



Service-Learning
Migrants/Refugees



Erasmus+ Project

Mobilising university-community resources through
SL(M) for the inclusion of migrants/refugees
[2022-1-ES01-KA220-HED-000087650]

REPORT ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS MIGRANTS (Pretest)



Cofinanciado por
la Unión Europea



UNIVERSITÀ
di VERONA



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1. INTRODUCTION

In a global context characterised by interconnectedness and mobility, attitudes towards migrants¹ not only reflect a society's readiness to embrace diversity, but also have a direct impact on its social cohesion (Cowling et al., 2019; Gonçalves et al., 2023). Negative perceptions can lead to dynamics of exclusion and marginalisation. In contrast, empathy, understanding and recognition of migrants' contributions can catalyse the creation of inclusive spaces where diversity is valued as an enrichment for society as a whole (Louis et al., 2013; Schweitzer, 2011).

It is important to recognise that attitudes towards migrants are not formed in a social vacuum, but are inextricably linked to media representations, government policies and everyday interactions. Entrenched stereotypes and prejudices can be challenged through educational strategies that promote a better understanding of the complexities of migration processes and the challenges faced by displaced people, to promote values of tolerance, respect and solidarity in future generations (Prentice, 2023).

Analysing university students' attitudes not only provides a snapshot of their individual perspectives, but also sheds light on the contextual and structural factors that influence the formation of these attitudes. This information is essential for the development of intervention strategies and inclusive university policies that promote respect for diversity (Cala et al., 2018; Gonçalves et al., 2023).

In this context, university students are highly relevant, since as future social and professional leaders they can play a crucial role in promoting positive attitudes towards the migrant population (Santos Rego, 2009). The knowledge and awareness acquired through training programmes and practical experiences, such as Service-Learning (SL), can have a direct impact on their contribution to the promotion of inclusion processes and, ultimately, on the well-being of all people (Santos et al., 2021).

More specifically, this report aims to address and contextualise the attitudes of university students in Spain (*Universidade de Santiago de Compostela*), Ireland (*University of Galway*) and Italy (*Università di Verona*) towards migrants. It is based on data from a questionnaire designed specifically to investigate attitudes towards this population. This report is derived from the Erasmus+ Project "*Mobilising university-community resources through SL(M) for the inclusion of migrants/refugees*", whose approach is based on Service-Learning as a

¹ In this document, the term 'migrant' is used in its broadest and most inclusive sense to include labour migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, etc. In the questionnaire, participants responded under the generic label of migrant without further information on the reasons for displacement or the entry procedure in the destination country. However, it is important to recognise that certain administrative categories may be treated differently depending on the social and political context and the historical period in which we find ourselves.

pedagogical methodology that supports the inclusion of migrants from the university.

More specifically, the general objective of this report is to analyse the attitudes of university students before participating in the training course on SL(M) and, if applicable, before participating in a Service-Learning project that is operationally focused on the needs of the migrant population.

In the light of the above, we will first describe the participants and then explain the instrument used for data collection. Thirdly, we will analyse the attitudes of the university students towards the migrant group and finally we will draw the main conclusions.

This first approach will be the starting point for analysing the impact of Service-Learning in changing attitudes and promoting social inclusion in Europe.

2. PARTICIPANTS

A total of 236 students participated in the SL(M) training at the three partner universities of the project, but only 113 completed the questionnaire (47.9%). Most were women (69.4%) (see Table 1).

Table 1

University students' gender

GENDER	FREQUENCY (%)
Male	29 (26.9%)
Female	75 (69.4%)
Other	2 (1.9%)
Prefer not to answer	2 (1.9%)
Missing data	5 (4.4%)
Total	113 (100%)

Focusing on country of birth (see Table 2), although the partner countries where the project was being implemented had the highest percentages, the overall figure also indicates the diversity of countries of origin. This may be due to the number of mobile students in the higher education, who rely on their participation in these actions as a key strategy for further training.

