identified more than 1,600 scholars who had been dismissed from their posts by 1934, though many of them were now living abroad (Hartshorne, 1937).

Germany, once known as a highly demanded destination for international academics, became a place for people to escape from. The transformation from a vibrant academic hub to a place scholars and students fled was quick and had lasting consequences for international scholarship in general, enriching academic life and society in Western Europe and America as a diaspora of talented students and academics dispersed from Germany, which involved such major names as Einstein and Born.

## Germany and The Cold War in the context of student mobility

During the Cold War era, the geopolitical landscape significantly influenced the opportunities for studying abroad. The chance of pursuing education in foreign countries was heavily contingent on the geopolitical alignment of one's home country. Satellite states, oil-rich nations, and countries whose governments aimed to maintain diplomatic flexibility by sending students in both directions experienced advantages in terms of educational opportunities. Germany, throughout these four decades, became an ideological battleground, symbolised by a physical wall that divided the nation.



This competition, marked by Marxism-Leninism against American values, revealed that student exchange policies were intricately tied to major powers' political agendas. The movement of students, particularly from the developing world to superpowers, was significantly influenced by the Cold War. Both the Soviet Union and the United States, although not explicitly imperial, reflected imperial-like policies in their interactions with allies and friends, including their approaches to students. The histories of the Cold War and international students are inseparable, each incomplete without the other.

The tendency towards popularisation of higher education was shared universally, including both Germanies, where by the end of the 1970s the total number of students reached 1 million, 6% of whom were international (UNESCO). In the case of East Germany, most of the internationals were newcomers from the Soviet Union and countries supported by it. As for the West, the shared language played the main role in the choice of destination, as Germany, Austria and Switzerland were the biggest sending and receiving countries for the students. The internationalisation of education became an ubiquitous trend among Western countries in this time period.

Table 2. Most popular host countries among students in 1960 and 1975

Most popular host countries 1960 and 1975			
Country	Foreign		Foreign
	1960		1975
United States	53,107	United States	179,350
France	27,132	France	93,750
West Germany	21,701	West Germany	53,560
USSR	13,500	United Kingdom	49,032
United Kingdom	12,410	Canada	48,055
Austria	10,374	USSR	30,563

Source: Perraton, "International Students, 1860-2010", 2020; UNESCO Statistical yearbook except for USSR 1960, Pis'mennaia, 2010

This surge coincided with the economic challenges posed by the 1973 oil price rise and growing criticism of overcrowded universities.

Facing these challenges, universities and governments initiated measures to control the influx of foreign students. In Germany, where the funding and admission policies for higher education lacked clarity, universities took steps to address overcrowding and concerns about the educational background of students. This led to the development of the "Studienkolleg" system to prepare students for university entrance, coupled with stricter admission criteria, including the requirement of an Abitur - or a high school diploma - or its equivalent for foreign students. Additionally, Germany implemented quotas for medical students as part of these measures.

## The history of DAAD and its impact on the internationalisation of German education

The history of DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst), or the German Academic Exchange Service, strongly correlates with the shaky political landscape of the 20th century, and is filled with ups and downs, starting from its foundation in 1925 at Heidelberg University by then a student Carl Joachim Friedrich. Since then, the headquarters of the organisation have been moved from one city to another numerous times, finding new home in Bonn, a small town in West Germany, where major political changes happened while Berlin was divided physically and metaphorically, in 1950. Even after the unification of 1989, the headquarters remained. Founded on the grounds of student exchange, especially between English-speaking countries, the organisation had been promoting intercultural dialogue and accessible education for international students in Germany as well as German students abroad.

As for the participation in politics of the time, officials of DAAD have suffered through repressive laws of the Nazi regime, that at their weakest did not allow any cultural initiatives that were not dictated by the Foreign Office, which severely limited the work done by DAAD. By the outbreak of the war in 1939, only applications coming from allied countries, such as Italy, Denmark or Japan were accepted.

Since the operations of the foundation succumbed to the need of the Foreign office, significant exchange was on hold, and was practically replaced by the German Student Association for Foreigners, fully managed by the Foreign office. However, as a result of the air attack of 1943,

archives of both organisations were destroyed, which eventually became the reason to suppress the activity.

Upon its rebirth in the 1950 in Bonn, under the management of Dr. Ruth Ziervogel-Tamm, Germany was slowly crawling back in international contexts and organisations such as IAESTE. In the first 10 years of the reestablishment the demand for education was high, and there were at least a thousand international students awarded DAAD scholarships yearly. The first jubilee of 1960 was marked by the inauguration of the Middle East office in Cairo and new office in New Delhi.

The next decade was significant for the rise of German students receiving grants, which originated the discussions of the brain drain and forced DAAD executives to create a committee to help to regain German scholars from outside of the country. Simultaneously, the first agreement was signed between DAAD and the Soviet officials, that allowed students from the Eastern Bloc receive grants and participate in exchange.

In the 1970, while constrained in finances, the activity of the organisation was manifested through organisational reforms, creating two main structures named Programme Area I, responsible for administration and promotion of DAAD and Programme Area II, taking control of the traditional activity such as scholarship and grant reviews and development of educational projects. Moreover, semester visits to foreign universities were encouraged by the “Integrated Foreign Study Visits” programme, which played an important role in the promotion of international education and academic mobility. The consistency of views regarding this issue was proven later in the 1980s when DAAD openly and successfully lobbied against the migration restrictions targeted at international students, which allowed candidates to enter Germany even before receiving admission letters.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 opened a new chapter of cooperation with East Europe, taking under the wings of DAAD some 8,000 foreign students predominantly studying in Eastern European capitals, finalised by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of a DAAD office in Moscow in 1993.

In the past 30 years, the activity of the foundation was particularly fruitful, remarked by the inauguration of additional offices on various continents and surge of the number of foreign students coming to Germany, at least 100,000 of whom rely on DAAD scholarships as the main source of financial support yearly. (DAAD History, 2022).

## Italy at the late 19th century in the context of student mobility

The education system of the Italian Republic was built upon the reunification of territories in the late 19th century. By having an established wide university network spread in different parts of the

country, some of which are the oldest institutions in the world, renowned for their scholarship, especially in the Humanities as well as Medical field, the higher education system did not have to be built from scratch. However, the change in perspective around education akin to other European nations of the period had taken place. Accessible education was seen as a step towards creation of the middle class, which was a relatively successful model, questioned later by the fascist regime (Moscati, 1985).

While there is no data available regarding the exact number of students visiting Italian universities, some researchers assess that the yearly influx of students in the beginning of 1900s would be around 1,000 people, according to the calculations based on data provided by the biggest universities, University of Padova being the most welcoming one for foreign students. Outbound mobility, however, was more encouraged, especially towards German universities, thanks to grants allocated by the Italian government (Signori, 2011).

### Italy between wars in the context of student mobility

This period, under the leadership of Benito Mussolini, emphasised youth as a crucial component of fascist ideology and employed various strategies to shape and promote the education system that would influence students' political beliefs.

In Mussolini's Italy, the regime considered youth to be a driving force for the righteous development of the Fascist state. Mussolini, by his own declaration, was the spokesperson for a "young Italy" that will be influential enough to create a "young Europe" and a "young fascism." This focus on youth was a consistent theme throughout the regime's history.

This idea was not just a rhetorical device: Mussolini's government introduced educational reforms aimed at indoctrinating the younger generation with fascist ideology. These reforms not only changed the school curriculum, influencing the youngest and the most impressionable, but also limited access to higher education, particularly university. Giovanni Gentile, Mussolini's minister of education, had two primary objectives: to mould the next generation of Italians into active supporters of fascist ideology and to address the issue of educated unemployment, the socioeconomic issue which was perceived as a potential threat to the regime's stability (Wolff, 1984).

The unemployment of the educated youth was combated in a rather particular way: not through creation of additional jobs in various sectors, or financial support of smaller businesses, as one would imagine. It was combated by putting limitations on student admission numbers. The government successfully reduced student numbers at universities, from approximately 50,000 in 1920 to 40,000 a decade later (Rüegg, 2004).

Surprisingly so, despite the drop in national enrollments, the number of foreign students increased, reaching 5% of the student population in the mid-1920s (Barbagli, 1982). They were mainly studying medicine, which led to attempts by the medical professionals to restrict their numbers. Moreover, the proportion of female students declined during this period, falling from 20% to 15% in a decade, while female enrollment was increasing in neighbouring France and Germany.

The fascist regime used educational institutions for propaganda purposes on international scale, too. Italian universities with their long history were used as a symbol of national glory, and this image was promoted internationally. This approach worked in both ways: the universities and the Italian education system was promoted across Europe which led to growth of international students seeking to improve their education status, when on the other hand the number of local students kept on steadily decreasing.

However, the propaganda seemed to be working for international partners. For example, in 1933 the Institute of International Education published a “Handbook for American students in Italy”, encouraging their youth to participate in mobility exchange programs. Moreover, it started with a dedication to the minister Gentili and a letter of praise to Mussolini himself, congratulating on efforts to “instil spirits of pride in Italian youth”.

This double-sided policy led to the creation of Gruppi Universitari Fascisti (GUF), a fascist youth organisation, which played a central role in student activities within Italy and abroad. It aimed to educate students according to fascist doctrine and provided various benefits, such as scholarships and accommodation opportunities. Close relations with foreign student organisations were also blooming.

Despite the policy of glorification focused on the Italian nation, Mussolini’s government sought support abroad. The regime established close ties with the German Reichsstudentenführung - The main student body, and meetings between Italian and German youth movements facilitated discussions and competitions on themes related to culture and ideology.

Numerous historical accounts provide insight into how Mussolini's fascist regime used education and youth organisations to shape the beliefs and values of the younger generation and to promote a specific image of Italy both domestically and internationally. It reflects the broader trends and strategies employed by authoritarian regimes during the early 20th century to solidify their power and control the narrative.

After this period, Italy was known mostly for its emigration patterns, due to bilateral agreements with a number of European nations that were in urgent need of human resources in order to restore local industries after the war.

Only after great economic changes that led to globalisation practices, Italy started to become a highly demanded location for international students and scholars.

## Italy after The World War II

After the second World War, Italy was not at its strongest neither economically, nor politically. Nevertheless, the idea of aid and cooperation in the post war context was in the full swing on the European continent. According to Cammelli, the Statistics professor in University of Bologna and the founder of AlmaLaurea - the largest database of Italian graduates - the enrollments of foreign students while were apparent in the 1950s, truly started to increase in the 1960s with a significant flows of students out from Asia and Africa, especially from formerly colonised lands that gained independence. The enrollment procedures at the time were not complicated by rigid migration laws, or separation of European students from those out of Europe. A number of aid schemes along the foundation of foreign student colleges in Siena, Pavia, Lecce and Naples and the European University of Florence highlighted the demand and the openness to welcome foreign students. However, the system was unable to take up a high number of enrollments, which in line with numerous other systemic issues in the design of higher education all led to massive student protests in 1968, with epicentres in Turin, Milan, Trento and Bologna universities (Mancini, 1968). The protests, while were mostly targeted at universities' administrations, professors' workload and lack of funding for student accommodation, they largely resulted in decrees aiming to complicate the enrollment procedure and overall stay experience for foreign students. First of all, the entry threshold into the high education level has been increased up to 80 out of 100 points on national exams, and by 1973 the requirement for yearly renewal of residence permits became obligatory. Moreover, proof of financial resources for non-recipients of scholarships was an important document in the decision to renew the permit<sup>2</sup>. Two years later, the pre-enrollment procedure was introduced as another bureaucratic tool to keep the foreign students away<sup>3</sup> that is still in place, yet is facilitated by the online service *Universitaly*. The government did not stop there, as by the end of the 70s the law draft was introduced to put the moratorium on the admission process for international students, which, however, was rejected, but later modified into a quota system, allowing only a limited number of internationals to each and every department. At the time, no particular difference was made between European and non-European students. That was true up until the mid 1980s when the idea of European integration, the unionisation and free labour market started to take a more distinct shape. By the end of 1987, non-European students were not allowed to apply for a work permit in Italy.

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<sup>2</sup> Circular no. 30/73 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

<sup>3</sup> Circular no. 119/75 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

However, in the same breath, the concept of cooperation was in full bloom, as almost two thirds of Italian universities signed diverse collaboration agreements with 239 universities across the world. While it is true that over 60% of these universities were European, the other 40% represented a diverse geography, such as universities of Nicaragua, India, Guatemala, Peru and Kenya.

Nevertheless, a high share of international grants allocated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were distributed among international students. The geographical focus, however, changed overtime, as in the 60s mostly European students were the recipients, later replaced by African students in the 70s, and only by the 1980s some nationals of Asian countries were favoured. Overall, at least 2000 grants were given out yearly by the Ministry (UCSEI, 1991). However, over time the funds became mostly allocated towards Italian students studying abroad.

That is how by 1987, among 1,1 million students studying in Italy, only 22,000 were of foreign origin, according to ISTAT, which is a tenfold increase from 1955. It is important to note that the biggest contributor in this growth was Greece, which was going through a period of political turmoil and the rise and fall of military dictatorship that directly impacted on push and pull factors forcing Greek students to choose other study destinations.

The link between such growth and decolonisation of foreign territories cannot be ignored, either. Moreover, the rise of the Italian centre-left was, too, deeply connected to this development, especially through bilateral agreements, under the name of “Amicizia” in 1977. While, later, the number of Greek enrolling into Italian and other foreign universities started to decrease, as the local education system was slowly recovering from the impact of a dictatorial regime, Greek students became replaced by those from Iran, Jordan and West Germany.

The success rate of foreign students, on the other hand, was deeply affected by the aforementioned requirement to present sufficient funds to support oneself during studies. As of late 1980s, only 2,000 international students left Italian universities with an attained degree.

Over all of the post war period up to the 1990s, at least 80% of international students in Italy chose departments of Medicine, Natural Sciences, Engineering and Architecture as their majors. That is an unexpected development for a country that is famous for its culture and art industries, yet is easily explained by the lack of such faculties in the universities of developing countries, or complex admission systems into medical courses in such countries as Greece or Germany.

The most popular universities for international students were those located in Bologna, Milan and Rome.

Table 3. Number of international students by city, Italy (1976-1988)

City	Academic Year 1976-77	Academic Year 1983-84	Academic Year 1987-88
Bologna	4,891	2,583	1,689
Milan	2,973	2,705	1.898
Rome	2,765	4,084	3,678
Florence	2,561	1,295	-
Naples	2,267	1,680	2,470
Padua	1,528	1,709	1,263
Pavia	1,484	1,106	-
Genoa	1,123	-	-
Turin	1,104	1,398	-
Perugia	-	1,173	1,035

Source: Data processed from ISTAT Documentation

## Germany and Italy as popular study destinations

When choosing a new destination to continue their academic journey young adults tend to take many factors into account. No wonder that the most economically successful states end up on the top of the list of the majority of international students.

The insurance factors that these countries might provide span different sectors: some offer scholarships for the whole duration of study, while others prioritise and advertise the stable labour



market or the flexibility of the immigration system that would allow students to stay legally after graduation to seek full-time positions.

It is important to paint a clear picture of educational and immigration systems in both Germany and Italy today to understand their relevance in the context of international educational mobility.

**Germany. An overview of migration policies, success in international university rankings and governmentally-funded scholarship networks.**

Germany - Migration policy

Germany is the 2nd most popular non-anglophone country amongst students (See Table 2) UNESCO Statistics Institute, 2018).

Despite quite hostile governmental stances on refugees and asylum seekers, that is sustained through growing support of far right political parties, according to OECD, Germany is one of the most open countries for skilled migration (OECD, 2013). This in particular sheds a light on the hypocrisy in rhetoric practised by some developed countries, when members of migratory communities are demonised from public podiums, but are simultaneously used when it is economically beneficial, whether it is cheap labour performed by irregular migrants to save money on taxes or high skilled specialists who will supposedly bring innovation and, therefore, profit (Haas, 2020).

Such welcoming policy practices are extended towards students, too. The labour shortages in certain sectors, requiring high skilled specialists have impacted the migration landscape, overall. The average cost of residence permit application is around 100 euros, not counting the cost of the required health insurance plan, amounting to at least additional 120 euros per month. Knowledge of German is required on the basis of the chosen study track.

Moreover, section 16 subs. 4 of the Residence Act allows newly graduated students to stay in the country for 18 months to find employment in accordance with the profession they acquired in the university. The previous student status also helps to fastrack into the citizenship path within 2 years of obtaining the employment contract, a procedure that usually takes 5 years for those who do not hold German degrees. The procedure is called a “settlement permit”. Apart from possible citizenship prospects, additional flexibility is granted when applying for the program, as no residence permit extensions are required, there is no ban on employment or profession changes, and, moreover, the access to social security and benefits becomes open.

## German universities in international rankings

The credibility of international university rankings can and should be discussed and put under a reasonable amount of doubt. However, a certain number of aspiring students, as well as their parents, give authority to such lists when they stumble upon the choices of the country where they would want to study, the university, or the majors offered. As one of the most cited ranking lists is the yearly QS publication, it is the ranking that will be taken into consideration in this analysis, as it prioritises such aspects as employability score upon graduation, international research network as well as international students ratio.

In terms of international ranking, German educational establishments have shown to be in leading positions. In fact, at least four different universities, two of which are situated in Munich, have been allocated spots in the top-100. Coincidentally, or not, the Technical University of Munich, which took the 37th place, has one of the highest international students ratio, 97.3 to be more exact, among other highly rated indicators, such as academic and employer reputation.

A good representation of local universities can be found in the separate ranking for Arts and Humanities faculties. While, as it will be discussed later on, the field of humanities is among the least popular for international students to enrol into, such institutions as Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Freie Universitaet Berlin and Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München hold places in the prestigious top-40 for the departments focused on these subjects.

Another way to hold up their academic reputation as the home to technical degrees, quite a fair representation of universities that offer Engineering and technology degrees may also be explored. At least five universities have found place in the top 100, according to the latest 2024 ranking, again, having Technical University of Munich in the lead on a high standing 28th spot.

As it will be mentioned later, Business, Management and Social Studies degrees are among the most demanded by both local and international students in Germany. However, those departments do not seem to hold up to their reputation, as only two universities that offer related programs were honoured with the 82nd and 99th places in this ranking, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, respectively.

Nevertheless, the diversity of the suggested subjects does not cease to impress. For example, in the world of Natural Sciences, again, a stately number of universities have been chosen to represent the field, where Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, or KIT for short, has been given 80 points and ranked 50th along with many others.

Moreover, the overall education system, in accordance with the 2018 ranking has been placed on the honourable 4th spot assessed by taking into account the accessibility of education, the yearly funding by the government, as well as the overall number of institutions and their performance in the main ranking. All these indicators together contributed to the final rating of 93 points.

## Governmentally-funded financial aid and support

The German education system offers numerous scholarships for local and international students through the German Academic Exchange Service or DAAD programme. Typically, living allowance, health insurance, travel allowance as well as German language courses are paid for by the scholarship. Tuition fees, however, are expected to be paid separately by students themselves. While after the protests that took place in 2014 Germany reintroduced a free public university system, there are still some universities requiring fees to be paid, which are usually limited at about 1500 euros per year, which is statistically cheaper than most western european universities. Most importantly, there is no difference between local and international students in the issue of tuition fee - the fees are universal regardless of nationality. In addition to that, frequently a “semester” or an “administrative” fee might be required, in which case it does not surpass 300-400 euros, regardless of whether the student receives any type of scholarship or not. Overall, the system can be considered quite student-friendly and welcoming to students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds as well as international students.

In terms of migration policies, Germany as a country is a double-sided coin. The general rhetoric regarding migrants, aimed especially at low-skilled migrants or refugees, remains hostile, which is double-confirmed by the latest parliamentary elections held in 2021, in which parties that heavily promote anti-migrant views did not get the absolute majority, but could boast around 20% of population support. Simultaneously, academic mobility along with high-skilled migration is encouraged.

## Italy. An overview of migration policies, success in international university rankings and governmentally-funded scholarship networks

### Italy - Migration policy

Italy has long been known as a country people migrate from, not to. Hence, numerous Italian communities spread across the world, to such countries as Belgium, Germany, France, mostly forming as a result of post-2nd World War labour shortage and bilateral agreements with those countries to provide human resources. However, long before that an Italian-American diaspora was formed, framing a new recognisable cultural landscape in the New World, travelling down south to Argentina and Brazil, where these diasporas are alive and well to this day.

However, for the past few decades Italy became a popular destination for new immigrants as well refugees, majorly from northern Africa across the Mediterranean.

The public education system has been under a lot of pressure, especially the schools system, where teachers were met with the pressure to accommodate an unusual number of pupils whose first language was not Italian, and who frequently were met with discrimination and oppression. This made the Italian government review immigration policies and, in general, drastically changed the political and social landscape in the country, raising tensions between locals and ethnic minorities.

The Italian migration system, while quite overcomplicated by the bureaucratic procedures, is relatively welcoming towards students, even those out of the EU. Papers necessary to receive an entry type-D visa are in the most part standard for such occasions, and the baseline requirement is to be at least 18 years of age and to obtain proof of admission from an Italian educational institution. In order to receive a student resident permit, it is required to present documentation and application for the permit to the Police headquarters (Questura) through the national post office Poste Italiane within the first 8 days of one's arrival to Italy. The student residence permit is given for a maximum of one year, and can be renewed no more than 3 times. Since it is common to graduate later than the official duration of a course suggests (3 years for Bachelor's degree - Triennale, 2 years for Master's degree - Magistrale), there are some limitations forced upon international, strictly non-EU students. For example, in order to successfully renew the document after first and second year, it is requested to prove that at least from 1 to 3 exams were taken and successfully passed within that academic year. The lowest score, however, is not specified. The permit allows students to work part-time, at most 20 hours per week, or 1040 hours per year<sup>4</sup>.

The only tangible privilege the student residence permit gives its holders is the ability to convert it to a work permit after graduation, hence there is no requirement to go back to one's home country to receive a new type of visa. For the transitional period between graduation and officiating a first work contract it is possible to apply for the so-called "cerco lavoro" or "attesa occupazione" permit. The prerequisite for receiving it, however, is to be registered in the local labour agency and to have an official "unemployed" status. The average cost of one application to receive or renew one's residence permit, including the obligatory state health insurance plan, is 300 euros<sup>5</sup>.

Even though on paper the procedure seems easy and well-documented, in reality there are reports of long waiting periods, frequent requests of unnecessary documentation by police officers and overall discrimination on sight (Tuckett, 2015).

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<sup>4</sup> Art. 39 Decreto Legislativo n° 286/98 e succ. mod. ; artt. 44 bis, 45 e 46 DPR 394/99 e succ. mod.

<sup>5</sup> Art. 39 bis.1, comma 1, Decreto Legislativo n° 286/98 e succ. mod.

## Italian universities in international rankings

As per latest published QS World University Rankings 2024, some Italian universities gained a few additional spots in the top-200, including Politecnico di Milano, Sapienza University of Rome or University of Padova compared to last year. However, Politecnico di Milano, University of Padova along with the University of Naples are the universities with the highest ratio of international students surpassing 75 points. Politecnico di Milano, for instance, is also charting quite high at the 18th place among Engineering and Technology departments across the globe, where the first 20 universities are dominated by American educational establishments. Some other Italian universities, mostly situated in the north of the country, ranked with overall high scores in the top-200. An impressive number of Italian universities are represented in the field of Natural sciences as well as Humanities, which will later be explored in Chapter III.

Moreover, according to the 2018 QS University System Strength Rankings, which elaborates on the overall educational system of the country, Italy took 11th place, thanks to its accessibility. Here, we should cast some doubt towards the credibility of such ratings, as, per instance, the American university system is ranked first with the perfect score of a 100 for each indicator, including accessibility, while American universities are some of the hardest to enrol into, and are among the most expensive in the world, therefore financial accessibility might not be taken into account in this case. For example, the leading university of this list is the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), which boasts an admission rate of only 4% and the median cost of tuition around 82000\$ dollars. That is 50 more than an average Italian state university tuition, and around 8 times more expensive than any given private university in the country.

## Governmentally-funded financial aid and support

The Italian public university system is distinguished by its generous scholarship network, which is designed, mostly, in order to combat low tertiary education attainment among Italian students, who with time have lost faith in the necessity of education due to high unemployment levels among young people. The aid is based not only upon scholarship funds, but also on flexible tuition fee waivers, for example, for those who already have siblings studying at the same university, benefits for people with disabilities, or additional funding for STEM students, especially women enrolled in such departments.

The main scholarship funding comes from so-called Regional scholarships (Borsa di Studio Regionale) and it varies from region to region, where different types of students (on-site, commuting, off-site) are eligible for fee-waivers and scholarships ranging from 2 thousand euros all

the way up to 7 thousand, where frequently everyday meal and a discounted place at university accommodation can be included. The eligibility of a student is need-based, and is calculated with the help of a special index called ISEE, which is not simple and is done by tax professionals. In order for it to be calculated, the documentation proving sources of income for the household is required, as well as property certificates for all family members, along with information on dependents in the family, such as underage children. For most regions, the highest possible ISEE index that is considered low enough to be eligible for a regional scholarship is 22.000 euros. This particular scholarship scheme is available for international students, too. However, with time, the accessibility of such scholarships, especially for first year students, started to fade as regions allocate less and less funds. As a result of the recent crisis of the academic year of 2022-2023, almost 2,000 students were left with no scholarship, despite their eligible status in various universities. The situation forced universities themselves to allocate new funds to accommodate the students, as student unions in and outside of Italy were calling for action coming from the state, which were not satisfied <sup>6</sup>.

As for the scholarships aimed specifically at successful foreign students, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy is allocating full scholarships known as MAECI. The funds are allocated among Italian embassies across the world, and as of 2023, citizens of 95 countries were eligible for participation. However, only Master's degree and PhD candidates are allowed to take part in the competition, where they can receive financial support for a period of three to nine months. In case of successful academic achievements, the scholarship will be prolonged for the second year, in case of sufficient funds. In case of a successful interview, the tuition fee-waiver and the scholarship is awarded to a student, with a monthly allowance of 900 euros. While the scholarship is generous, a certain rate of allocated money goes to students not enrolled in higher education, but rather Italian language courses, frequently with a duration of around 3 months, which eventually saves funds for the ministry, yet takes away the chance from tertiary degree students to have a reliable financial support from the government.

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<sup>6</sup> "Italian Funding Shortfall 'Could Leave 20,000 Students Stranded,'" Times Higher Education (THE), December 31, 2022,

### Chapter III: Data and Case Studies. Comparative analysis of international students by citizenship, degree subjects and post-graduation intentions

As international education becomes one of the biggest vessels for young specialists to showcase their skills, it is important to address quantitative data regarding the issue. Currently, the overall number of international students in the world is over 6.3 million, which is a significant increase from 2 million in 2000 (UIS, 2022).

The European Union, which represents diverse educational systems, accepting local and foreign students, currently hosts 18.5 million, at least 1.6 million of whom are international students (Eurostat, 2023). Geographically, the list of the most attractive host countries is diverse, yet it is concentrated in developed countries (see Table 4). However, as discussed in Chapter I, the academic mobility paths are slowly changing with the creation of new student hubs, especially in the Asian continent.

Table 4. Most popular host countries among students 2017-2018

Country	Number of foreign students hosted, by year	
	2017	2018
USA	984,898	987,314
UK	435,734	452,079
Australia	381,202	444,514
Germany	258,873	311,738
Russia	258,658	262,416
France	258,380	229,623

Source: UNESCO Statistics Institute, 2017 - 2018

## Overall migration trends to Italy and Germany

First of all, it could be helpful to monitor overall migration trends to Germany and Italy. The most productive way to do it would be to overview the data provided by national statistical agencies of each country. The data is compiled, in this case, by Eurostat.

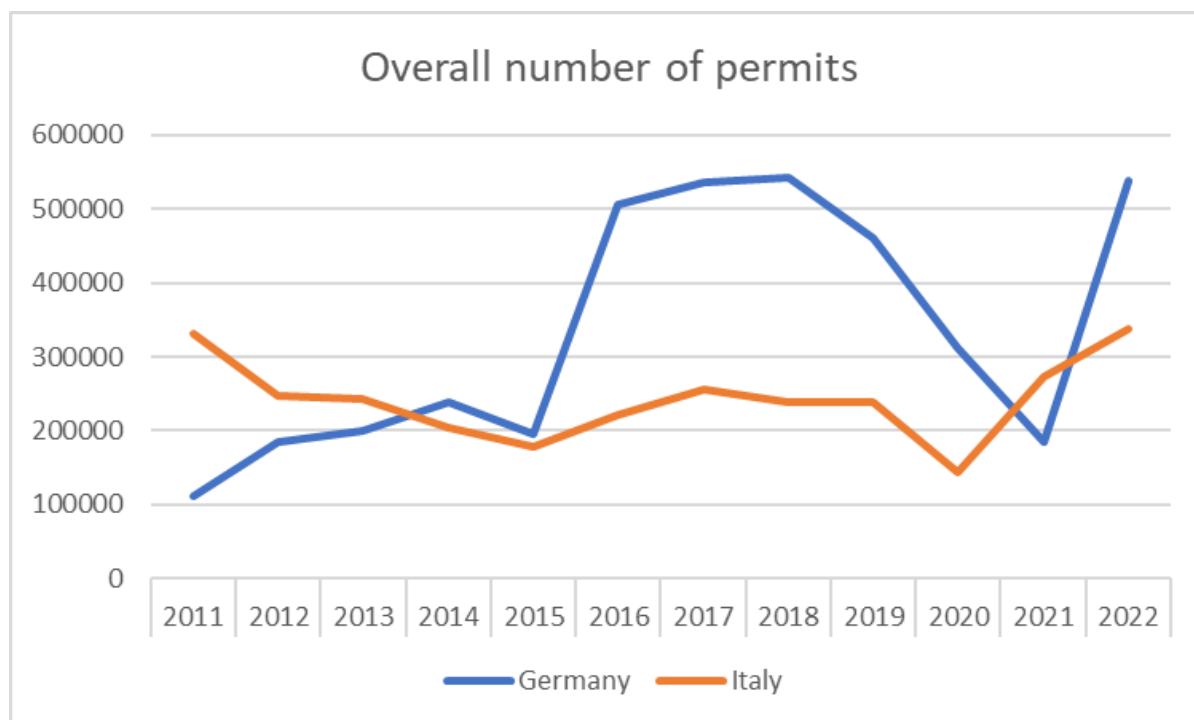
Table 5. Overall number of first time permits in Italy and Germany, 2011-2022

TIME	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Germany	110,349	184,070	199,925	237,627	194,813	504,849	535,446	543,571	460,340	312,669	185,570	538,690
Italy	331,083	246,760	243,954	204,335	178,884	222,398	256,593	238,863	238,714	143,697	274,095	337,788

Source: Eurostat

Hence, the data acquired is concerned with first time residence permits receivers. Reasons for acquiring these permits vary: apart from educational purposes, the majority of migrants receive their resident permits on the grounds of family reunification or employment. Miscellaneous reasons are also included in the following data. However, irregular migration is not represented in this data due to inconsistency in calculations, yet it remains to be a significant part of migration trends towards Italy.

Figure 1. Overall number of first time permits in Italy and Germany, 2011-2022





Source: Eurostat. Data processed by me

The data shown on Figure 1 seems quite inconsistent, especially when taking a closer look into Germany's numbers. As it is evident from the graph, there are some sharp jumps as well as some unexpected downfalls. For example, after a more or less balanced growth from 2011 to 2014, the huge slump of 2015 followed by sudden increase by not less than 250% becomes even more highlighted. Fairly, over half of these permits belong to the "other" category that also includes refugees. Having investigated the media as well as official statements made by German migration authorities for clues on why such a sharp decline followed by an even more dramatic surge in applications might have happened, it is possible to come to the conclusion that the so-called "migration crisis" and the overflow of war refugees primarily from Syria had temporarily suspended the usual work flow. That period was marked with hostile media campaigns against refugees and migrants in general, as well as a change in rhetoric coming from officials that concluded with revision of the migration system in Germany as a whole, now fully prioritising high-skilled workers over everyone else. The slump of 2015 could also be explained by bureaucratic reasons, even though there are no official statements regarding this issue. Here, we propose a theory that the agency that deals with applications - the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) – did not have the adequate workforce required for processing the increased amount of paperwork amidst the refugee crisis. This could be the reason behind the delays in the issuance of the permits. This theory is confirmed by the EASY quota system (Initial Distribution of Asylum-Seekers) in the 2016 BAMF Migration report. Moreover, the structure of the organisation was undergoing changes due to the resignation of the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Manfred Schmidt following the criticism regarding his response to the crisis and refusal to expand the office workforce to process the paperwork (DW, 2015).

As for Italy, the situation seemed more or less stable, especially in comparison with Germany. The most noticeable sign of uncertainty can be traced to the COVID period of 2020, but the numbers not only came back to normal immediately by 2021. Moreover by the year 2022, 60,000 more people received their first resident permits despite the economic crisis and the new government that has shown to have quite a harsh stance on inclusive migration policies. While educational and employment reasons remained stable, family reunification and other miscellaneous categories were shown to be more popular.

## Overall number of students

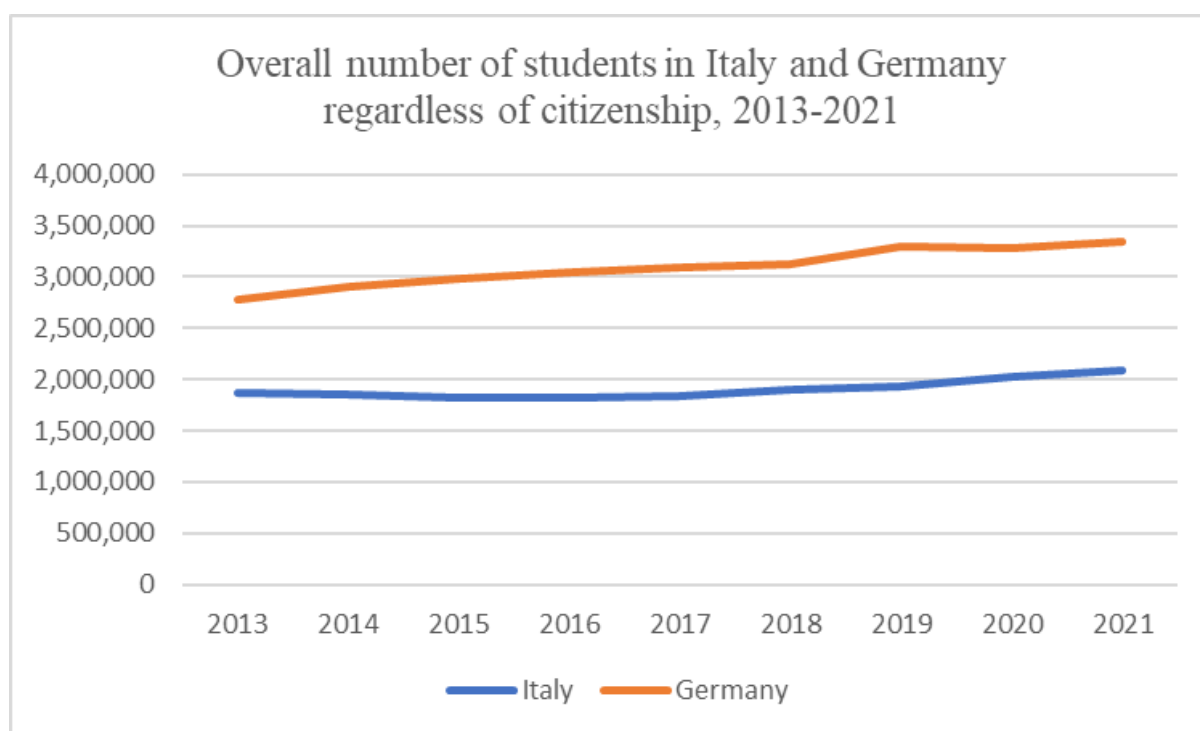
There is a worldwide tendency for growth in the sphere of higher education, despite numerous criticisms towards the development of the academic world, such as commodification of education, and others (see Chapter I). Below, the overall number of students for the past decade in Germany and Italy are represented. In this data we include all long-term students, local or international, regardless of citizenship, therefore their legal status is not considered.

Table 6. Overall number of students in Italy and Germany regardless of citizenship, 2013-2021

Country/Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Italy	1,872,693	1,854,360	1,826,477	1,815,950	1,837,051	1,895,990	1,937,761	2,030,768	2,096,778
Germany	2,780,013	2,912,203	2,977,781	3,043,084	3,091,694	3,127,927	3,296,249	3,280,033	3,351,573

Source: Eurostat

Figure 2. Overall number of students in Italy and Germany regardless of citizenship, 2013-2021



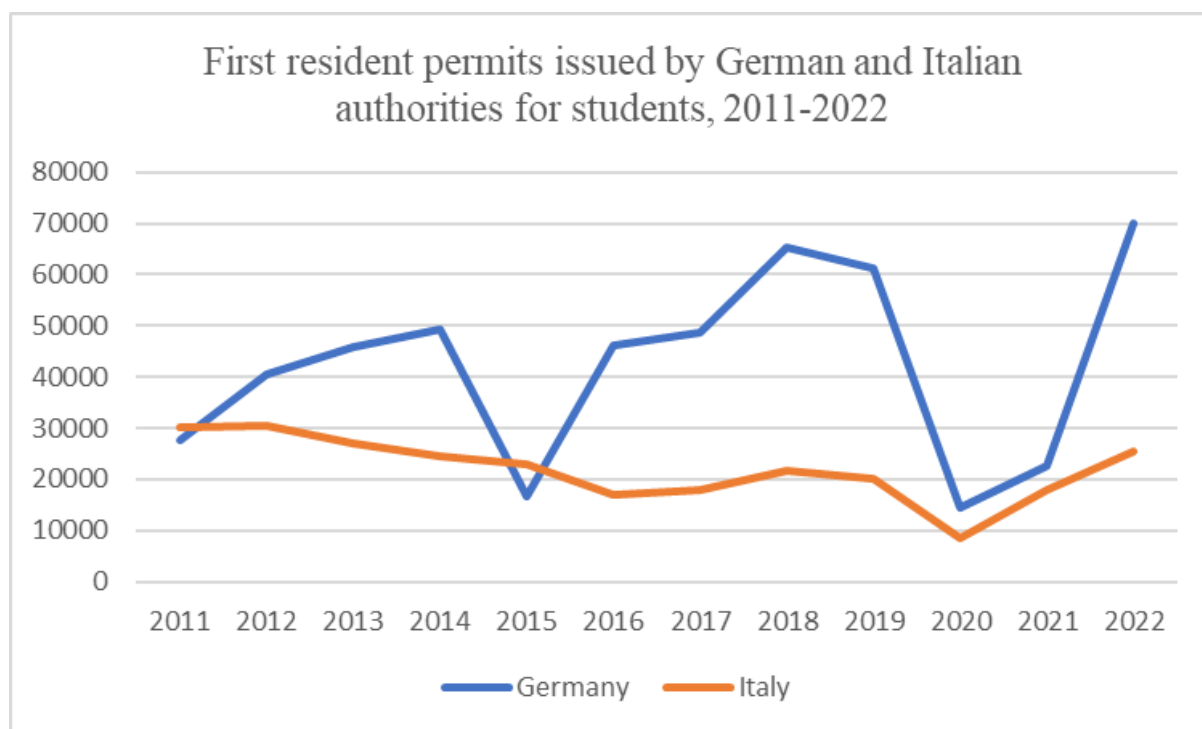
Source: Eurostat. Data processed by me

The overall number of students in both countries saw steady yet proportional growth of newly admitted students in the past 10 years. However, in the case of Italy, the period was slightly more turbulent as the number of students was noticeably yet slowly declining, only to pick up in 2017. The German data shows a half-million increase, which was only moderately challenged in 2020, which can markedly be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing quarantines. Impressively, this particular situation did not affect Italian institutions, which set the tendency for a roughly 3% yearly growth in new admissions. Germany, on the other hand, attracted 2% more freshly enrolled students, which was still enough to remain one of the most educated countries in the region.

### Student permits issued in Italy and Germany

It seems only rational to look into more detailed data regarding first residence permits for international students, coming from non-EU countries issued by German and Italian authorities on the grounds of studies.

Figure 3. Number of first resident permits issued by German and Italian authorities for students, 2011-2022



Source: Eurostat. Data processed by me

Table 7. Number of first resident permits issued by German and Italian authorities for students.

Country/ Year	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Germany	27,568	40,479	45,955	49,406	16,683	46,083	48,637	65,232	61,299	14,605	22,710	70,072
Italy	30,260	30,631	27,083	24,373	22,870	16,847	17,963	21,795	20,020	8,428	17,807	25,466

Source: Eurostat

As a part of this comparative study, it is evident that the numbers and tendencies of this particular category - education - is quite proportional to the overall quantity of new residence permits across all categories (see Figure 1). The overall number of students, however, is not necessarily comparable to this data, as it was already noted, the exponential growth was slow but steady in both cases. Despite the grand efforts to attract international students, the average rate of the international student body in both countries remains at 1% of all new students. Meaning that the number of extra-EU students, who are expected to outbalance growing youth emigration, does not show an adequate growth rate to substitute for highly mobile local graduates (see Chapter V). When it comes to international students, there are certain inconsistencies that become apparent, specifically in the German case. The previously mentioned bureaucratic disorder also seems to play its role in 2015. Italy, on the other hand, although started strongly, gaining almost 3,000 more international students in 2011, has seen more decreases and only slight increases throughout the decade. Only by 2022 a significant improvement. However, that number is still 20% less than 2011 figures.

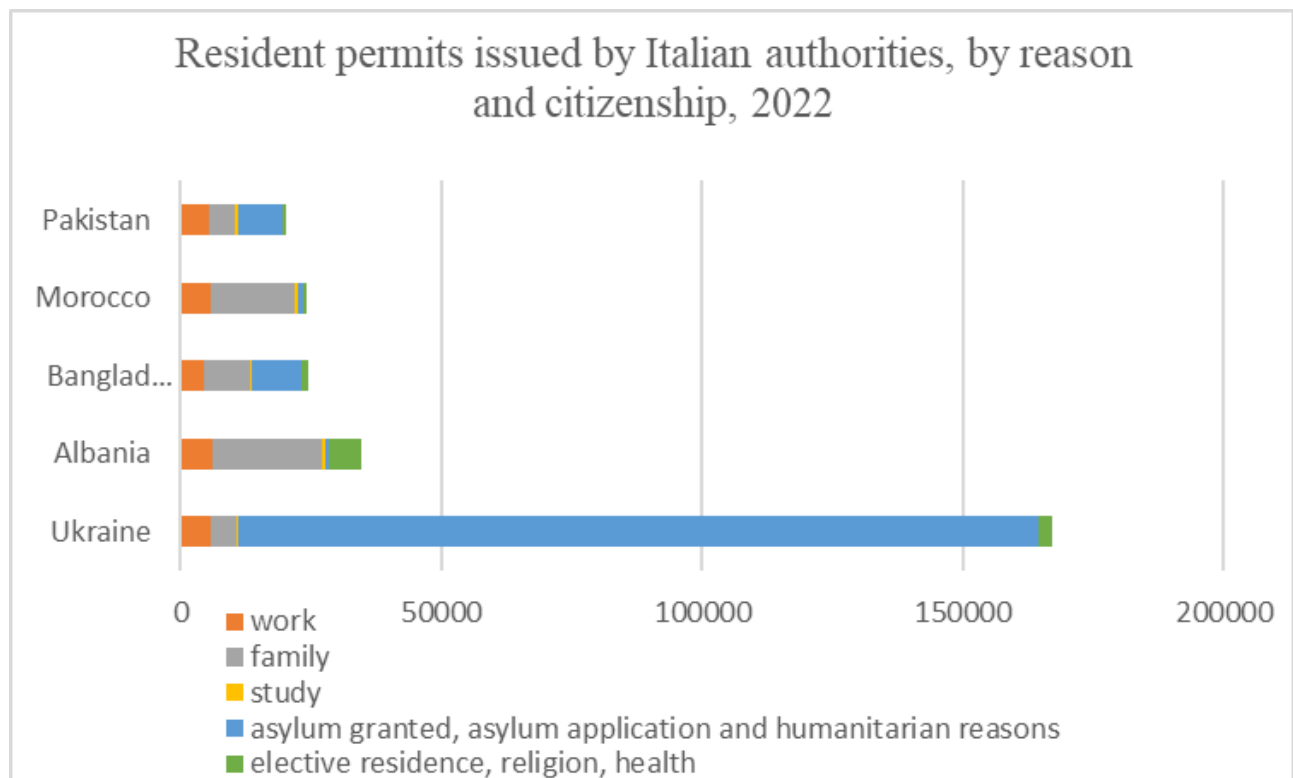
## Students by citizenship

### Italy. Data and case studies

In Italy, apart from the all-European statistical office Eurostat, and ISTAT - the Italian National Institute of Statistics, there is another official body that can be reliable for research, especially when it comes to data regarding education within the country. It is the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (Ministero dell'università e della ricerca). The open data provided will prove to be particularly useful in conducting this research.

First, we will present the 5 countries whose citizens chose Italy as the main destination of migration, sorted out by their citizenship. The data is concerned with the non-EU citizens, who have to apply for short or long-term residence permits in Italy.

Figure 4. Resident permits issued by Italian authorities, by reason and citizenship in 2022



Source: ISTAT. Data processed by me

Apart from the sudden spike in applications from Ukrainian people in the wake of Russian intervention in Ukraine which led to another high-grade refugee crisis in Europe, most applications for residence permit on the grounds of work and family reunification were granted to Albanian, Bangladeshi and Moroccan nationals. Family reunification is noticeably a more demanded category. However, in terms of student migration, the situation is drastically different.

Here, we will take a look at the countries of origin of the majority of international students in Italy. For the past decade the top-3 countries that tend to send their most talented youth to pursue their academic careers and choose Italy as their main destination remained almost invariable: China has been and to this day remains the first sending country number wise in terms of students coming to Italy with the goal to pursue higher education. This trend has been maintained for at least a decade now. The next 2 spots have, however, changed overtime. By 2023 the second most popular sending country is Iran, a position that before used to belong to Cameroon. Recently, Indian students have also shown a particular demand for Italian education, which is another universal trend.