Table 2

University students' country of birth

COUNTRY	FREQUENCY (%)
Italy	43 (38.1%)

Spain	33 (29.2%)
Ireland	9 (8%)
Romania	3 (2.7%)
Cuba	2 (1.8%)
France	2 (1.8%)
Germany	2 (1.8%)
Uruguay	2 (1.8%)
Argentina	1 (0.9%)
Bangladesh	1 (0.9%)
Chile	1 (0.9%)
Colombia	1 (0.9%)
Honduras	1 (0.9%)
Morocco	1 (0.9%)
México	1 (0.9%)
Peru	1 (0.9%)
United Kingdom	1 (0.9%)
Switzerland	1 (0.9%)
Sweden	1 (0.9%)
Netherlands	1 (0.9%)
Missing data	5 (4.4%)
Total	113 (100%)

Students were studying at the *Università di Verona* (42.5%), *Universidade de Santiago de Compostela* (38,9%) and *University of Galway* (11.5%) (see Table 3). However, in a similar way to their origins, we saw a variety of participant affiliation to other higher education institutions, which may be due to their status as students on mobility actions (2.7%).

Table 3

Participating students' universities

UNIVERSITY	FREQUENCY (%)
Università di Verona	43 (42.5%)
Universidade de Santiago de Compostela	44 (38.9%)
University of Galway	13 (11.5%)
Excelia (Business School)	1 (0.9%)
Ott-Friedrich Universität Bamberg	1 (0.9%)

Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán	1 (0.9%)
Missing data	5 (4.4%)
Total	113 (100%)

They were mainly undergraduate (60.9%) or postgraduate students (22.8%) (see Table 4).

Table 4

University student's course types

STUDIES	FREQUENCY (%)
Bachelor's degree	56 (60.9%)
Postgraduate	21 (22.8%)
Other	15 (16.3%)
Missing data	21 (18.6%)
Total	113 (100%)

Finally, we examined the students' previous socio-community involvement in two ways: participation in SL projects and volunteer actions (see Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5

Previous participation in SL projects

SL PARTICIPATION	FREQUENCY (%)
No	81 (75%)
Yes	27 (25%)
Missing data	5 (4.4%)
Total	113 (100%)

Table 6

Previous participation in volunteer activities

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION	FREQUENCY (%)
No	57 (56.4%)
Yes, at the university	5 (5%)
Yes, with an organisation	38 (37.6%)
Yes, both	1 (1%)
Missing data	12 (10.6%)
Total	113 (100%)

This confirms that most students had no knowledge of Service-Learning methodology (75%)

and that more than half of the participants had no experience of social and community engagement activities such as volunteering (56.4%).

3. INSTRUMENT

The instrument used is based on two scales from the Questionnaire of Attitudes towards Refugee Families (CAFARE), originally developed as part of the UNINTEGRA project funded by the European Commission's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (<https://unintegra.usc.es/>). We adapted the scales to specifically reflect the attitudes of university students in Spain, Ireland and Italy towards migrants.

The questionnaire was translated into three languages: Spanish, English and Italian, to ensure participants could access and understand it in their respective language codes.

The instrument has four sections:

- Respondent profile: collects socio-demographic questions such as gender, age, country of birth, university where they are studying and what they are studying.
- Service-Learning (SL) experience: asks about participation in the SL(M) training course and their involvement in SL experiences during the 2023-2024 academic year. This section will be analysed once the entire data collection process has been completed.
- Previous socio-community involvement: refers to previous participation in Service-Learning projects at university or in volunteer programmes.
- Attitude scales: these are Likert scales designed to measure university students' attitudes towards the migrant population in the three countries. These scales were adapted from previous studies such as Schweitzer et al. (2005) and García et al. (2003). There are two scales with seven values ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' for statements about the situation of migrants, and five values (from 'none' to 'high') to measure the emotional intensity of seeing and thinking about a migrant person.

Data collection was done online using the *Microsoft Forms* platform. Specifically, the questionnaire was completed both before (*pre-test*) the students participated in the training activities (basic training course on the topic)—and, if applicable, participation in SL(M) projects (P2P experiences implemented from subjects of different degrees and fields of knowledge in the three participating universities)—and after the completion of the SL(M) project activities they participated in (*post-test*). This first report, is a preliminary presentation of the pre-test data only, not the whole sample, as there are students who will be trained in the second semester. The analysis was carried out using the statistical program SPSS version 27.

The pre-test questionnaire within the framework of this preliminary report was applied during October and November 2023.

4. RESULTS

We now present the results of the main objective of the study, which focused on analysing the attitudes of students at the three universities towards the migrant population prior to their participation in the project's training activities (see Table 7).