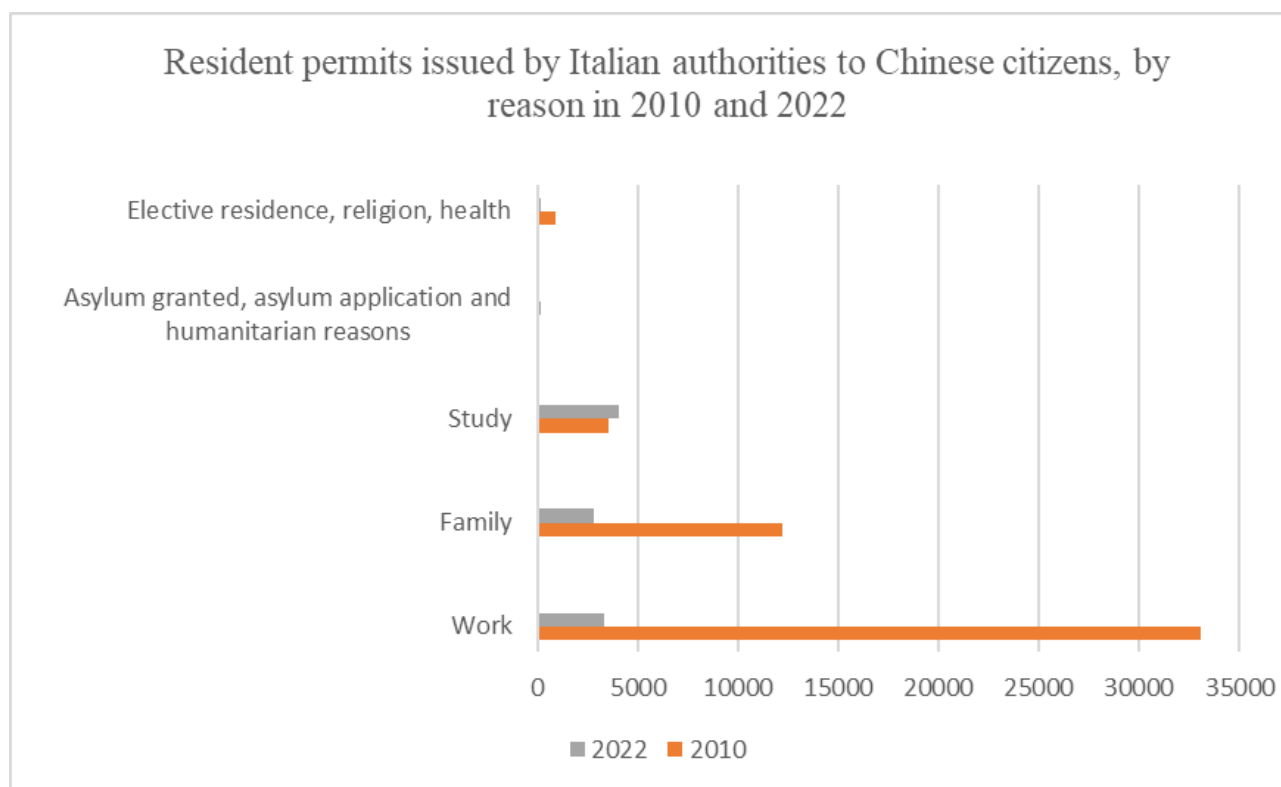
Below, in order to give a data-based approach to the comparative study, we will make an attempt at giving a full statistical scope of the number of students coming from the three aforementioned countries for the past decade, as well as the social and political context that these countries - China,

Cameroon and Iran - exist in nowadays. Moreover, the local communities and diasporas representing these countries in Italy will be discussed, too.

### Chinese community in Italy and student statistics

In the past decade the Chinese community in Italy grew significantly, and that trend also had an impact on the education sector. While studying has always been a popular reason to move to Italy among Chinese nationals, work migration and moving for family reasons used to occur more frequently in 2010 (see Figure 5). Today, however, that is not the case, as the difference between study purpose visas and other types is relatively small, as shown in the graph below.

Figure 5. Number of resident permits issued by Italian authorities to Chinese citizens, by reason, 2010 and 2022

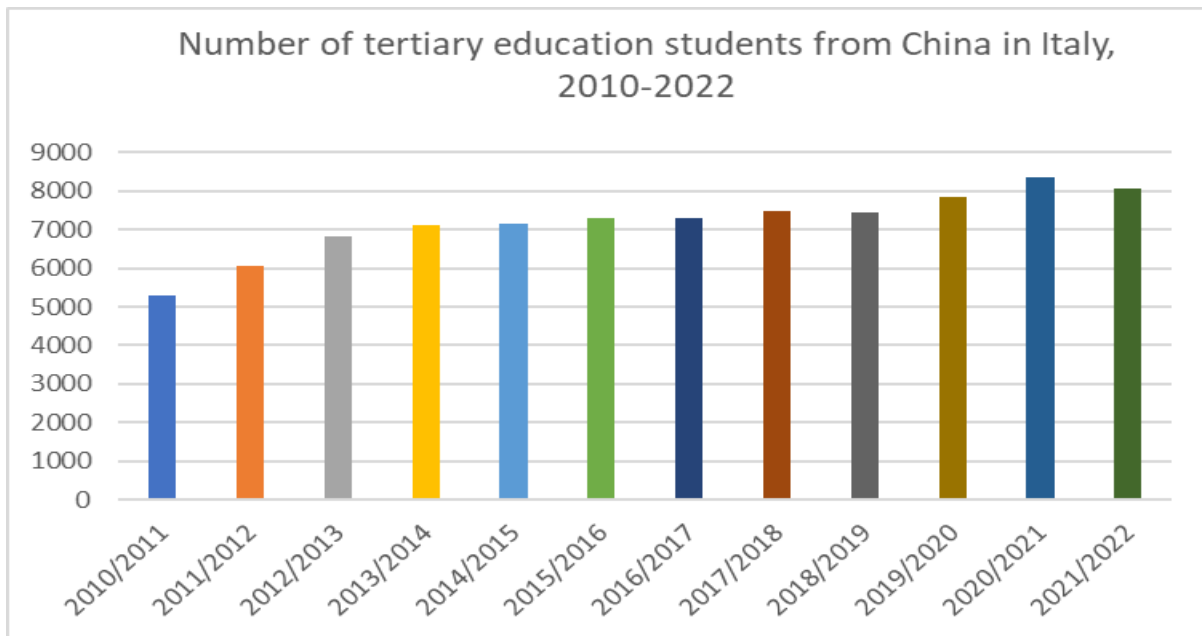


Source: ISTAT. Data processed by me

Since 2011, the number of students rose by 3,000 from 5,000 to 8,000 people in all levels of tertiary education. The average yearly growth rate is shown to be around 4%. That being said, during a significant chunk of the decade, notably years from 2014 to 2017, the growth could almost remain inconspicuous as it did not raise over an occasional 2 percent. The reason it catches the attention is that the average rate of growth between the years of 2011-2013 was about 13%.

However, the growth never stopped, just slowed down. Even during the year of Covid-19, bearing in mind that both China and Italy held some of the strictest quarantine rules, the quantity of students not only did not remain the same, but also rose by an additional 200 persons.

Figure 6. Number of tertiary education students from China in Italy, 2010-2022



Source: Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca, MUR. Data processed by me

#### Reasons for migration

The Chinese diaspora in Italy is relatively young, and went with the flow of Italy becoming a popular immigration destination among foreigners.

The high mobility of Chinese nationals is manifested through the transnational character of the Chinese diaspora across the European continent and strong local community and family ties.

Through such strings, the members of diasporic communities establish job opportunities and most importantly, opening up paths for legalisation in Italy. Moreover, a lot of Chinese families took advantage of migrant amnesty programs in the late 90s and 2000s to legalise their stay and bring family members from China to fully settle down. They are now largely centred in Tuscany, Lombardy and Veneto regions.

The profile of the Chinese migrant changed overtime, too. The first wave in many cases consisted of low-skilled workers, coming predominantly to the North of Italy to work for factories and manufacturers.

As of 2023, there are at least 300,000 Chinese immigrants in Italy, employed in diverse sectors of the Italian economy. Many are business owners themselves, running convenience stores or ethnic restaurants.

However, in terms of acceptance within majorly conservative Italian society, the members of the diaspora rarely felt welcomed in the country. Some young second and third-generation migrants, sometimes born and raised in Italy, even if eligible for Italian citizenship, choose to reject it, and report a certain feeling of disconnect with Italian lands, despite roots that go back to 40 years ago<sup>7</sup>. However, the sentimental connection to the homeland is not the only reason. The Chinese state, in fact, does not accept double citizenship in any case, which unnecessarily overcomplicates travels back home, whether long or short-term.

Now the average Chinese immigrant is a young person, who is high achieving back home, too, which is proven, mostly, by academic excellence based on high scores received on the Gāokǎo National Exam - a very challenging graduation exam, that is required for university admission, that has been heavily criticised for its competitive nature, the pressure that is put on fresh high school graduates and the multiple choice format that lacks practical use (Gierczyk and Diao, 2021). It is assumed that most international students coming from China are those scoring at least 400 points out of 750, since Italian institutions accept Gāokǎo results, with a passing score of 400 for Bachelor's degree studies. Therefore, practice is to take the National exam that allows enrollment in various education systems around the world, including Italy, remains common. Italy, in this case, acts as a safe choice, due to admission requirements, affordable higher education, and, most importantly, established migrant network and local Chinese communities.

While the discussions on brain drain are getting louder in China by day, taking into account rapid demographic changes in the country and at least 1 million students who already chose other countries or even continents, the Foreign Secretary does not shun away from finding programs that promote international education for Chinese students. Thanks to the bilateral agreement between China and Italy, one of the most impactful educational cooperation opportunities is “The Marco Polo Programme”, the name of which comes not only from the association of the traveller's name that brings up Italy, but also from the fact that this historic figure worked in China as a diplomat a few centuries ago. The programme allows not only to study in the university, but also to take Italian language courses prior to the commencement of the main study course in order to accelerate the speed of social adaptation. However, not all universities offer linguistic courses that will make a student eligible for this program. In the beginning, only a handful foreigner-focus establishments such as the University for Foreigners of Perugia, the University for Foreigners of

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<sup>7</sup> “Why Second-Generation Chinese Migrants in Italy Don't Want Citizenship,” euronews, January 30, 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/01/30/why-second-generation-chinese-migrants-in-italy-eschew-citizenship>.



Siena, the Third University of Rome, the "Dante Alighieri" Society, the University for Foreigners of Reggio Calabria accepted the candidates, along with some private owned language schools. Now, most Italian universities take part in the program, through their own linguistic centres.

Apart from the linguistic advantages, the programme gives access to university courses that frequently have quotas on the number of international, meaning non-EU, students. However, the main benefit that participation in this program brings is the ability to convert the short term visa that allowed them to enter Italy into a long-term study residence permit without leaving the country, while students from other countries taking language courses would be required to re-apply for a new study visa in the country of origin if they chose to pursue a degree in Italian university. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic has not completely stopped student mobility from China, has noticeably suspended the flows and made everyone take a step back and ponder over transcontinental mobility for educational purposes as an economically sustainable choice, when a significant number of courses are still offered online. Some predict that the mobility will not stop completely, but will change directions, dethroning East-West trajectory in favour of East-East path. Many claim that the feeling of independence and adulthood that came with moving countries, adaptation in a different cultures and all other obstacles that come with international education were not reciprocated during the quarantines and made many students reconsider the choice to study abroad as a viable one, due to unnecessary amount of anxiety and stress connected to COVID restrictions, that became a new normal over time.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the scientific and academic advancement that has been on the rise in China for the past few years could also play a role in the reduction of the number of Chinese students abroad. However, a difficult economic situation in Italy post-COVID made some Chinese students make a difficult decision to go back home, as the prospects of better employment with a foreign degree would be higher there. Not only that, but also the proximity to the family that, as it was discovered, could be taken away with travel restrictions at any given time played a big role in these decisions.

#### Cameroonian community in Italy and student statistics

The case of Cameroonian students in Italy is quite interesting. In the beginning of the decade, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Education, they were in the lead among international students who sought higher education in Italy. The numbers, however, were quite telling, as even in the most productive year of 2008 there were 4,000 less people than Chinese students who enrolled the same year.

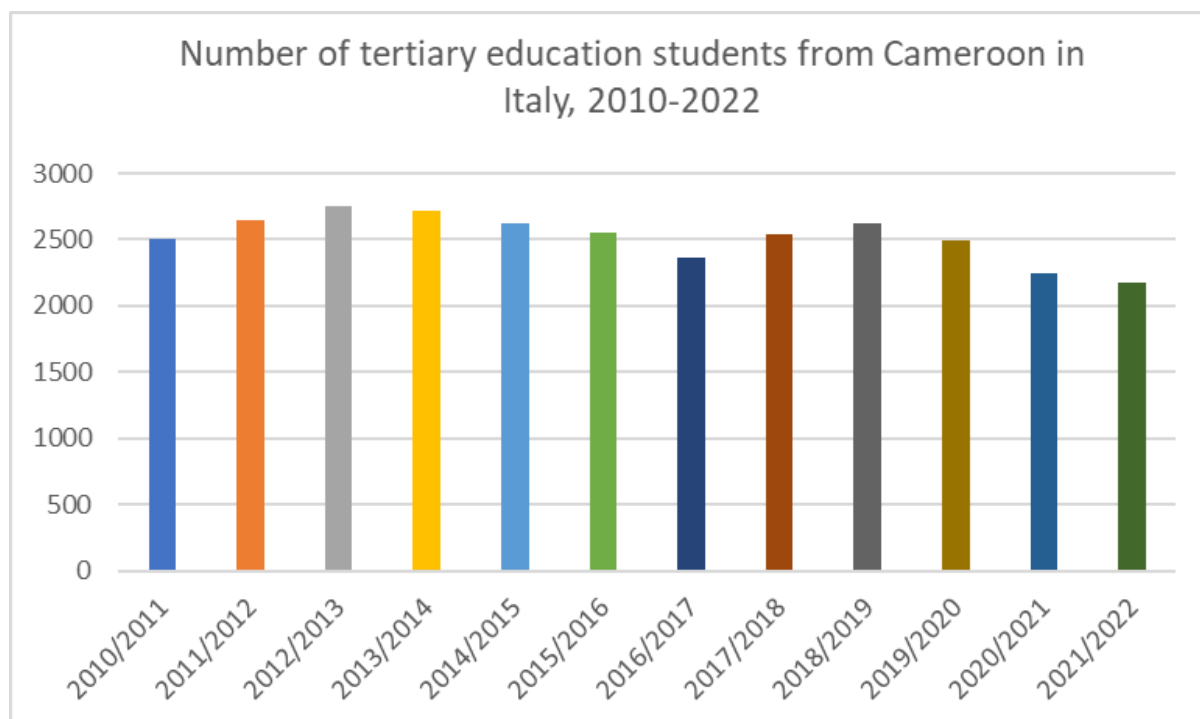
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<sup>8</sup> "Less Chinese Students in Italy?," Monsuni, January 22, 2021, <https://www.monsuni.com/less-chinese-students-in-italy/>.

From that period, a lot of parameters changed. The coefficients only kept decreasing, there is, unfortunately, no growth rate to be observed. While a short period of 2 years from 2017 to 2019 was hopeful, the sudden drop by 5% was significant in 2020. The number of students struggled to return back to the rates of the early 2010-s.

As of the most recent statistics, once in the top-3 sending countries, currently Cameroon does not even crack the top-5 among countries where students choose Italy as their destination of studying.

Figure 7. Number of tertiary education students from Cameroon in Italy, 2010-2022



Source: Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca, MUR. Data processed by me

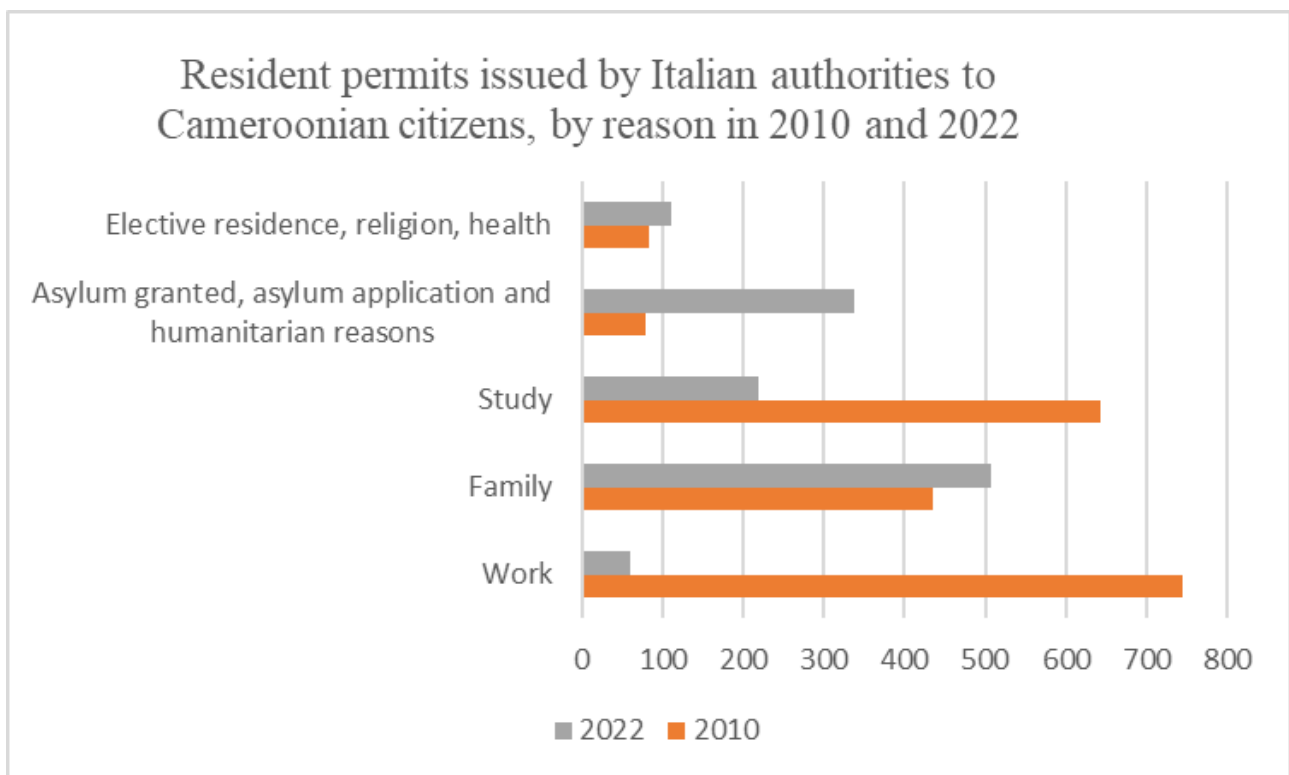
#### Reasons for migration

The Cameroonian community in southern and western Europe is among the recent ones who predominantly arrived by sea to such Italian islands as Lampedusa in the wake of recent political events that led up to violent military conflicts within the country and ethnic tension. According to numerous human rights focused watchdogs, at least 6,000 people were killed as a result of confrontation between Anglophone-speaking community and Francophone-led government officials starting from 2016. It did not finish there, but continued with uncountable kidnapping attempts, rise in sexual violence, and separatist movement proclaiming the territory as “Ambazonia” on the west of the country with the English speaking majority. Since then, the security of citizens was not prioritised, which consequently led to major refugee migration, predominantly through Tunisia. According to migrants themselves, as well as political experts, the local population is not quite

accepting of recent migrants, and the tension rising between them might be supported by the Tunisian government, which is actively trying to get rid of the wave of refugees coming from Central Africa (Nardi, 2023).

As of now, the Cameroonian community in Italy is not scarce, and the majority of those eligible for residence permits receive it through family reunification policy or for education purposes, which is a drastic change in comparison with the beginning of the last decade (Machetti and Siebetcheu, 2013) (see Fig.8 below). The local conflict, powered by linguistic supremacy, could lead to interrupted education practices, especially for the English-speaking part of the country,

Figure 8. Resident permits issued by Italian authorities to Cameroonian citizens, 2010 and 2022



Source: ISTAT. Data processed by me

However, the cooperation on the grounds of education between the Italian and Cameroonian governments continues. Promoted by the Ministry of Justice of Cameroon and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, also responsible for the national scholarship programme given out to international students, the program focuses on international criminal law. Taking place in the Sant’Anna School of Advanced studies in Pisa, the training program is a part of the project "Strengthening the judicial systems of African countries through training", established with the goal to strengthen the rule of law in West and Central Africa<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> "The Collaboration between Italy and Cameroon Continues: Starting, in Yaoundé, the Course on International Crimes, Organized by the Sant’Anna School with the Support of the Farnesina and the

Moreover, in early 2022 it was reported that a number of Cameroonian students who received tertiary training in Italy, set up a few projects intending to promote diverse causes within Cameroon. Such causes include sustainable energy technologies, mass building materials production, agricultural development among others. As it is evident from the goal of the program, it is intended that these students not only receive quality education in Europe, but also use their newly acquired skills and knowledge for the best of their homeland, despite challenging political circumstances.

As told by the Italian Ambassador to Cameroon, after this experience these students are seen as a link that connects Italy, and Europe at large with Cameroon, that will be there to increase cooperation and create an attractive economic environment for investment and development. For those migrants or refugees who choose to stay in Italy, there is another program focused primarily on Master degree students, who are citizens of Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria holding a refugee status. This initiative called University Corridors for Refugees (UNICORE 4.0) is supported by around 30 universities across the country and guarantees diverse advantages such as monthly scholarships, transportation reimbursement as well as bureaucratic support within local migration services. Depending on the size of the university, there are from 1 to 5 grants allocated to each university. Moreover, the university itself might give bonus scholarships in addition to the main one. For instance, the University of Bergamo offers surplus 500 euros of monthly pocket money, free access to the university canteen, tax exemption on the tuition fee, as well as free Italian language courses. The program is supported by the UNHCR in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and local refugee rights organisations such as Caritas Italiana.

#### Iranian community In Italy and student statistics

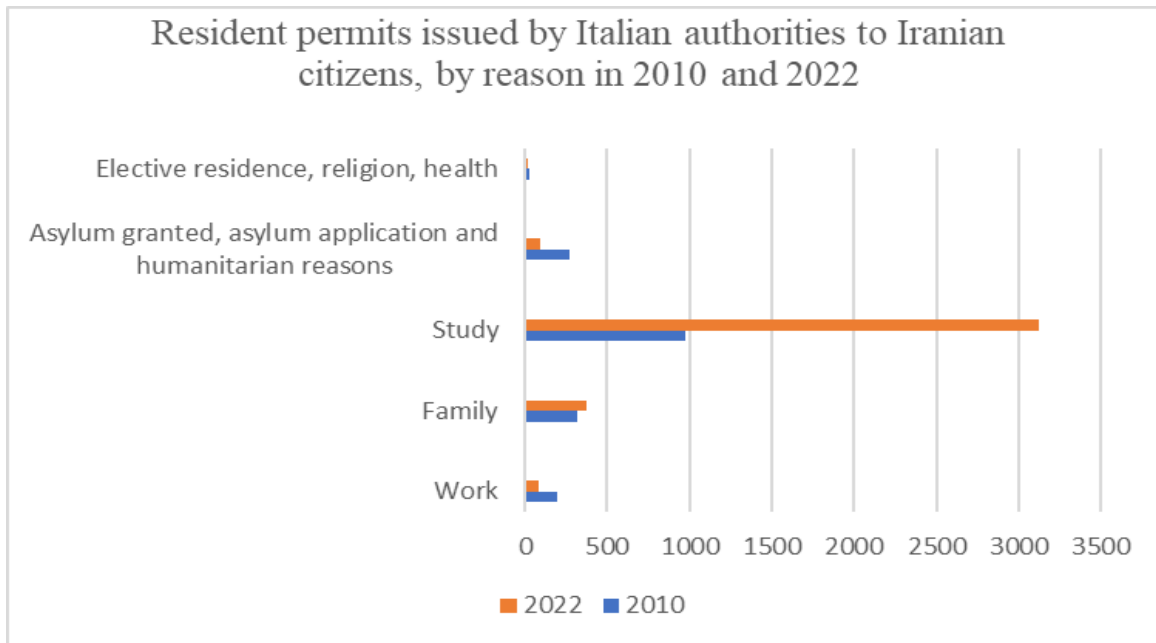
While Italy has always been a quite popular destination for Iranian students, back in 2010 their number did not reach even 2,000 people. Even in that case, they were right after Cameroon in our data.

In fact, education is the prime reason for Iranians to move out to Italy, while the number of successful applications for work permits and other reasons is relatively low (see Fig 9.)

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Collaboration of Local Counterparts," Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, accessed January 9, 2024, <http://www.santannapisa.it/en/news/collaboration-between-italy-and-cameroon-continues-starting-yaounde-course-international>.

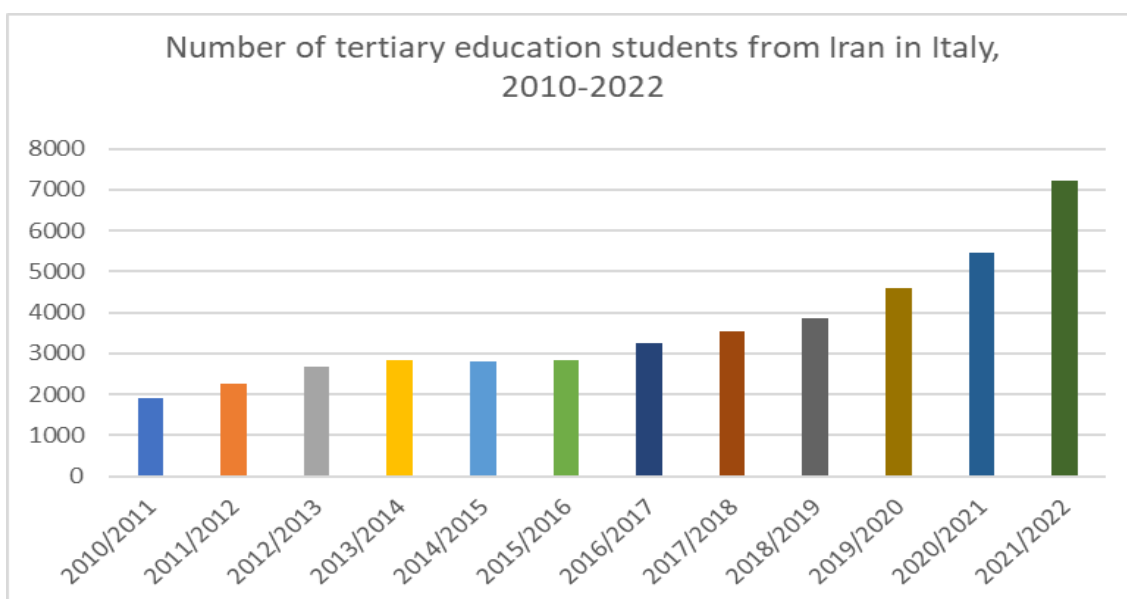
Figure 9. Resident permits issued by Italian authorities to Iranian citizens, by reason, 2010 and 2022



Source: ISTAT. Data processed by me

However, unlike Cameroon, the rate of growth of the quantity of Iranian students increased by an astonishing rate of 13% a year. For this reason, a humble number of 1,800 represented in 2010 within a decade full of global events and crises rose by over 300% and reached 7200 people.

Figure 10. Number of tertiary education students from Iran in Italy, 2010-2022



Source: Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca, MUR. Data processed by me

## Reasons for migration

The ties between Iran and Italy are strong, whether migratory or economic ones. Despite the complex political situation and impact of international sanctions imposed on Iran, Italy, in fact, is one of the most important trading European partners, exporting around half a billion dollars worth of products each year, according to OEC.

Moreover, after the Islamic Revolution of the late 70s, Iranian students were the second largest group, while the other places were occupied by neighbouring European countries (Bahrami and Rostami, 2019) . They were represented by almost 3,000 students. As of 2023, while the local Iranian community is not that numerous, reaching almost 14000 Iranian nationals, the community is closely connected and organised, which is especially important in the wake of the new wave of protests in the country.

Italian universities, on occasion, try to find ways to support Iranian students through scholarships and various study programmes. For one, The University of Tuscia in a picturesque region of Toscana introduced “Scholarships for Afghan and Iranian Women Students” as a response to the uprising of the misogynistic governments led by Taliban in Afghanistan and The Revolutionary Guards in Iran. This particular aid program gives a chance to female students along with additional monthly stipends to those who are citizens of the two countries and have already requested asylum in Italy (Alizada, 2023) .

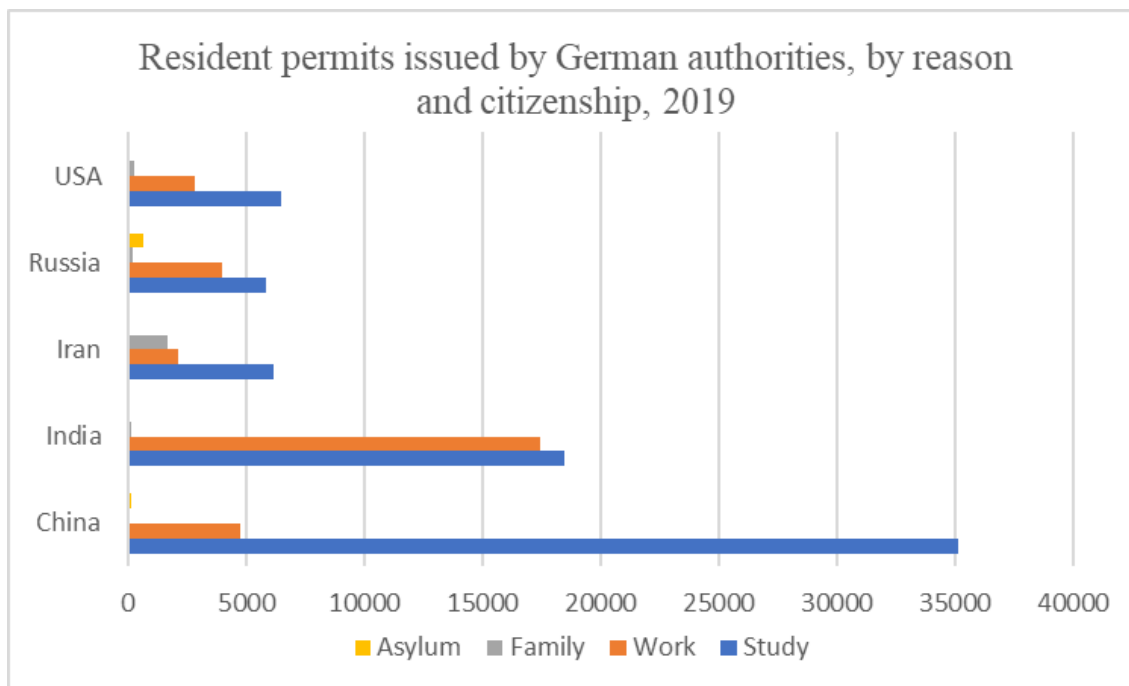
However, a number of Iranian students not only in Italy, but in other countries inside the European Union report difficulties, especially financial ones. To get into specifics, the lack of stability with the local currency Rial and general deficit of physical euros and dollars inside the country led to many people who require international currencies to convert hard earned money on black market at a rate that is almost 15% higher than in official banks. Moreover, the limit one person can convert is established by the government and now is 2200 euros, which is why prospective students have to turn to the black market in order to sustain life outside of the country at least before the scholarship is issued. Nevertheless, since it is statistically more probable to receive a regional scholarship, issued by respective governments of each Italian region, it is imperative that students receive their ISEE calculated within the imposed deadline. However, even this does not come without unnecessary trouble, as, due to the confusion with the Iranian currency, the coefficient of ISEE might be calculated incorrectly, which could potentially jeopardise the chances to receive any governmental support (Cegalin, 2022). Taking into account the fact that the funding for such types of financial aid slowly decreases, especially for international students, it is no wonder that many Iranian nationals have to consider the possible rising cost of studying abroad to be a defining factor when making the decision to participate in international education.

## Germany. Data and case studies

Migration trends towards Germany seem more or less reflective of student mobility trends, which will be explored later in this chapter, especially for Indian and Russian communities members of which apply for student permits almost as frequently as for employment-related documents.

Here, the 5 most important countries, whose citizens received the biggest number of residence permits for different reasons in 2019 in Germany.

Figure 11. Resident permits issued by German authorities, by reason and citizenship, 2019



Source: Destatis.Statistisches bundesamt. Data processed by me

Germany prouds itself in being one of the top-5 countries that students choose to study in, coming just after the US, Australia and the UK (UNESCO, 2022). As it was mentioned earlier, it is also the most popular non-English speaking country among students. However, a wide accessibility of courses provided in English does come in handy when it comes to international students. Around 70% of German universities and institutes of applied sciences offer English-based programs in various fields (Bruder, 2015).

As of 2022, there were around 300,000 international students in Germany, which comes to around 10% of the total number of students in the country. In 2022, 70,000 of them received resident permits for the first time on the grounds of having study visas.

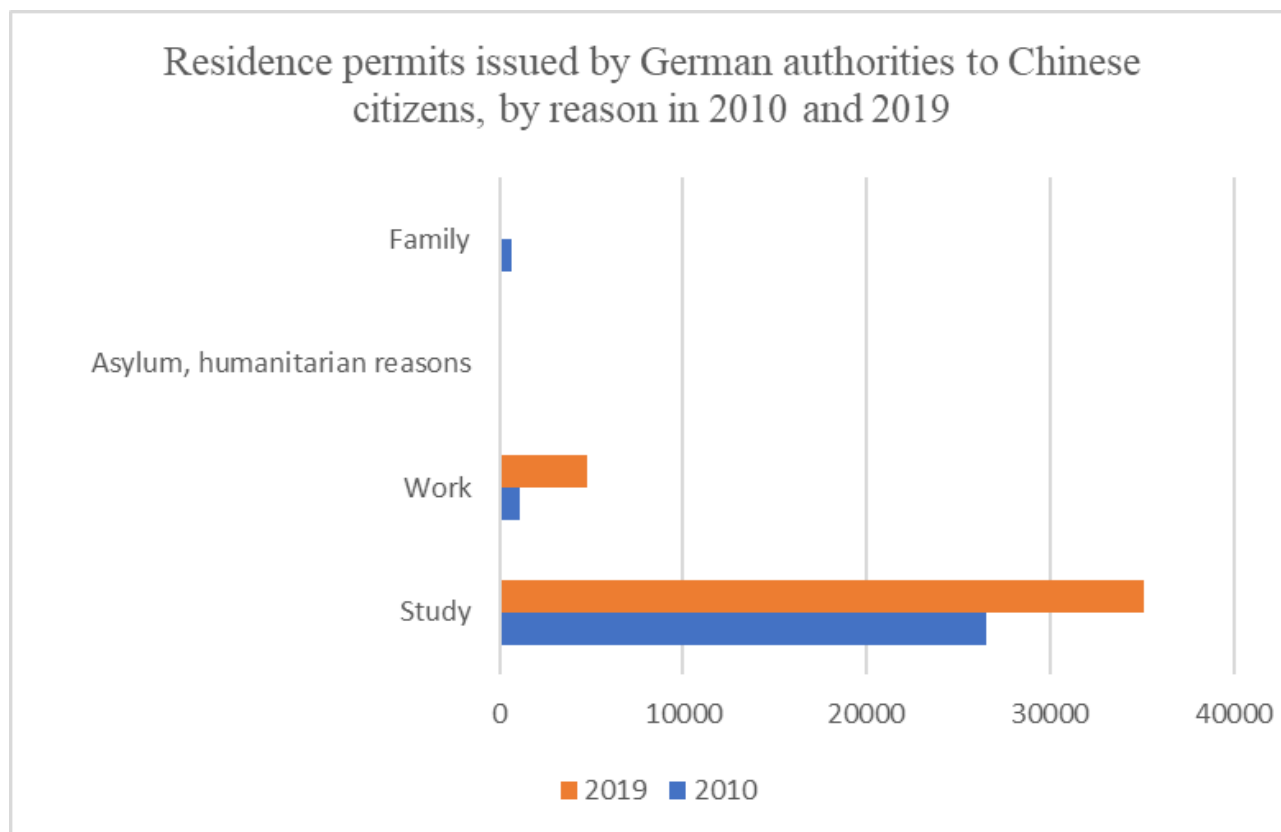
As for the number of students coming from specific countries, in this case, just like in Italy, Chinese students have constituted a vast majority, by a significantly high margin.

However, the top-3 sending countries have been more fluid than in the case with Italy for the past decade. In this period, the countries that managed to break that milestone include such countries as: Russia, Turkey, India and Syria. Germany’s active labour market, welcoming migration policies for those who graduate within the country as well as open refugee policies can be attributed to these particular statistics.

### Chinese community and Chinese students

The Chinese community in Germany is quite numerous and established. However, according to the statistics below, most Chinese nationals start their journey in Germany through study purposes visa, which then might be followed by employment-related residence permit. Moreover, residence permits for asylum seekers and refugees are not a frequent occurrence in the case of Chinese migrants, neither in the beginning nor in the end of the last decade.

Figure 12. Resident permits issued by German authorities to Chinese citizens, by reason, 2010 and 2019



Source: Destatis.Statistisches bundesamt. Data processed by me

The latest comprehensive study on the student mobility to Germany lists China as the biggest student sending country on all levels of higher education. By 2021, 41,000 students of Chinese origin were documented in the DAAD system - the main agency, which takes care of international

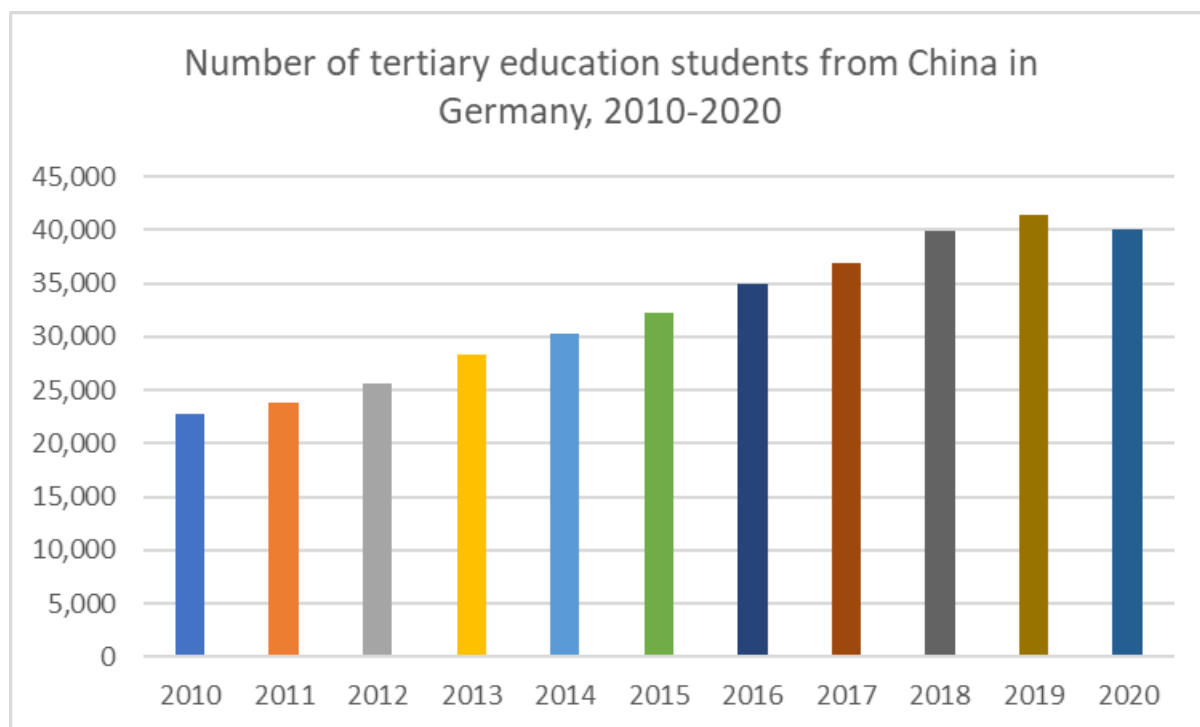


students coming to Germany (see Chapter II) - almost half of whom were pursuing Master's degrees, and a third were seeking their first Bachelor's diplomas.

By the start of the previous decade their number was two times lower than today. But it was growing exponentially year-by-year. With an average yearly growth rate of around 5%, this result was destined to be achieved. However, a slight slump was witnessed in 2020 during the peak of COVID-19 restrictions. That year only 40,122 Chinese students arrived in Germany, which constituted 2% less than the year before.

The year 2013 saw the highest growth rate in a decade. 11% more students chose Germany as their destination that year, which is double of the average rate. Yet, even then the 30,000 landmark was not achieved, the number remaining at 28,000 students. Only a year later this milestone would be cracked, and another 6 years later another high point of 40,000 Chinese students studying in Germany.

Figure 13. Number of tertiary education students from China in Germany, 2010-2022



Source: DAAD Statistics. Data processed by me

#### Reasons for migration

The socioeconomic profile of an international student of Chinese origin differs greatly from the one, to say, from Iran. While lower tuition fees across German universities and general availability of scholarships are an important factor for many Chinese students, they rely on financial support coming from families (DAAD, 2017a: 32). The reasons are not only economic but also cultural, due to the possible stigmatisation imposed by the Chinese society as a so-called “garbage-student”

(留学垃圾, liúxué lājī) (Zhou, 2010). However, the real rate of families who could afford to educate their offspring abroad is relatively low, as the middle class in the country has only just started to take shape. Therefore, being able to afford sending kids to study, especially to such a country as Germany, where the average cost of living is relatively high, is not an universal experience. It might also seem that studying abroad is an important step in a confirmation of one's status and prestige, yet the continuous economic growth within the country has in many ways impacted local education, too. Hence, it became more difficult to convince Chinese students to participate in international education mobility. This situation coupled with the government's subtle mainly successful attempt to reverse the brain drain, according to the experts, will eventually lead to a decrease in the number of Chinese students abroad (Shen, 2008).

The long standing issue of ageing population that is a result of short-sighted demographic policies could potentially represent a bigger threat to the Chinese officials, the effort put into keeping high potential candidates inside the local education system could be best described as subtle. Moreover, international mobility, if not is actively encouraged, is definitely not discouraged by the officials, as long as the community of Chinese nationals outside of the mainland grows and stays closely knitted. However, such encouragement comes with a price of freedom for Chinese students who receive governmental scholarships. As according to German investigative watchdogs in cooperation with DW, in 2023 the evidence suggested that the recipients of the China Scholarship Council (CSC) sponsored by the Ministry of Education of China upon accepting the aid are required to sign a document that is full of certain vague statements, such as a promise to not harm China's security and to pledge loyalty, coupled with more firm requirements such as keeping "frequent contact" with the local Chinese embassy, which includes updates on academic successes of the student as well as their private life.

The document goes as far as to include the student's family, requiring to name 2 "guarantors" who will be limited in mobility, and will be held responsible along with the recipient of the scholarship in case any clause of the contract is breached. Since the aid itself is quite generous, reaching 75,000 euros per 4 years, no wonder that quite a few students use the opportunity, even if they are obliged to work in China for 2 years after completing the education level. In the past 15 years, at least 30 universities have welcomed such scholars, and very rarely such issues have been raised, despite the fact that academic freedom from political influence is an important clause in the German constitution, the government is, technically, powerless, which let the universities decide upon the action they were willing to take against such ideological influence. The Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (LMU) is considered one of the main partners of CSC, having welcomed almost 500 students sponsored by the programme, as of late 2023, has not frozen the cooperation with the board, while Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg (FAU) has

indefinitely suspended acceptance of students receiving the CSC scholarship due to fears of industrial espionage.<sup>10</sup> The local officials expect other universities to follow suit, however, it is important to take into account that FAU had relatively low number of CSC students, unlike LMU or Frei University of Berlin, that if not actively profit from this cooperation, use it as a mean to save money as they do not have to, for example, pay the students who work in laboratories or on diverse expensive research projects when the Chinese government is more than willing to fund them (Steinhardt and Habich-Sobiegalla 2022).

The decision was heavily criticised by the experts in Chinese domestic policy, as “going against political reality in China ” and it is highlighted that the difference between DAAD-funded scholarship and CSC is not as drastic as it might seem on the first glance. The same discussions are actively taking place in other European countries, such as Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands. Since the German tried to remain impartial, it acted in a more subtle way. For example, in the April of 2023 it was announced that DAAD - a governmentally funded organisation - is expanding the KIWI foundation, that is specifically designed to deal with international cooperation strategies and foreign universities. While the scandal of CSC is nowhere to be found in the press release for this expansion, the hints are easily identified, especially through mentions of support demanded by German institutions in working with their collaborators<sup>11</sup>.

This situation raised diverse questions in the world of international education. First, is governmental cooperation possible without political interference? Especially, such an issue becomes relevant when it comes to countries with such autocratic regimes, where international mobility is encouraged, but not for the experience of students themselves, but for the betterment of the country. The second question that should be asked is who is to blame and if somebody should be punished for participating in collaboration, even if it was done with the best of intentions. Unfortunately, most of the time the students themselves would become the most harmed targets in discussions alike, as universities would lack the power or will to go against a powerful foreign regime in order to avoid international scandal.

### Indian community and Indian students

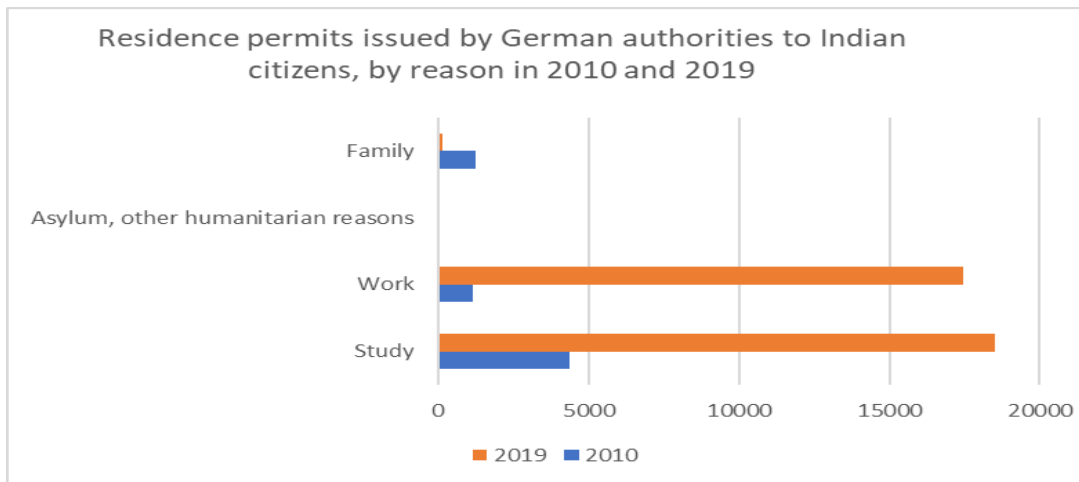
With a growing Indian population and economy, outbound migration became a natural development, which could be seen on Fig. 14 , as the difference between work and study migration numbers in 2010 and 2019 are striking, while family reunification programs for now seem to be less appealing.

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<sup>10</sup> The PIE News, “German University Suspends China-Funded Students and Researchers,” September 1, 2023, <https://thepienews.com/news/german-university-china-students-researchers/>.

<sup>11</sup> DAAD expands guidance services for German higher education institutions [https://www.daad.de/en/the-daad/communication-publications/press/press\\_releases/daad-baut-kiwi-aus\\_2023/](https://www.daad.de/en/the-daad/communication-publications/press/press_releases/daad-baut-kiwi-aus_2023/)

Figure 14. Residence permits issued by German authorities to Indian citizens, by reason, 2010 and 2019



Source: Destatis.Statistisches bundesamt. Data processed by me

As a country of origin, India first slowly, but later very steadily became one of the nations that sends their young specialists to study beyond the borders, where frequently the government or some local corporations offer either tuition fee waivers, scholarships for the duration of studies or guaranteed employment by the end of chosen courses. These attempts at encouragement were instrumental and made Indian students distinctly relevant for this study.

When examining the numbers closer, the exceptional quantitative growth immediately catches the eye. In 2010, there were only 4,800 Indian students studying in Germany. The number itself is quite high, but is disproportionate to the population growth rates of the country, which by the beginning of the last decade already surpassed 1 billion. There is no denying that the tough economic situation, such as a strikingly high poverty rate of an average 20% (Alok, 2020) as well as generally low life quality were one of the main reasons for it. Moreover, the average literacy rate as of 2011 in India did not surpass 77%, while in China, for example, it was about 95% (UNESCO, 2011). Hence, the striking difference in the number of mobile students between the two countries constituted around 20,000 people.

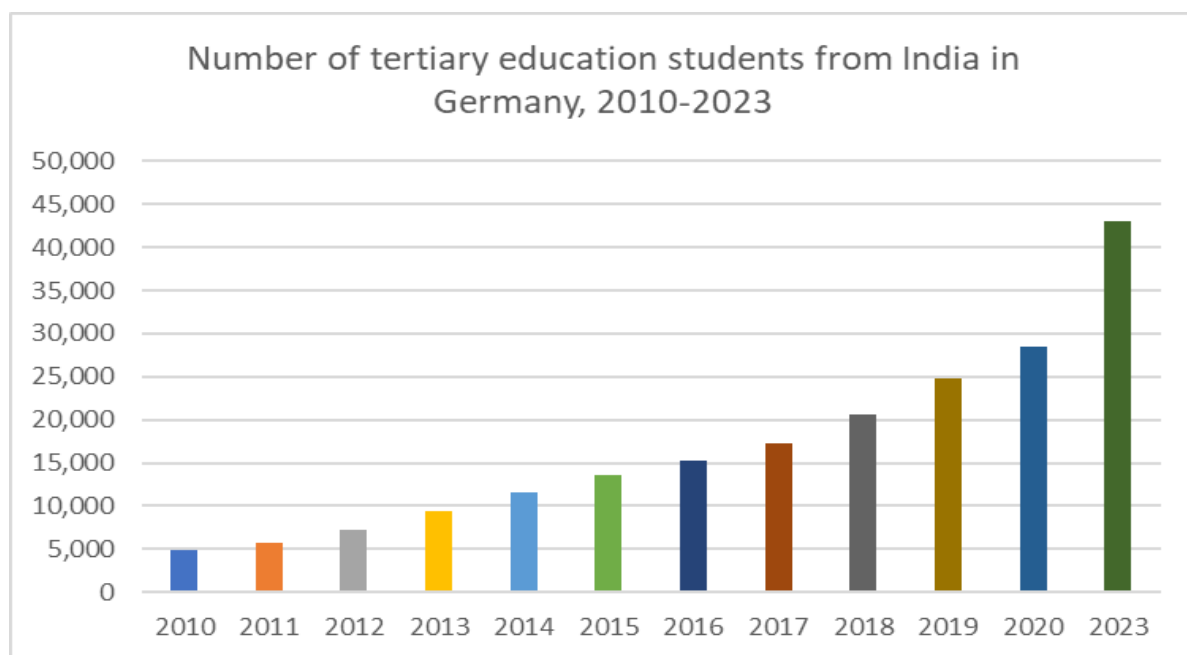
India, on the other hand, has one of the lowest proportions of international students enrolled in higher education systems among OECD and partner countries with available data (OECD, 2021). However, with a decade a lot of things changed. The growth rate of the number of the Indian students enrolled in German tertiary education surpassed an yearly average of 20%. In 2013, the number rose by almost 30% in comparison to the previous year, which is a boost that was not met yet in the course of this research. By 2020, the number was reaching the 30,000 mark.

While this study was conducted, DAAD India released the latest statistics, claiming that the number

of Indian students reached almost 43000 people, the growth rate equaled 26%, which is unprecedented for the local agency. <sup>12</sup> Distinctively, the average growth rate for the number of foreign students in Germany constitutes at about 3% yearly. Around 60% of those students chose Engineering degrees as their majors, while a little over 20% focus on Social studies. Close to half of them come down in favour of Universities of Applied Sciences.

While gender parity is not in the focus of this research, it is important to note that the gender ratio among these future specialists is 70% male and only 30% female. This fact could be a starting point for fruitful research in the future.

Figure 15. Number of tertiary education students from India in Germany, 2010-2023, excluding 2021-2022



Source: DAAD Statistics. Data processed by me

#### Reasons for migration

Indian and German markets are closely intertwined as Germany is the country's biggest trade partner in Europe. Steady economic and population growth of India, makes the recent peak in student number not all that surprising.

As the German labour is experiencing shortages of specialists in many sectors that require advanced technical education and expertise, local employers do not shun away from hiring foreign professionals, especially when they possess a German degree. No wonder that a significant majority of Indian students choose to study for Engineering and Science degrees, which increases the chances to stay in the country after graduation, which at least 70% of Indian students claim to plan

<sup>12</sup> [Indian Student Numbers touch a Record High in Germany](#)

to do. However, the initial access into the labour market is tangled, since a lot of internship positions are not accessible to migrant students.

While the good reputation of German universities in the world, general financial accessibility of education are important factors for Indian students, according to various research, the perceived possibility for social mobility is the main driving force behind choosing Germany as the main destination, especially for those coming from middle class households ( Aksakal, 2017). The difference between them and those coming from higher class families is seen through the choice of the country, as while Germany might rightfully boast with up to date research conditions and good reputation, the US and the UK would be a more popular choice for them.

Moreover, evident independence from the family is also reported to be an important factor, especially for female students. It also includes financial independence of the family, as they are not forced to pay off tuition fees or student loans, and are frequently able to support themselves through part-time jobs, mainly in the service or tourist sector (Hercog and van de Laar 2017).

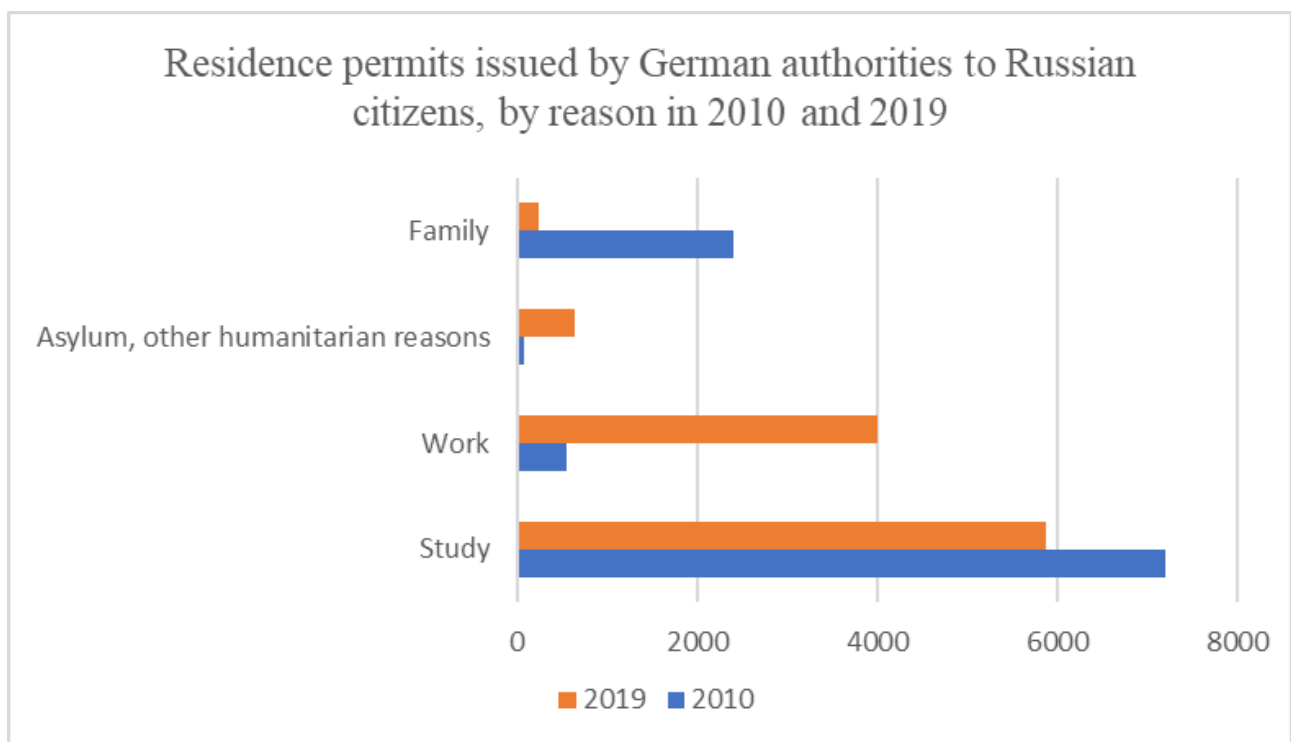
However, the reality for those who secured jobs within Germany varies, due to complicated migration rules, such as not being able to change or quit one's positions for at least two years, as it could endanger their migration status. Overall integration can be a positive experience for migrants in high skilled contexts, unless there is no isolation in diasporal community and willingness to learn German, which might not always be required in education or high-tech labour markets, the extensive bureaucratic procedures require, if not advanced knowledge, then intermediate level understanding. While numerous employers highlight the quality and the speed of the job done by employees of Indian descent, the level of trust shown by their managers is not enough to move steadily up the career ladder. The earnings tend to be lower for migrants taking up the same positions as their German counterparts.

As Germany offers quite extensive financial resources for the majority of international students through DAAD scholarships, Indian students quite rarely rely on domestic support. However, while there is no direct support channel coming from the Indian government, there are a few private foundations that encourage Indian students to continue their education abroad. Mostly, such funds are targeted towards future Master degree students, who have already secured places in foreign universities. Such scholarships include Narotam Sekhsaria's Scholarship and K. C. Mahindra Scholarship for Post-Graduate Studies Abroad to name a few. The method of support may vary, too. For example, the latter offers interest-free scholarship loans of around 5000 euros for the duration of studies.

## Russian community and Russian students

Russian migration towards Germany has always been rooted in the established political connections, and had blown up after the end of the Cold War, as the Iron curtain fell (Perraton, 2020). However, as migration rules became more restrictive, and high skilled migration became more accessible, movement on the grounds of employment and education gained in popularity, as shown by the difference in numbers of residence permits received by Russian citizens in 2010 and 2019.

Figure 16. Residence permits issued by German authorities to Russian citizens, by reason, 2010 and 2019



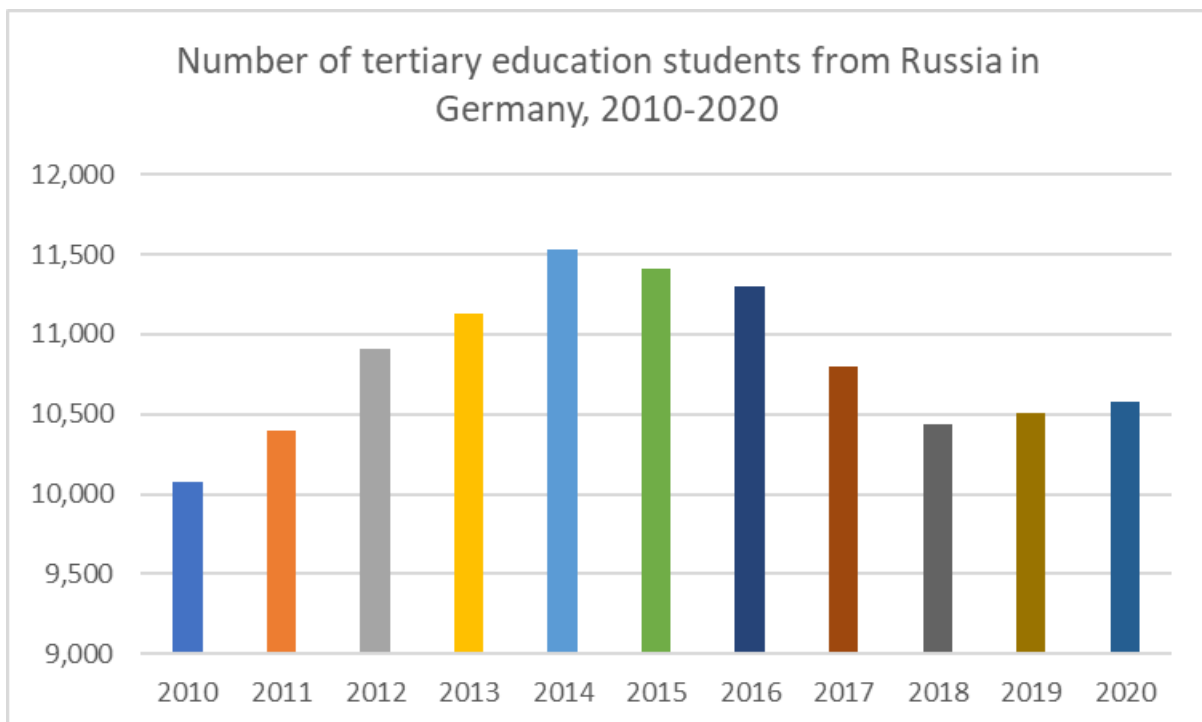
Source: Destatis.Statistisches bundesamt. Data processed by me

Despite quite high so-called brain-drain rates from the country, historical migratory connection that Russia has with Germany along with constant political turmoil, the number of Russian in German universities has been surprisingly low (Korobkov and Zaionchkovskaia 2012). For the past decade, and a few years before that, too, the growth is not just low, but rather non-existent, averaging at less than 1% yearly. The stable quantity of 10,500 students remains the same with only some small variations, depending on a year, with a slight peak at 11534 students in 2014.

However, regardless of the seemingly low performance on the part of Russian students in terms of overall numbers, it did not prevent them from consistently being in the top-5 in the list of the most

popular sending countries, frequently even cracking the top-2, notably from 2010 to 2013, and the top-3 starting from 2014 to 2017. While in comparison to the number of Indian and Chinese students, that of Russian students fades, but proportionally to the overall population in Russia, lack of funding from the government as well as difficulties in obtaining visas in embassies located in Russia due to international sanctions, it comes clear that the number while could be bigger, or at least slowly grow over the years, it is a more or less accurate representation of the migration trends from Russia to Europe.

Figure 17. Number of tertiary education students from Russia in Germany, 2010-2020



Source: DAAD Statistics. Data processed by me

#### Reasons for migration

As historically Russia had always had deep ties with Germany, it is no wonder that many Russian students choose Germany as their main destination. This connection was once more confirmed when the DAAD office first opened up in Moscow not long after the collapse of the USSR. Over the past decades, the network grew across the country, and one can consult the office in regional offices not only in the capital, but also in Saint Petersburg, Kazan and Novosibirsk.

Moreover, while after a recent Russian aggression in Ukraine a lot of international organisations pull out their staff from Russia, temporarily or permanently suspended their operations in the country, or simply were not able to function due to local laws regarding so-called “foreign agents”, as of late 2023 local DAAD offices still operate as usual for individual students. However, a number of academic exchange programs and different research events, totalling up to tens of



millions of euros were cut down as a response to the war in Ukraine<sup>13</sup>.

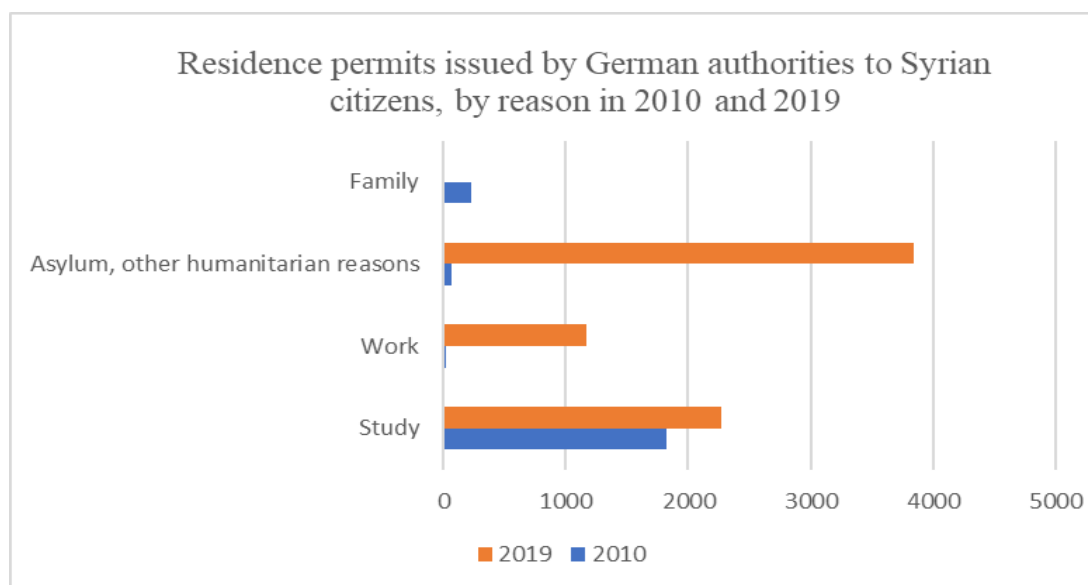
Despite numerous sanctions that greatly affect not only the local economy, but also the work of local embassies, DAAD still offers not only consultations regarding study programmes available in Germany but also professional support in getting national visas for those who received offers from German universities. As put by the president of the German Rectors' Conference Peter-Andre Alt "Freezing relationships does not mean destroying them. We want to rebuild the bridges, so we won't explode them<sup>14</sup>".

Since the emigration out of Russia in the 2 years following the war has increased up to a million people, according to various sources, most of whom are young, educated individuals with a middle-class background, the number of future students coming to Germany is very likely to increase, despite certain restrictions imposed by the local authorities, banking systems and general difficulties with applying and receiving visas.

### Syrian community and Syrian students

The Syrian community within German educational establishments is not necessarily new, yet due to the series of unfortunate events in Syria and the overall Middle Eastern region, it grew exponentially over the past few years. However, the majority came with the hopes to receive asylum, a trend that continued well into the late 2010s. Nevertheless, study and work visas became a rather frequent occurrence as the landscape changed, as shown in the Fig.18 below.

Figure 18. Residence permits by German authorities to Syrian citizens, by reason, 2010 and 2019



<sup>13</sup> "Information for Russian Students and Researchers," [www.daad.de](http://www.daad.de), accessed January 9, 2024, <https://www.daad.de/en/the-daad/information-for-russian-students-and-researchers/>.

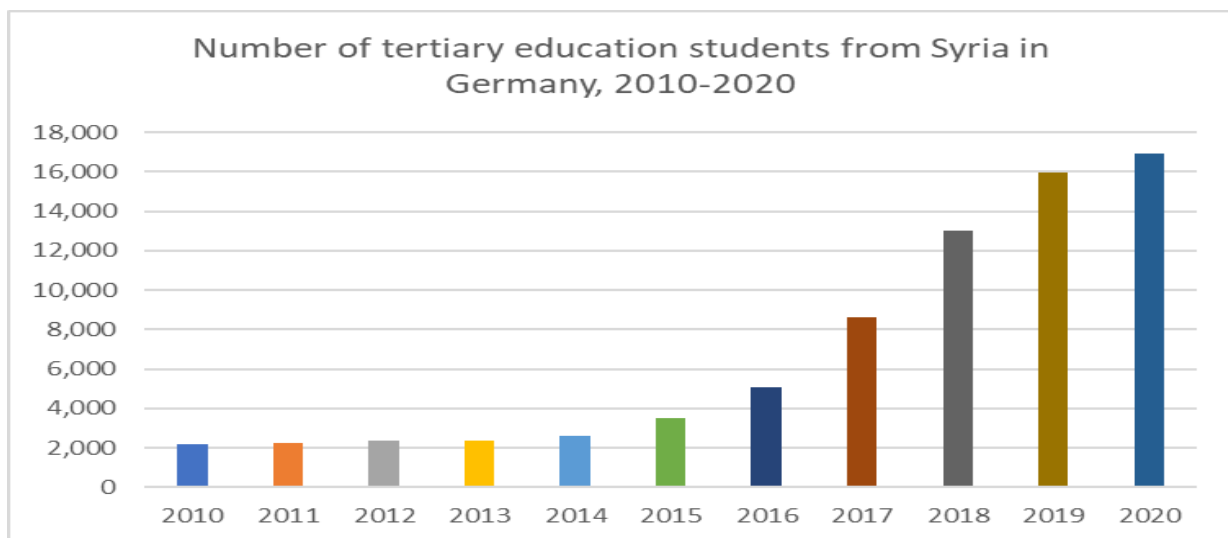
<sup>14</sup> "German Academics Told 'Not to Cut Ties' with Russian Counterparts," Science|Business, accessed January 9, 2024, <https://sciencebusiness.net/news/german-academics-told-not-cut-ties-russian-counterparts>.

Source: Destatis.Statistisches bundesamt. Data processed by me

In the beginning of the last decade, there were around 2,000 Syrian students enrolled in German universities, with a meagre yearly growth rate of little less than 5%. Most likely it would continue that way if it was not for the migration and refugee crisis that affected Germany's migratory landscape.

Starting from 2014, the sudden spike constituting 35% seems hard to ignore. After this period, the number only continued to grow, reaching 15000 students by 2019. However, in 2020 the growth did not stop, but significantly slowed down to the 6% rate in comparison from 22% from the year before. There is a possibility that COVID-19 restriction played a significant role in this decrease.

Figure 19. Number of tertiary education students from Syria in Germany, 2010-2020



Source: DAAD Statistics. Data processed by me

### Reasons for migration

Since the summer of 2015 the number of Syrian refugees became unprecedented in Europe, and in Germany specifically, the migration system was overflowing with requests for asylum. As a natural extension of this, the education system has been affected in many ways, too. Starting from elementary school level, where newcomers were unable to communicate with their peers or teachers due to the language barrier, up to university-level students who were forced to flee the war and leave their studies behind (Ashour, 2022).

As a successful integration into the education system of the country of destination is a crucial part of adaptation, a number of various programmes were implemented in order to allow refugees of different age groups regain access to education. The regional authorities of different German states, such as North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg due to their autonomy in issues of education and social policy, as a response to the migration crisis had allocated 1,5 million euros in

support to Syrian, as well Jordanian scholars arriving to these states, with a “New Perspectives for Young Syrians and Jordanians through Academic Education and Training”.

Another programme that is aimed at supporting Syrian students as well as scholars, who do not necessarily live in Syria, is funded by The German-Syrian Research Society (DSFG), founded in 2016 by newly arrived Syrians and Germans mostly of Syrian origin. The scholarship itself works as a form of crowd-funding, hence anyone could subscribe on their website or make a donation, making a contribution towards the development of education.

As for the DAAD policy of inclusion of Syrian students, and students at risk in general, one must mention the “Hilde Domin Programme” funded by the Federal Foreign Office, launched in 2021. While the students themselves are not allowed to apply, but rather should be recommended by their respective department’s administration with the confirmation of their inability to finish the course within the country, the scholarship includes monthly allowance for the duration of the study, the travel allowance and coverage of language courses expenses. According to the latest report published in 2022, the majority of applicants and eventual recipients, over 30%, came from Syria, then Lebanon and Jordan.

Moreover, by 2018 a groundbreaking programme was launched by the University of Potsdam that allowed educated refugees from Syria to participate in education. Those trained in pedagogy were allowed to take part in “The Refugee Teachers Programme”, which fast-tracked them back into class within 18 months, rather than 7 years that would be expected from local teachers. An intensive language programme along with the teacher training let numerous refugees secure jobs first as teacher assistants, and later as main teachers from elementary to high schools. Such an integration method was praised by various non-governmental structures, such as UNHCR for allowing refugees to adapt into new society, gain self-confidence and use their previous experiences and skills (Niesta Kayser, Vock, and Wojciechowicz 2021).

To summarise, migratory trends towards Italy and Germany differ greatly regardless of reasons for migration. However, despite the anti-immigration rhetoric, winning over media and political landscapes, the efforts to attract more young students and high-skilled specialists remains a major goal for educational institutions.



## Chapter IV: What do international students in Italy and Germany study? Discussion on migration and labour prospects for high-skilled migrants

International students are diverse, highly motivated, and most importantly, are prone to taking high-stake risks. That is why some of the most demanding programs and disciplines are particularly popular with international students, especially those coming from developing countries. Moreover, while some governments are reluctant to sponsor specialists' educational journey abroad in programs focused on humanities and social sciences, when it comes to modern and developing technologies, such as engineering and the IT-field, a handful of official governmental bodies as well as corporations are willing to provide either full scholarships or favourable student loans in exchange for a guaranteed entry position in the company after graduation. Hence, a majority of foreign students choose such majors in order to have clear job prospects upon graduation.

For the analysis of the data in this chapter, statistics provided by the OECD researchers will be considered as the primary source. In terms of fields of study, the quantity of international students admitted to 10 different majors will be studied. These categories are the following: Education; Arts and humanities; Social sciences, journalism and information; Business, administration and law; Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics; Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs); Engineering, manufacturing and construction; Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary; Health and welfare; Services. It is important to note that this particular research takes into account international as well as foreign students, who, as it was discussed in Chapter I, are those students who are citizens of foreign countries, yet moved to the country of destination for reasons other than education (family reunification, work, etc.) . Hence, those who had been living in Italy or Germany for a long time before pursuing higher education and most likely had already received long-term permits for reasons other than studying. European citizens, who do not require additional documentation such as local resident permits, along with credit-mobile students arriving through exchange program routes such as Erasmus are also included in the study. That is why the digits might seem exaggerated in comparison with all other aspects of this study, when, in fact, they represent one of the most comprehensive research results on this topic.

### Italy - what do international students study?

Italy, being the home to countless artistic movements, philosophical schools and vast cultural landscape is famous for its quality of education in the field of humanities. In a way, education in this sector is encouraged through small gestures such as, for instance, free entrance to the biggest art museums, Uffizi and alike, to those studying Art history. Moreover, 8 Italian universities are ranked

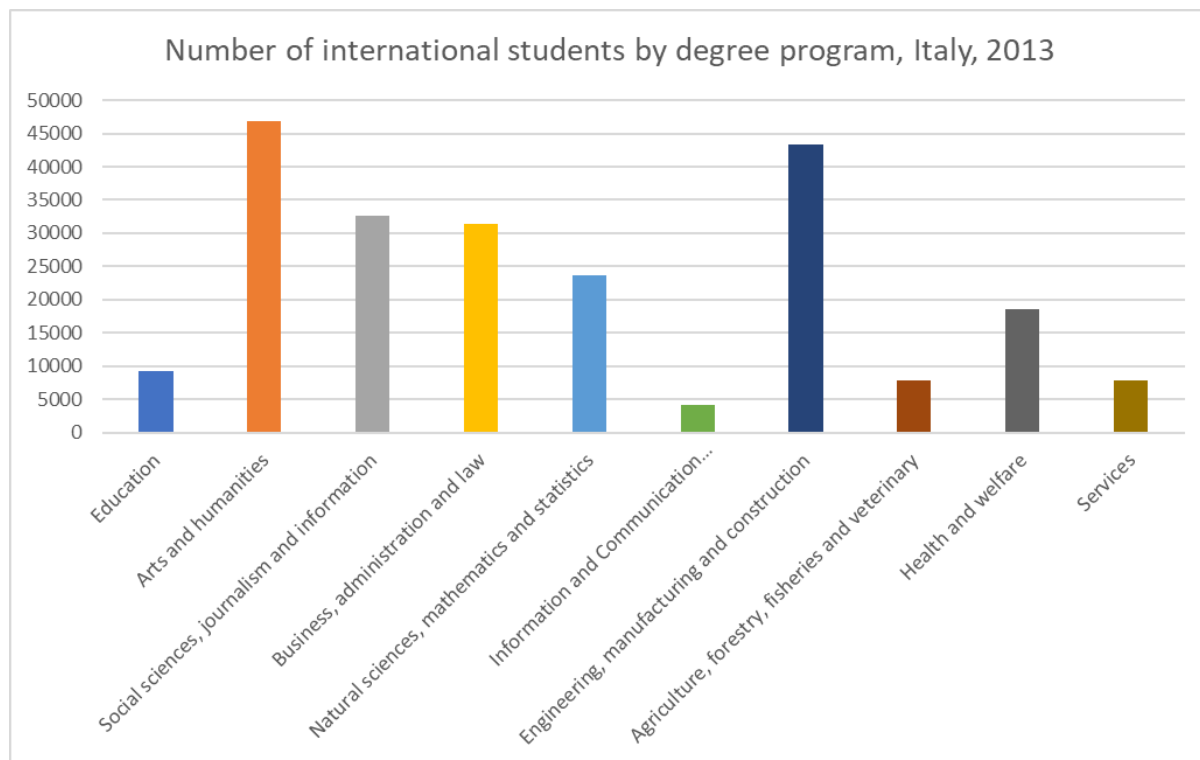
in the top-50 for studying Historical degrees, where Sapienza University of Rome is the leading institution in this category, according to the latest rating published by the QS (QS, 2023). While the legitimacy of such ratings are up to a more extensive debate, and should not play a significant role when choosing the university to continue one's academic career, the international recognition inevitably leads to raise in sponsorships for the department, bigger exposure outside of university and major funds to conduct research or accept more students (see Chapter II).

But it would be unfair not to mention the well developed programs in such technical fields as Engineering, natural sciences, medicine and many others, which might not be as famous as Humanities and Art, but are as highly respected among peers, which will be explored in this chapter.

Taking a closer look at the data from the past decade, there are a few patterns. As hypothesised before, the field of Arts and Humanities has always been the most popular with international students coming to Italy. In 2013 some 46,000 people chose this major. Engineering and manufacturing was also in the lead, losing by a very small margin of 3000 people. Up next were the Business and law department, along with the social sciences and journalism majors, concluded by natural sciences, all attracting between 20,000 and 35,000 students from abroad. The least attended courses were Communication (ICTs) as well as Health and welfare along with Education degrees. As it typically is, the diplomas for medical as well as educational professionals are rarely converted in other countries. Moreover, most countries do not offer such programs in the English language, hence the lack of popularity of such majors.

Below, the results of the OECD research regarding the number of international students enrolled in different speciality programs in 2013 is presented, highlighting the popularity of certain fields of study.

Figure 20. Number of international students by degree program in Italy, 2013



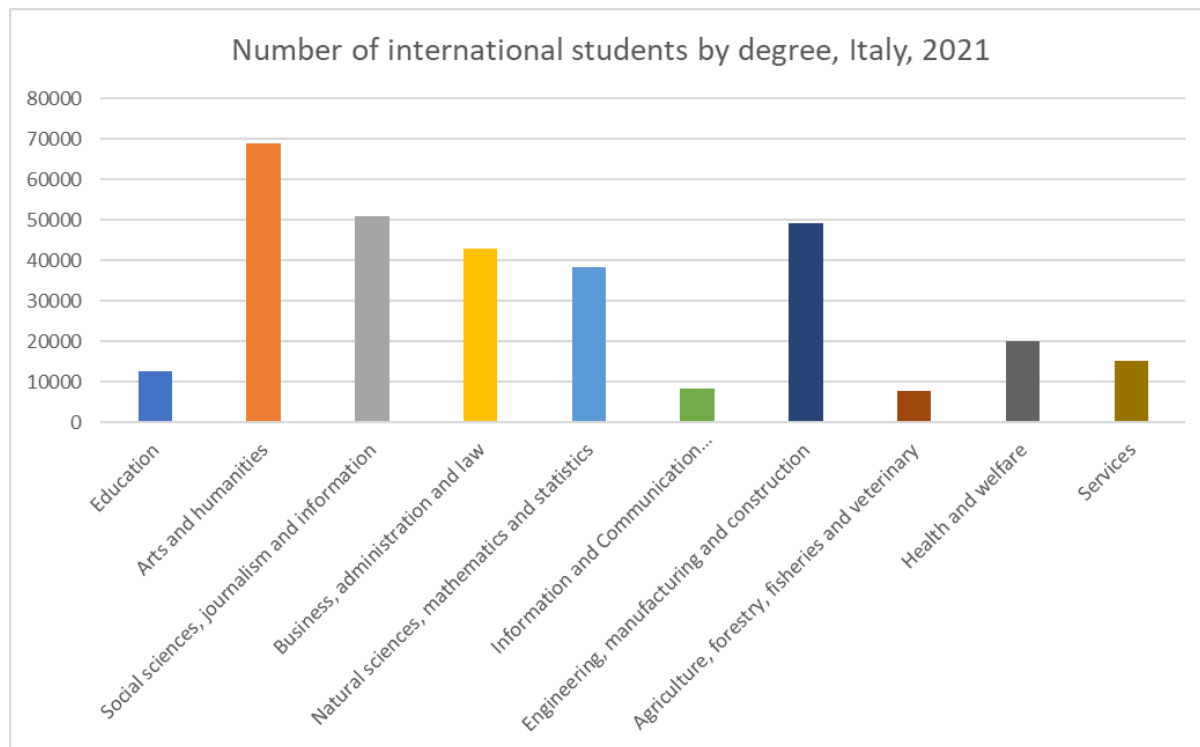
Source: OECD. Data processed by me

The close to equal popularity of such degrees as Humanities and Engineering is another proof of the multidisciplinary approach shown by the Italian education system, that frequently promotes social as well as technical academic paths.

By 2021, proportionally, not much has changed. Arts and Humanities degrees were still in the lead, attracting almost 70,000 students from across the world, which means it occupied 20% of the present research. As almost a decade ago, Engineering majors were slightly less popular than Humanities, while also sharing the second place with Social sciences, both occupying 16% of these statistics, where 50,000 students were represented in each category. While other degree programs such as business and law as well as natural sciences and statistics seemed quite demanded, as they were attended by at least 40,000 international students on all levels of higher education, which is the same number as the most attended course in 2013, others such as ICTs and agriculture struggled to attract more than 10,000 foreigners to join their program, representing less 5% each. Health and Welfare, along with the hospitality studies, however, became significantly more in demand than 10 years prior, occupying over 6% for each group of study. The rise in the services industry is not surprising as the Italian economy in many ways relies on the tourism and hospitality industry, which means those who graduate with these degrees and decide to stay in Italy upon graduation, will have a higher chance to find a reliable job in this sector.

As the continuation of the OECD study, we also offer the visualisation of statistics regarding international students studying in various scientific fields in Italy, as it changes by 2021.

Figure 21. Number of international students by degree program in Italy, 2021



Sources: OECD. Data processed by me

In this table the development from the past 10 years is shown in more detail:

Table 8. Number of international students by degree program in Italy, 2013-2021

	Education	Arts and humanities	Social sciences, journalism and information	Business, administration and law	Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	Engineering, manufacturing and construction	Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	Health and welfare	Services
Italy										
2013	9176	46838	32615	31311	23708	4166	43257	7898	18636	7892
2014	9146	49280	34495	29731	21396	4628	42434	8552	18443	8420
2015	9418	52413	38273	28711	23289	17223	27165	7951	24801	0
2016	9042	54632	33207	39072	26700	5489	40956	8371	22334	217
2017	9863	58778	35257	42117	28895	6182	42513	8204	23289	338
2018	11409	63172	43421	36061	33297	6992	45391	8347	18920	10952
2019	11379	63641	44918	36737	35866	6949	46708	8244	18858	12198
2020	12374	65686	47024	39629	36361	7390	49254	7909	19715	13625
2021	12548	69101	50924	43072	38480	8250	49126	7821	20140	15177

Source: OECD



## Germany - what do international students study?

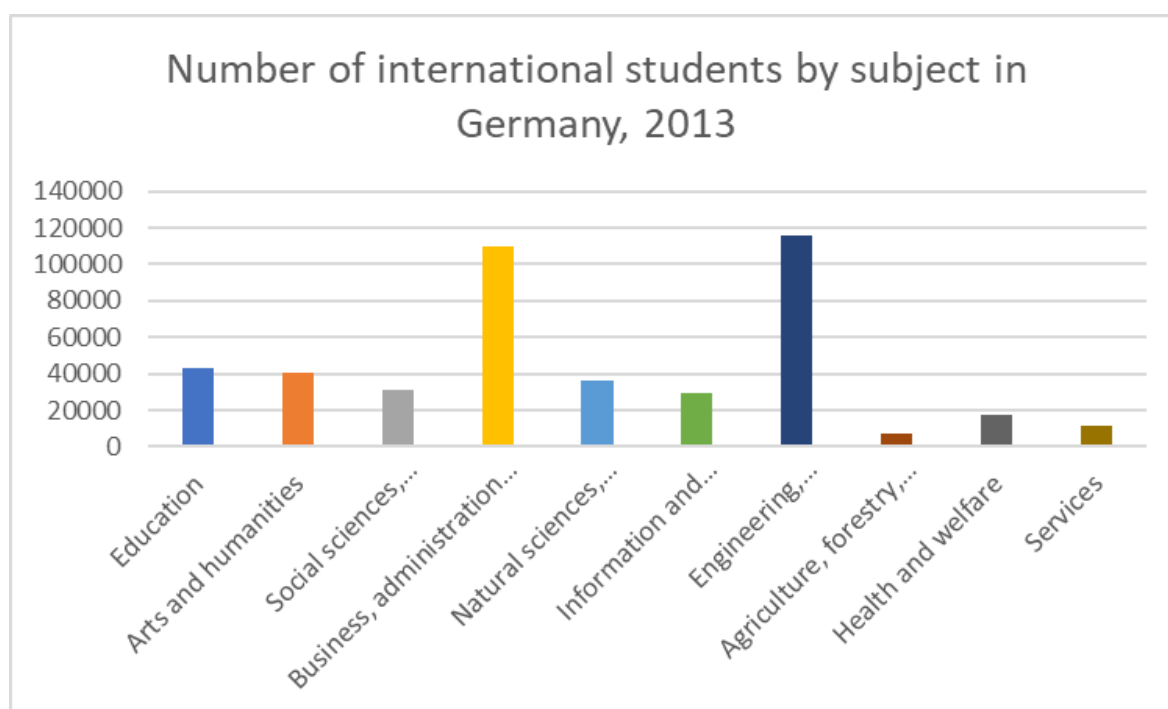
Germany, as it was established in the previous chapters, has always had a vast cultural landscape, being home to numerous great artists, writers and such. But scientific and technological development has always been of particular interest for the government to promote and for the universities to establish strong applied sciences departments. Hence, the dedicated Institutes of Applied Sciences gained in popularity in the 20th century.

This development has been transcribed into the image of a country where one goes to receive a quality scientific education.

The numbers as well showcase this pattern in full force.

By 2013, an unprecedented number of students from foreign countries chose Engineering and aligning disciplines as their speciality to study in Germany. That number constituted almost a third of all international students enrolled in German universities. What is noteworthy, Business and Law departments across the country enjoyed the same popularity as technical degrees, representing exactly a quarter of the total number, that equaled 110,000 students. Disciplines connected to Humanities, Social Sciences and Education across the country struggled to reach the 10% mark, yet still attracted around 35000 new students each, similar to results showcased by Italian universities that year. Such branches of study as Informational technology and natural science, despite their relevance in the modern job market, were in even lesser demand.

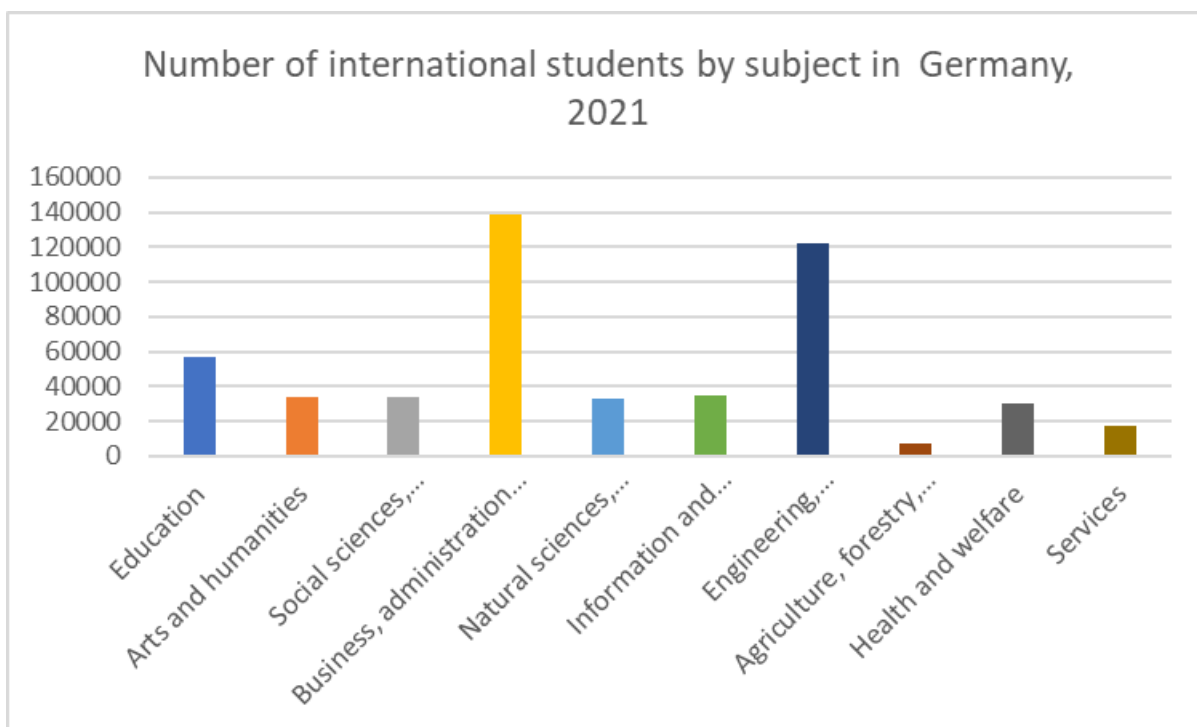
Figure 22. Number of international students by degree program in Germany, 2013



Source: OECD. Data processed by me

By 2021, as noted before, the number of students rose significantly. However, some of the subject groups were more successful in inviting over new students from abroad than others. For instance, despite the evident general increase, the number of internationals studying Art and Humanities not only did not grow, but in fact was steadily declining over the years, reaching 34,000 people, which equals 15% decline. Along with this trend, Education studies picked up over 30% in the course of the decade, becoming the third most numerous subject group in this study. Another aspect worth mentioning is the particularly slow growth rate, mixed with frequent decline in interest from the international students for the Engineering degrees. While the number managed to stay afloat by gaining additional 5% through the past 4 years, yet it only includes 6000 additional students in comparison to 2013. The biggest bump in the quantity of newly admitted students was witnessed among Business, Administration and Law degree students, where the overall number reached almost an impressive 140,000 people through almost 30% growth from the decade before.

Figure 23. Number of international students by degree program in Germany, 2021



Source: OECD. Data processed by me

According to DAAD's latest reports the ratio of German and European students by each subject is the exact opposite of the results discussed above. That is to say, that the majority of Germans choose to study non-technology related subjects, while interest in these degrees is almost regional. Most students admitted to such courses come from Asia and Pacific, as well the Middle East.

## Who stays after graduation?

As it was discussed previously in the Chapter II, immigration laws regarding students in both countries analysed in this research allow more flexibility for graduates of local universities than for lower-skilled migrants, or other types of transnational mobility. Based on that, it is important to review the statistics on students who choose to stay, in accordance with their area of specialisation, economic background, local labour market and other factors that might have played a role in the decision (Weisser, 2015).

### Italy. Do international students stay after graduation?

The Italian job market has shown slight improvements over the years, however, certain factors such as the pandemic and the following economic crisis, all have impacted the stagnation, especially when it comes to new entries into the labour market. Moreover, since the unemployment rate for highly educated workers has equalised with the unemployment prospects for those workers who have only obtained high school diplomas or vocational training (OECD, 2023), the possible perks of high education attainment once again become a topic of discussion, not only for local students but also for international specialists who see high education as a first step into a long-term migration path.

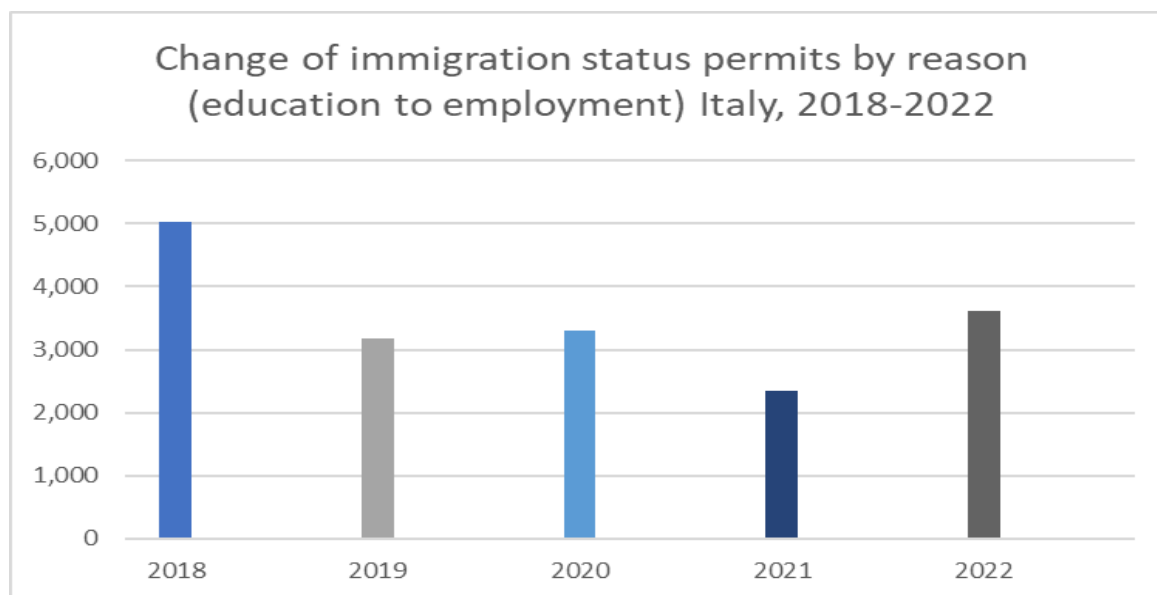
The initial entry into Italian labour starts before the graduation for at least 35% of international students, according to EMN Italia. The number, in fact, varies depending on the socioeconomic situation of the family in the country of origin, and, most importantly, the region of Italy, where the university is located. Among students whose parents possess higher education, the percentage of those who work is 29.5% compared to those who come from families with a low level of education (37.7%). The number of working students is statistically higher in the North of Italy, where it reaches almost 50% for all students, while in the South local market does not offer enough opportunities for part-time occupations, especially when it is necessary to combine work and study activity. However, working in “black”, as undocumented employees is a rather frequent occurrence, especially for students seeking part-time jobs in the hospitality sector, as well for those who hold online positions back in the home countries, which, if remains undeclared, can complicate the assessments. As students, at least 20 percent of those who were lucky to successfully land a position in an Italian company, tend to work in the catering sector, and only then at much smaller rates in the sales industry, in personal assistance positions or tourism, where the numbers spread from 5 to 10 percent each. It is important to mention that while 9 in 10 European students were able to find jobs, this number declines for American students, only 80% of whom were successful in this task, and reaches the lowest point for African and Asian students, who only have a 70% chance of landing a

part-time position during their studies.

However, it is difficult to say if they keep those positions after graduation as there is no comprehensive research on the topic as of now. Nevertheless, according to a survey conducted by the Foreign Ministry in 2013, at least 40% of international students had intentions to stay in Italy after graduation, while 20% reported to have been looking for jobs outside of the country, yet mainly in Europe. Moreover, European students were more likely to hold intention to stay in Italy, but the number decreased for African and Asian students. While the level of satisfaction of Italian universities in general is quite high, especially for the humanities departments, job opportunities seem to be the main push factor for a larger section of students. Migrants, who reside in Italy with their families and did so before enrolling into the higher education system, report the same rate of intention to stay in Italy as international students - 40%. This rate seems to follow Italian born students, too, who also show high degree of out migration due to poor labour conditions and lack of opportunities in Italy (See chapter V).

The Italian migration system follows the quota system, where such quotas are introduced from every two to three years and categorise immigrants who are eligible for the various types of residence permits that allow for legalisation only of a specific number of migrants per year, depending on their specific situations. Residence permits' conversion is one of the actions that is also regulated by the so-called "Decreto flussi" - The Flow Decree - a document that is issued yearly to establish a quota for foreign citizens who can enter Italy to perform non-seasonal employment and self-employment (Tuckett, 2015). However, the conversion of a student resident permit does not fall under any category, which calls for a conversation regarding the demographic and labour conditions within the country. According to the Eurostat data, for the past 5 years, on average at least 3,000 students yearly take the advantage of this rule and successfully receive their new residence permits on the basis of signing a long-term full-time work contract with an Italian enterprise. On average, that makes around 15% out of yearly first residence permits. Evidently, there was a significant decrease in the post-quarantine period of 2021, where the numbers dropped down to only 2,000 people. Taking into account the intention of at least 40% of international students to continue their path within the Italian borders, this particular statistics showcases certain institutional issues experienced in Italy, starting from overcomplicated bureaucratic process, that are slowing down the legalisation procedures for many migrants, new and old; the state of Italian labour market, that is on the one hand has been under pressure of a labour shortage, especially in the high-skilled sector, caused by a demographic crisis, and on the other hand, the reluctance of the society to hire and promote immigrants in the rigid labour market constraints.

Figure 24. Number approved applications to change migration status from “education” to “employment” in Italy, 2018-2022



Source: Eurostat. Data processed by me

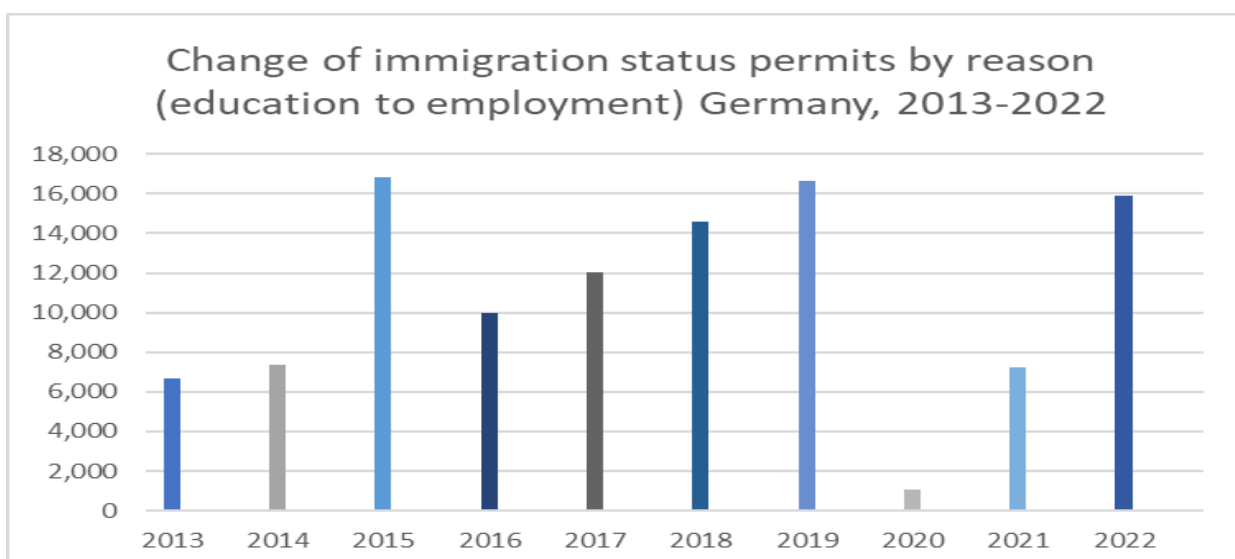
## Germany. Do international students stay after graduation?

As it was mentioned prior in Chapter II, the German migration system is fairly welcoming towards new students as well as just-out-of-university graduates, allowing them to prolong their stay in Germany and in case of finding official employment, granting a facilitated path towards citizenship. Having discovered that, it is no wonder that, according to an independent survey, conducted by the biggest German information portal for foreign students “Study in Germany”, a striking 70% of international students consider staying in Germany for a long period of time after receiving their degree (2018 International Students in Germany Survey - Studying-in-Germany.org, 2018). Only around 15% of respondents had no intentions of staying in Germany and were planning to go back to their country of origin, citing the ever-growing cost of living and language barriers as the main reason, while the remaining 15% survey takers shared that they would stay in Germany, but only to take advantage of the free movement opportunities within the Schengen area, therefore, strictly for touristic reasons, as student permit does not give rights for working anywhere outside of Germany. But how many people do truly stay and take advantage of the flexible migration policy accessible to newly graduates, even with non-EU citizenships? In fact, the intentions of the aforementioned 70% of respondents do not always convert into reality, as, according to the Destatis (The Federal Statistical Office), only a third of non-EU international students have fully committed to prolong their stay. However, even if it is by a far margin a smaller number than expected, according to OECD International Migration Outlook of 2022 report, it is one of the highest rates in OECD countries, and is similar to Canadian statistics - a country famous for its open doors policy. In the

long-term study done by the official statistical bureau, it is stated that the majority of those students who ended up staying in Germany had Chinese citizenship - almost a third of those who received their first-time residence between years 2006 and 2011, had still lived in Germany 10 years later. In the same time period, around 6,000 Russian citizens had successfully legalised their stay and converted the residence permit in accordance with their current status. As well as roughly 5000 Turkish students, who were not mentioned in the previous sections, yet represent a large community in Germany. Furthermore, there is a noticeable trend among American citizens who have received their degrees in Germany to remain in Germany for some years after graduation, as they are listed as the second largest group in this study.

This particular pattern could be linked to the existence of stable and established migrant networks representing these three nations in Germany. Moreover, at least 28% of those who stayed, regardless of initial citizenship, have received German passports. However, the path to naturalisation is not paved only through employment, but is most likely to be reached through family reunification programs. As for the students-turned-employees, which are the main target of our study, as provided by Eurostat, while in the past decade the numbers have been unstable, there is a tendency for growth. However, the 2015 peak number of 17,000 approved conversion application is yet to be surpassed, as it was disturbed by the bureaucratic labour shortage of German migration office in 2016 (see Chapter II), and later by the COVID crisis of 2020, there are definite prospects of increase in the coming few years, as Germany becomes not only a more popular study destination, but also boasts stable economy in a rather troublesome economic landscape of Europe (Wut, Xu, and Sum 2022).

Figure 25. Number approved applications to change migration status from “education” to “employment” in Germany, 2013-2022



Source: Eurostat. Data processed by me

## Comparative Analysis and Conclusions

Overall, this cross-country comparison performed on different levels, such as migrational, and educational, has been important in bringing about a few important points. As it was mentioned before, on the surface level the basis for this comparative study is quite steady - the accessible higher education system, wide governmentally-funded scholarship network, as well as demographic crisis calling for more welcoming migration policies. However, on the deeper level, the state of local economic market, which includes feasible job opportunities, a room for career growth along with fair expenditure towards education by the government, which in Germany constitutes at least 7% share of GDP (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2023), while in Italy it is no more than 4% (OECD, 2023), the effects of which are noticeable even if the quantitative difference in overall budget is not taken into account.

Yet, what does the data discussed in this chapter show? First of all, while the popularity of Germany over Italy for international students is hard to argue with, the level of attractiveness of higher education in each country within local students in both cases did not show particular growth over years, hence the need for mobile students.

Second, in many ways, student migration trends towards Germany greatly complement overall migration flows, which proves not only the existence of established migrant networks within the country, but also the willingness of international students to join these networks through legal framework and consequently the high-skill job market, too, as proven by the number of students who decide to stay in Germany after graduation.

In Italy, however, the dynamic seems to differ. Main migration channels to Italy are represented by family reunification schemes and asylum requests, originating by a high margin in the “Greater Middle East”, South Asia and Eastern Europe. The student mobility to Italy, on the other hand, follows world migration trends, where students choose Italy for studying purposes, due to accessibility and a choice of reputable universities around the country as a first step towards the economic and movement freedom that is granted by the European Union. This is, definitely, not always the case, yet the data on residence conversion shows that no more than 10% of international students choose Italy as the main country of residence after graduation, or at least are able to successfully convert their residence permits.

The choice of majors, too, showcases the intentions of students. The ongoing labour shortage in the high-skilled sectors, connected to STEM-fields have led to the promotion of related subject majors in universities, loosened migration policies for educated migrants, and a need for international specialists to fill the gaps, especially in Germany. While such disciplines are also attractive for

international students in Italy, too, the reputation of Italy as the arts capital remains unbreakable, as the majority of internationals choose programs related to the fields of Arts and Humanities.

In summary, quantitatively, Germany is systemically on the top in this research over Italy, while both countries experience similar issues, when it comes to demographic situation, migration bureaucracy, as well as perks in terms of accessible education. However, a more lively labour market and lower outmigration levels, that are a reality in Germany, come into play, that create a market for international education, that is more welcoming to foreign students, since the competition is not as intense among young specialists in various fields.



# Chapter V: Italian and German Students abroad. The Demographic Impact of Youth Emigration

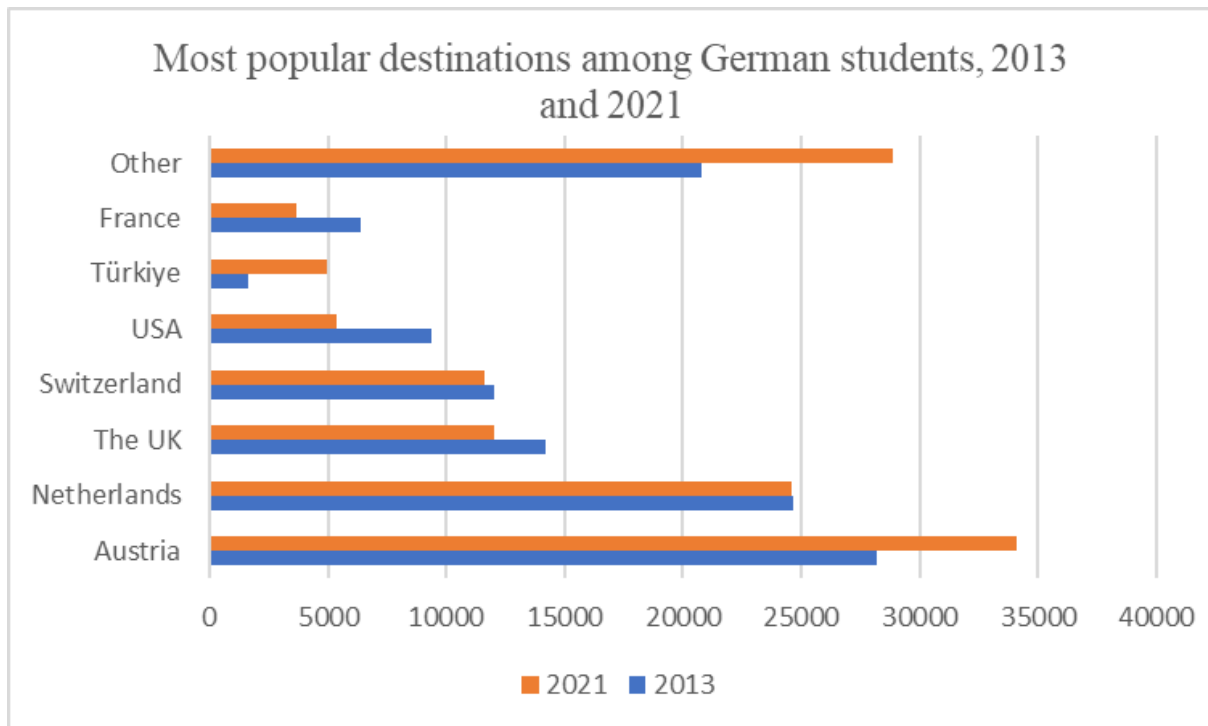
## Mobility of students from Italy and Germany

Student mobility is not only a prerogative of those coming from developing countries. The Bologna agreement of 1999 and overall recognition of foreign qualifications abroad led to the rise in demand for academic mobility among European students of all levels. For a number of years, for instance, German students prove to be particularly active in the academic field when it comes to international degree-related programs. Italian students, however, are more prone towards short-term exchange programs, or so-called credit-mobility programs, such as Erasmus.

### German students abroad

The number of German students abroad has been growing exponentially for the past decade, and geography of mobility, too, has become more diverse, and now includes such countries in the East of Europe as Bulgaria, Romania or Hungary.

Figure 26. Most popular study destinations among German students, 2013 and 2021



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Data processed by me

By the beginning of the pandemic, around 130,000 German students were studying abroad. The

geography, however, was limited to mostly neighbouring Western European countries, where over 70% of students in question moved to pursue their degree, while Southern European region, the US along with Australia representing the Pacific continent all earned around 5% of the total number. Surprisingly, despite the availability of quite diverse educational as well as linguistic landscape coupled with relatively less expensive quality of life on average, less than 1% chose countries in the Asian continent to continue their academic journey there. The same goes for South America. In fact, the most attractive host countries for German students are Austria, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Switzerland. However, the latter two countries have lost their demand in the past few years. Especially the UK, where it could be seen as a deliberate policy measure in the wake of the Brexit referendum. The results were the following: despite the fact that the changes were not effective immediately after the referendum took place in the summer of 2016, the number of international students first slowly, then steadily declined. The most poignant reason for this would be the rise in tuition fees, which was already relatively high, that used to be the same for all UK and EU nationals. This limitation also led to obstacles in getting the bank loans on the same conditions that UK nationals would, raising interest rates for foreigners. Most importantly, their right to seek jobs without requesting a residence permit was also revoked, not to mention the rise of cost of living. As a result, the number of students dropped by at least half after the pandemic, as for German students, a 20% decline was registered in the 2021-2022 academic year (ICEF, 2022). While European nationals started to reject the opportunity to study in The UK, the British universities expanded their market outside of Europe, to such regions as the Middle East and Asia. In fact, according to the research conducted by ApplyBoard - a digital aggregate that analyses internal data in the field of education through local statistical agencies and a number of field-specific agencies, such as Open Doors IIE (The Institute of International Education) (Basiri, 2023), Germany took the biggest hit from this development, as a high number of students landed their decision to apply to foreign schools in Germany rather than the UK due to the accessibility of education there. Italian universities were also in the top-10 countries that were deemed more attractive for international scholars now that The United Kingdom seemed unattainable<sup>15</sup>. Along with this decline on the Isles, Austria, for instance, saw a quite impressive increase in German students by around 40% ( Federal Statistical Office, “Deutsche Studierende im Ausland” survey, 2023). The linguistic and geographical proximity allowed for more frequent mobility practices.

Another sudden quantity drop was seen in Australia, a formerly popular destination. Post-pandemic

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<sup>15</sup> Meti Basiri, “5 International Education Predictions for 2023,” ApplyBoard (blog), January 12, 2023, <https://www.applyboard.com/applyinsights-article/5-international-education-predictions-for-2023>.

numbers struggled to achieve the levels of the 2019 academic year, when in 2021 there were less than 400 registered students from Germany who would choose this english-speaking country as their new temporary home.

The factor that also plays a major important role in this study, is what exactly German students seek to study outside of their home country. As it was pointed out before, the majority of foreigners arrive in Germany to study for such degrees as Business Administration and Law. What seems to be a noticeable pattern, is that around a quarter of German students abroad graduate in the same subjects, whereas another 20% are enrolled in faculties of Social Sciences. Engineering and Construction degrees are underrepresented in this context, which can be taken as further proof that such research fields in German universities are more advanced than in other countries. However, some 15% study fields related to Health and welfare, which are mostly focused in such countries as Poland and Bulgaria, where medical degree admission policies are less restrictive than in Germany. The distribution by the type of degree is another aspect worth mentioning. According to DAAD - the most important local organisation that deals not only with international students, but also with German students abroad - calculations, almost half of Germans leave home to pursue bachelor degrees, most of whom choose Greece, Turkey or Japan as their destinations. As for the master degree courses, less than 40% of mobile students pursue them, leaving around 10% to PhD candidates. Master and Doctoral degree students are mostly concentrated in Western and South Eastern European countries, such as Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic.

#### Erasmus visits by German students

Since 2010, the number of Erasmus students in Germany from various European universities has doubled and reached 40,000 credit-mobile students, targeting Universities of applied sciences by a relatively high margin. At the same time, Spain became the most desired study destination for a number of German students, reaching 6,000. Overall number, dispersed also in France, Norway, the UK and Norway, among some other countries, was to reach 30,000 short-term mobility students by 2021, where master students only represented a third of the total number. Doctorate degrees, despite the mobile nature of PhD students, were represented by less than 5% of the total number.

In this case, the Business and Law degrees were again overrepresented. Those studying social sciences as well as Arts and Humanities, as some of the least popular degrees in Germany, by a high margin equal to around 15% prefer mobility programs as Erasmus and alike, especially in those locations where such fields are more developed, such as Italy. The Engineering as well as Health and Welfare degrees were in fact underrepresented, as another testament to the quality of technical degrees in the country.

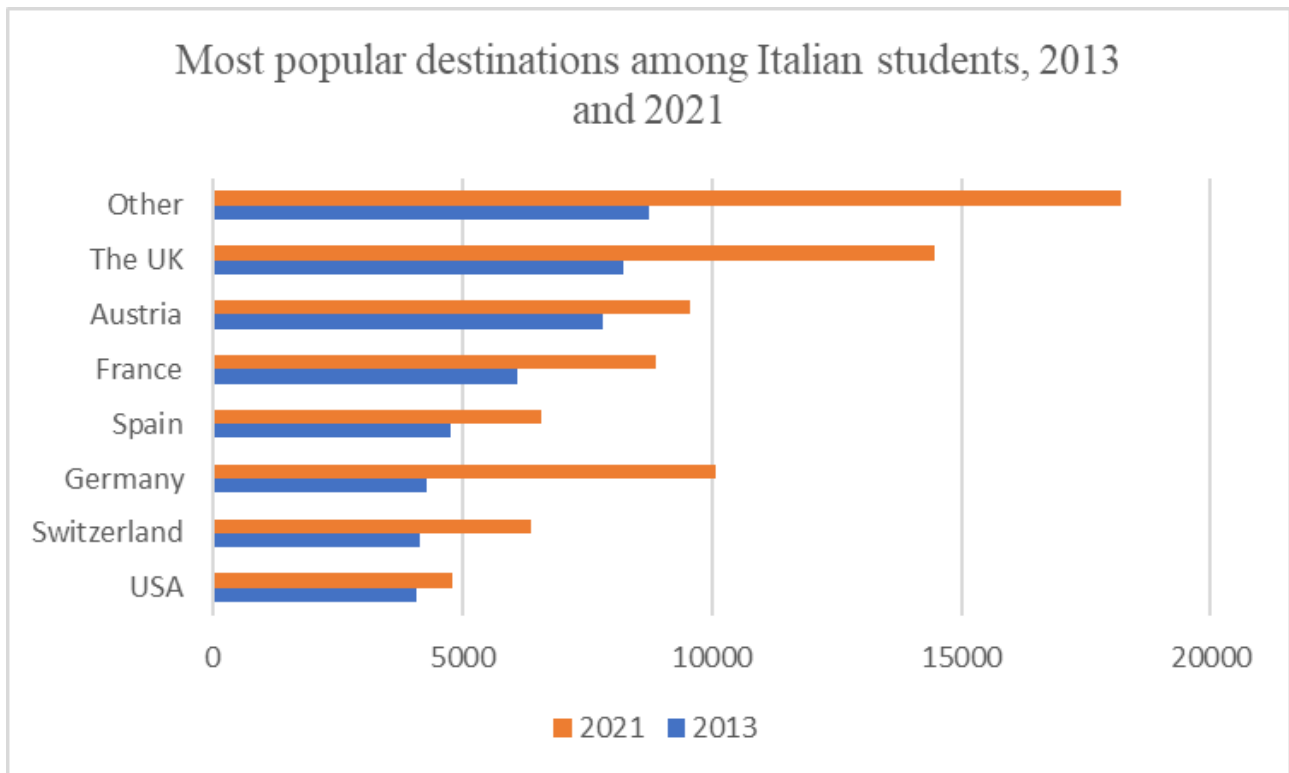
Such demand of Erasmus and other short-term mobility degree programs for diverse students from Germany, which was hardly impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, serves as a prove, that the majority do not seek to get further involvement in local job markets, but rather use this opportunity to improve their intercultural communication skills, as well as linguistic opportunity to practise foreign language skills in academic as well as informal environments, promoted by various independent Erasmus student-led organisations such as ESN, where, for instance, the German branch is supported by over a 1,000 volunteers (ESN, 2023).

## Italian students abroad

It is important to remember that Italy has only recently experienced large waves of immigration, both skilled and unskilled. Italian citizens are still quite mobile, especially when it comes to labour migration. Italian students are no different in this case. Citing tough economic conditions in the country, taken hit by the pandemic regulations, many students frequently seek education abroad. Taking into account the 30% unemployment rate among young educated people, the choice can be justified (Leonardi and Pica 2015). The most popular destinations include countries, especially inside the European Union, where this particular aspect is less dramatic, such as the Netherlands, with 93% successful post-graduation employment rate, or Germany, where it only was less than 90% in the year of uncertainty brought about by the pandemic.

Overall number of Italian students abroad is yet to reach German levels, however, Germany itself slowly became one of the most popular destination countries over the years. While the Western Europe remains the most attractive direction for the majority of Italian students, the pattern shows that Scandinavian countries are to reach entertain new popularity levels, as well as Eastern direction - e.g. Romania, Albania - that is a home to many migrants residing in Italy, along with Latin America - Argentina and Brazil, both of which have deep rooted historical connections with Italy. The mobility routes, in this case, are more diverse than for German students.

Figure 27. Most popular study destinations among Italian students, 2013 and 2021



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Data processed by me

However, the number of degree-related mobility students is not as impressive when compared to exchange programs. In the years following the pandemic, the number of higher education Italian students abroad admitted on full-time terms has drastically declined from 8,000 to 5,000 in 2021. Around half of these students were Master degrees students. Nevertheless, according to UNESCO, Italy is currently in the top-12 sending countries with the most students abroad, and the 3rd among European countries after Germany and France. The most popular destinations are concentrated in the Western European region, including the United Kingdom, despite the Brexit policies that were discussed above. The United States, leading as the most demanded receiving country, is experiencing another popularity boost, and Italian students are taking part in it, too. With 5000 students arriving to various universities in 2022, regardless of the length of courses, the number of students will only increase with time (Open doors, 2022)<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> Institute of International Education. "Number of international students studying in the United States in 2021/22, by country of origin." Chart. November 14, 2022. Statista. Accessed November 22, 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/233880/international-students-in-the-us-by-country-of-origin/>

Such patterns of brain drain, though seem encouraging at the first glance, are merely another testament to the demographic collapse connected to the ageing population across all Italian regions supported by the weakness of the economy in the ever-changing world.

### Erasmus visits by Italian students

The Italian Erasmus community is among the most active ones in Europe. While being an inspirational receiving country, welcoming around 50,000 Erasmus students yearly within around 300 projects, Italy is, in fact, it is the country that sends the highest number of exchange students on exchange programs. The number peaked in 2019 at 80,000 students. Despite a slight, yet noticeable post-pandemic slump by around 20%, the number, if not disrupted by global events limiting mobility, is looking to grow by year.

The Italian Erasmus office allocated over 70 million euros in 2021 in the form of mobility grants for those going on short-term mobility programs. The geography was concentrated around western and southern Europe, where France, Germany and Portugal dominated as receiving countries, where the average length of stay was around half a year, or one semester.

As for international students' mobility, the data is the following: on average, yearly only 300 foreign students of Italian universities would take part in the short-term mobility programs, such as Erasmus, due to legal complications such participation might bring when it comes to long and short-term permits<sup>17</sup>.

## Demographic impact of youth emigration

### Germany. Youth emigration trends

Outbound migration from one developed country to another is always tricky. However, more and more countries in Eastern and Southern Europe are beginning to admit that their fight for young population has failed<sup>18</sup>. Coupled with low fertility rates in the region and high internal migration from rural areas to cities, the concentration of population has noticeably changed. However, active migration flows are yet to bridge the vacuum left by German emigrants, who decide to leave the country, despite its economic stability and relatively low youth unemployment rate (Lulle, Janta,

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<sup>17</sup> "IT Erasmus+ 2020 in Numbers," accessed January 31, 2024, [https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/factsheets/factsheet-it-2020\\_en.html](https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/factsheets/factsheet-it-2020_en.html).

<sup>18</sup> Philip Oltermann et al., "Germany and Spain Scramble to Reverse the Flight of Youth," The Guardian, March 2, 2020, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/02/germany-spain-scramble-reverse-the-flight-youth-eastern-europe>.

and Emilsson 2021), (Cahuc et al. 2013). Nevertheless, in 2015, during the “Refugee crisis”, the German migration system has shown that it is not yet ready to accept as many migrants, as the country’s labour market as well population needs (see chapter III).

Labour shortage, however, is already affecting the labour market, as young high-skilled workers leave frequently to receive education elsewhere, mainly Austria, the UK and the US, while migrant inflows specialising in such fields Medicine or Engineering, where the shortage is more pronounced, is relatively low (Garloff and Wapler 2016).

## Italy. Youth emigration trends

As it was mentioned before, Italy has always been known as an out-migration country, therefore its new status as a popular migrant destination today has become a challenging subject, taking into account low birth rates, and still, high out migration tendencies. South to North student migration remains an issue that leaves the southern part of the country underfunded, underpopulated and less qualified in emerging fields (D’Agostino, Ghellini, and Longobardi 2019). However, due to the accessibility of the education home, many Italian high-skilled young specialists choose to receive education home and only then take the advantage of the free labour market of the EU and move out of the country. Therefore, there is no payoff for the education system in this case (Assirelli, Barone, and Recchi 2019). Nevertheless, the gaps created by such emigration trends, that should have opened a way for a larger high-skilled or student immigration, as of now, have only left a massive in terms of labour shortages in various fields, as well as many instances of skills mismatches due to outfashioned technologies used in highly technological fields (Monti, 2016.).

The case of Italian emigration patterns are one of a kind, especially for a developed European country. In fact, outmigration numbers have almost quadrupled over the last 15 years, which was one of the outcomes of the economic crisis that hit Europe in the late 2000s. Moreover, it affected both internal and external migration, as the Italian South quickly became unattractive for local young graduates, as well as international migrants due to high unemployment rates despite considerable labour shortages in the region in many fields. However, at least 4% of the southern population is of foreign origin, employed mainly in the agricultural, domestic care and hospitality sectors (Colombo and Dalla-Zuanna 2019).

The cultural resistance of the Italian population in general, as well as policy makers, to the acceptance of Italy as a country of immigration is closely connected to the youth emigration, too. While economic factors, such as wide wealth gaps and skill imbalance in many sectors coupled with thousands of unfilled vacancies on the labour market, are foundational, demographic factors should not be overlooked, either. As the number of workers heading towards retirement is growing year by

year, their potential replacement by younger specialists are thinning out due to age imbalance. Hence, what was considered as a push factor - the demographic dynamics - for emigration for Italian youth, has now become a pull factor for new coming immigration waves (Dalla-Zuanna, 2019 and 2023).

In both cases, the ongoing demographic situation plays quite a visible role in the formation of migration and internal policies, however, as noted by many experts, as well as data, the measures are not adequate neither for attraction of a higher rate of high-skilled migrant, nor for natural population growth within neither countries.



## Chapter VI: Dropout Rates. Reasons and consequences. The Phenomenon of Academic Resilience Among Migrants

### Dropout rates for tertiary education in Europe

#### Why do students drop out?

While university education preserves its prestige and does provide more opportunities on the job market a lot of people choose to not continue their studies before they graduate, hence not receiving professional qualification, that would have been instrumental in furthering their career or academic work. The reasons behind this decision may vary depending on the financial security, general dissatisfaction with the choice of the major or the university. If the case of international students is added, it is also important to talk about the immigration issues, lack of international scholarships or financial support from family or the country of origin, cultural clashes, discrimination issues. The notion of dropping out changed in the past few decades, as before high education generally was deemed as something preserved for the higher stratum of society. Now that education is far more accessible and the number of students, whether native or international, grows exponentially, this so-called democratisation of education allowed for a wider choice of academic career paths for people from different walks of life.

According to Elias, a rising dropout rate is one of the most dominant issues the EU education system faces (Elias, 2018). On average, it affects by a much higher frequency the members of lower economic class, which dismantles the ideology of accessibility and equality promoted by European governments. In fact, recently, a collective of EU education ministers pledged to combat high dropout rates through financial support for students and their families, individual mentorship and guidance programs and promotion of social inclusion.<sup>19</sup>

#### Dropout rates from Italian universities

Despite the perceived accessibility, whether financial or academic, and temporal liberty of the Italian tertiary education system, Italy has been facing a detrimental crisis when it comes the dropout rates for newly enrolled students - in fact, only a third of those enrolling in the first year of university system graduate (Gitto, Minnervini. 2011). Moreover, according to OECD, around a quarter of Italian high school students choose not to pursue higher education after receiving the high school diploma.

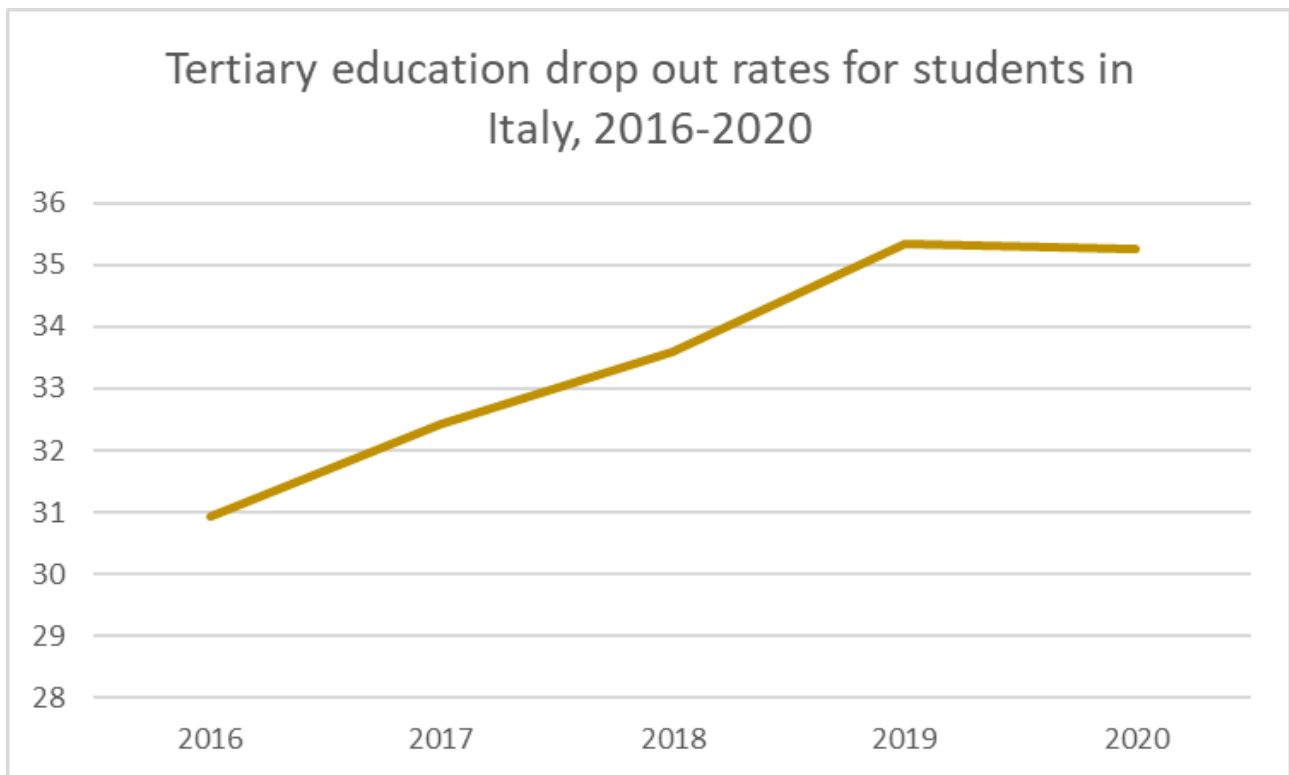
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<sup>19</sup> [EU ministers work to reduce university dropout rates and promote EU values in education](#)

In terms of higher education, the rates are also far from low. Despite universities being evenly distributed across all regions of the country, it is generally expected that high school graduates will travel to another region to pursue the Bachelor's and later Master's degree. The South to North trajectory is unevenly popular due to economic superiority in the Centre-Nord region. Statistically, the probability of a student dropping out is lower if they move out of their native region elsewhere. However, around a quarter of students who are Italian citizens tend to drop out of their studies within the first year. In 2017, the completion rate was around 70% (OECD, 2019). Rarely, financial reasons are crucial in this decision, as the Italian system is quite generous with the financial aid programs that vary from region to region, but are proportional to the quality of life in each locality. Moreover, according to Belloc, the higher ISEE index, therefore family income, the higher the chance that the student will choose to give up on their studies (Belloc et al, 2009). On average, being a regional grant recipient lowers the probability of prematurely finishing the course of studies by around 3% (Modena, 2020). It could be attributed to the financial pressure imposed by the university or the family that is usually responsible for the financial support. Such disparity with the frequent connections made between early university leavers and their socioeconomic background in the case with Italy needs further inspection. Financial stability, in this scenario, plays a crucial part. The state of the labour market, which was discussed in the previous chapter, does not give reassurance to young graduates, either, as unemployment rates for both, degree-holders and non-skilled workers are higher than in other developed European states. Hence, the decision to withdraw from studies, or at least to prolong the procedure, can be made due the wishes to embark on the career earlier than most peers in order to gain experience "on the job".

In the context of international students, the rate of dropping out for the past decade never once exceeded 10% (Eurostat, 2023). Unfortunately, the current dataset does not allow to sort out the percentages of dropped out students by citizenship, hence this number has a high probability of including EU-nationals, who are generally not analysed in this study.

Figure 28. Tertiary education dropout rates for students in Italy, regardless of citizenship, in %, 2016-2020



Source: OECD. Data processed by me

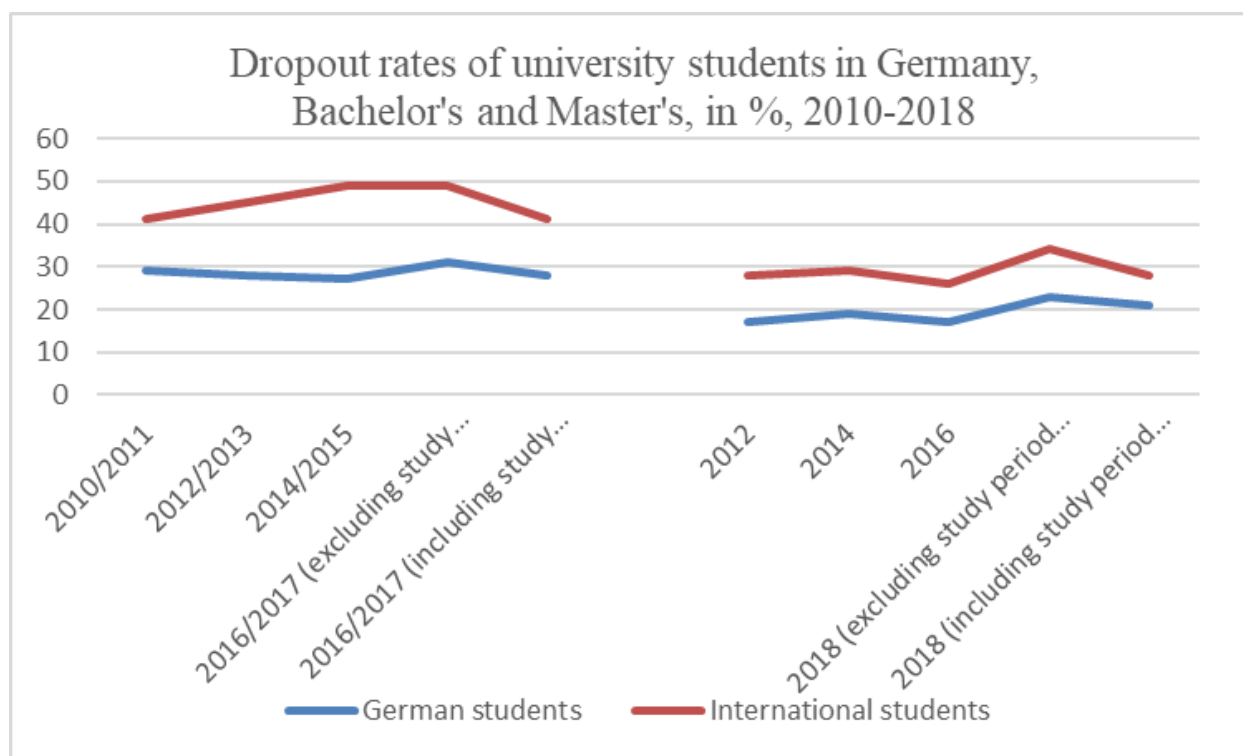
### Dropout rates from German universities

In Germany the issue of students dropping out before acquiring their degrees could be called quite topical, too. In fact, within German nationals seeking Bachelor's degrees the rate of premature drop-out constituted around 31% in 2016/2017 academic year. In the same time period for the students in the Master's degree courses, the rate was almost 10 points lower, peaking at 23% in 2018. This striking difference could be attributed to more psychological reasons, as young specialists tend to narrow down their choices when it comes to getting their Master's diploma to a more carefully chosen set of disciplines, therefore there is less chance of them prematurely finishing the studies. Moreover, an increasing number of Master's students' ages exceeds 25 years (UBC, 2022). In this case there is more chance that the initial reason to pursue higher education was connected with specific career-related goals. Financial stability also plays a role, as the older the person, the more probability for them to be expected to balance work, family and university life. As for the international students, the picture is even more dramatic. It is believed that foreign students tend not to give up on their studies due to resources spent to arrive at their destination, migration issues and possible job prospects that international education opens up, especially for students from developing countries. However, in this case, the drop out rate seems noticeably high.

Yet, a positive tendency towards a demotion can be observed. The same year German students were leaving universities by a high margin, international students followed suit. In 2017 half of foreign students decided to end their studies precipitously, even if the study period extensions are excluded. The Master's degree dropout rate is slightly lower and on average only a third of them quit university life earlier than expected. Yet in the year 2018, for instance, the percentage was close to 35 (DZHW, 2022).

Below, statistics for the past decade regarding dropout rates among Bachelor and Master degree students in Germany of local and international origin is represented.

Figure 29. Tertiary education dropout rates for students in Germany, by degree, regardless of citizenship, 2010-2018



Source: DAAD. Data processed by me

### The academic resilience of migrant students

As seen in the previous section, the data on early university dropouts of migrant students is relatively limited. However, it is important to note that on average the rates of degree attainment are much higher than for local students, regardless of the country of destination.

Most research on this topic, however, is focused on children of working migrants, so-called, 1.5-generation, that have gone through the process of socialisation in the country of destination starting from early school years. While the decision to embark on the academic career is made less

frequently than for local students, the probability of receiving the degree is overtly higher, yet is dependent on many factors. First of all, the age when future students arrive to the destination country and years of socialisation spent in the local cultural landscape; second, the supportive family attitude towards education. This point is loosely linked to the economic background, as in the low-income contexts, high school graduates might not be presented with the choice not to work. Personal motivation, most probably, is the most important factor, as receiving a university diploma can be seen as “beating all the odds” for students coming from vulnerable backgrounds. The integration into local cultural, educational context and local labour markets are crucial parts of the decision to become a part of the higher education system. However, studies suggest that 1.5-2nd generation adolescents are more likely to receive so-called “ethnic penalties”, meaning they are more prone to be unemployed, underemployed or to have precarious or non-official employment due to their national or racial origins (Maes, Wood, and Neels 2019), (Gabrielli and Impicciatore, 2022), .

In the context of the new generation of migrants in Germany and Italy, the resistance to enrol into higher education is signified by poor integration organisation, practised starting from elementary school. For instance, in both countries at least half of students do not use the local language of instruction at home. Moreover, in Germany only 7% of natives among vulnerable students are expected to enrol into the tertiary education system, while for migrants it is slightly higher - 12%, which does not convert into reality upon high school graduation. As for Italy, this coefficient is around 30% for both, migrants and native students (PISA 2015, 2018), (Gabrielli, Longobardi and Strozza, 2021). Such low societal expectation may affect the choices in regards to taking further steps in the academic world after high school.

## Conclusion

To summarise, the rising dropout rates in European states, and in Italy and Germany specifically, are closely linked to the worrying state of the local labour market and the disenfranchised youth that are about to take over positions in the said market. Moreover, the growing lack of insurance that higher education degrees used to be able to provide to future specialists, has affected the rate of degree attainment too.

As for international students, the choice to prematurely finish studies does not always stand as an option due to economic justifications, “ethnic penalties” and overall discriminatory behaviour targeting migrants, as well as so-called “academic resilience”.

However, for the 1.5-2 generation of immigrants the expectations to receive a university degree are

much lower than for newcomers due to vulnerability and disadvantaged position in the local societies, be it for lack of language skills, poor integration policies or economic background.

## Chapter VII. Conclusion and discussions

### Discussion of results

The comparative analysis and the data contribute to clearer understanding of how push and pull factors theory along with migration determinants work, in the context of internationalised education and mobile students, restricted by rigorous migration legislation, accessibility of education, and supported by strong migration networks and needs of the local labour market. However, since new approaches to transnational mobility have emerged in the past decade, focusing on migrants' personal agency, and the connection of migration to social and economic development, the multidimensional perspective to student mobility has also gained authority. As subjects of this research are highly-motivated, mostly young students, the focus on external factors, informing students towards migratory paths seems unreasonable.

As, according to the data, students choose Germany as the main destination country for their tertiary education on a relatively higher rate, and, moreover, make an effort to integrate into the labour market after receiving a degree much more frequently than in Italy, it is safe to build an assumption that one of the most important driving forces behind the choice of the country do not only rely on the accessibility of education, but also on the opportunities that the degree provides.

However, the higher drop-out rates for international students in Germany in comparison to Italy have also shown that the lack of motivation, and/or financial stability in the economic reality where education is seen as another commodity, could be a determinant in the choice to leave studies prematurely.

The methodological constraints that were stated in the beginning of the paper have restricted the study to the data on non-EU citizens arriving to Germany and Italy, as EU-students are not required to go through long bureaucratic procedures within the migration system, which can fundamentally change their experience as international students.

### Conclusion

By analysing tertiary education internationalisation efforts combined with changing migration policy imposed by Italian and German governments in the past decade, this thesis has shown how promotion of higher education and policies, encouraging high-skilled migrants and students can directly and indirectly shape student mobility. Nevertheless, the differences in the approach to internationalisation is highlighted by the limited opportunities students are presented with after

graduation, which, legally, is possible for everyone, however, the labour market in each country might not allow for a fruitful cooperation between freshly graduates and local employers.

The conditions informing mobility patterns have been shown to be based on a few points: reputation of local institutions, financial accessibility of education, migration policies imposed on students and new graduates. German universities attract students in accordance with their renowned and up-to-date technical background, with studies mostly based on research activities; welcoming migration policies, especially for those staying in the country after graduation, as well as simplified paths towards long-term permits and citizenship. Italian universities, on the other hand, rely on their reputation, too, however, in fields such as Arts and Humanities, and offer a more theoretical approach to the offered studies programmes.

The demographic situation in both countries, connected to the racing ageing population, decreasing birth-rates, and emigration of youth, that could be tackled through invitation of international students has not been properly addressed and, despite a growing popularity of both, Italy and Germany, as receiving countries for student mobility, the numbers failed to eliminate the gap left by high-skilled emigrants.

As for the mobility paths, the pre-existing migration networks proved to be significant players in Germany, as student mobility routes overlap with general immigration migrant trends into the country, especially when it comes to Chinese and Indian migrants. In Italy, it is the opposite case, as general migration trends greatly differ from inbound student mobility tendencies towards Italy.

To conclude, this comparative research has drawn an overarching picture of the state of internationalised tertiary education in the case of Italy and Germany as receiving countries, which despite seemingly systemic similarities, have shown drastically different approaches in the context of globalised education systems.

## Recommendations for future research

The scope of this research was chosen to be wide, with an intention to study generalised trends that are to be tracked within the comparative international education schemes. Therefore, it can be interpreted as a first step towards a more comprehensive, detailed study regarding Italy and Germany as attractive student hubs in the heart of Europe.

Moreover, we believe that the link between international education and migration is yet to be thoroughly researched, as it slowly becomes distinguished into a new form of migration, rather than being an afterthought of more “traditional” types, such as family or labour migration. As the focus in this research was given to the demographic states in receiving countries and the choice to



welcome international students as a means to combat labour shortages, it is advised, to open the floor for the discussions linked to demography in sending countries, especially the gender perspective, if accounted for, could become a basis for fruitful research.

Nevertheless, in the wake of shifting and changing migration laws, that also apply to foreign students, not to mention numerous military conflicts that are in the full swing across the world, it is important to continue providing quality ethnographic research into lives of international students, especially those on less well-worn paths, such as “East-to-East” or “West-to-East”.

Another topic that bears a lot of potential for social studies is the scholarship network offered not by governmental bodies, but by private entities or funds, recruiting young talent, their agendas, motivation and selection procedures, as well as promotional strategies.

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