Table 7

Descriptive statistics on attitudes towards migrants

ITEMS	Mean	SD
Migrants get more from (Spain/Italy/Ireland) than they contribute	2.92	1.577
The children of migrants should have the same rights to attend public schools in (Spain/Italy/Ireland) as (Spanish/Italian/Irish) children do	6.45	1.307
Migrants have increased the tax burden on (Spanish/Italian/Irish)	2.74	1.737
Migrants are displacing (Spanish/Italian/Irish) workers from their job	2.16	1.467
Migrants should be eligible for the same health care benefits as those received by (Spanish/Italian/Irish)	6.23	1.514
The quality of social services available to (Spanish/Italian/Irish) has remained the same, despite migrants coming to (Spain/Italy/Ireland)	5.29	1.629
Migrants have the right to aid/assistance just like vulnerable (Spanish/Italian/Irish)	5.92	1.714
Migrants should learn to conform to the rules and norms of (Spanish/Italian/Irish) society as soon as possible after they arrive	4.57	1.794
The reception of migrants is undermining (Spanish/Italian/Irish) culture	2.01	1.710
The values and beliefs of migrants regarding work are basically quite similar to those of (Spanish/Italian/Irish)	4.00	1.571
The values and beliefs of migrants regarding moral and religious issues are compatible with the beliefs and values of most (Spanish/Italian/Irish)	4.32	1.844
The values and beliefs of migrants regarding family issues and socialising children are basically quite similar to that of (Spanish/Italian/Irish)	4.18	1.582
The values and beliefs of migrants regarding social relations are compatible with the beliefs and values of most (Spanish/Italian/Irish)	3.80	2.054
Migrants should have to accept (Spanish/Italian/Irish) customs/traditions	3.86	1.862

In general terms, the results point to a positive attitude among university students in relation

to the rights and opportunities that the migrant population should have in host countries. Respondents agreed that the children of migrants should have the same right to education as children in the host country (M=6.45; SD=1.30). Similarly, they agreed that they have the right to receive the same health care (M=6.23; SD=1.51), and equal access to social assistance (M=5.29; SD=1.71). They felt that the quality of social services was the same after the arrival of migrants in their country (M=5.29; SD=1.62).

These results are also supported by other complementary findings that suggest a favourable view of migrants. Young university students did not agree with the statement that the arrival of migrants weakens culture (M=2.01; SD=1.71), causes the displacement of locals in the labour market (M=2.16; SD=1.46) or contributes to an increase in taxes (M=2.74; SD=1.73).

However, there were also some discrepancies, especially in terms of the migrant population's values, beliefs and customs and their adaptation to those of the host society. While they indicated that migrants' values and beliefs of migrants were compatible or similar to those of the country in moral and religious matters (M=4.32; SD=1.844), family and socialisation of children (M=4.18; SD=1.582), and work (M=4.00; SD=1.571), in other aspects this perception was not so positive.

In this regard, it is worth noting the scores in terms of the fact that migrants should accept the customs of the host country (M=3.86; SD=1.862) or that the values and beliefs of migrants regarding social relations are not compatible with those of the host country (M=3.80; SD=2.054). On this last point, however, it is worth noting the high standard deviation, indicating significant heterogeneity in participants' responses.

To complete this analysis, we now focus on the emotions that respondents identify when they see or think of migrants (see Table 8).

Table 8

Descriptive statistics for emotions towards migrants

ITEMS	Mean	SD
Admiration	3.51	1.164
Hatred	1.22	.646
Attraction	2.56	.988
Hostility	1.56	1.008
Anger	1.33	.820
Fear	1.59	.907
Sympathy	3.35	1.105
Discomfort	1.59	.897
Disgust	1.26	.766

Pity	2.38	1.243
Insecurity	1.69	.983
Distrust	1.60	.875
Compassion	3.29	1.447
Indifference	2.17	1.204
Respect	4.20	1.134
Gratitude	2.90	1.168

As Table 8 shows, young people generally reported positive emotions towards the migrant population. This is evidenced by high scores for emotions such as respect (M=4.20; SD=1.34), admiration (M=3.51; SD=1.16) and sympathy (M=3.35; SD=1.10).

This is complemented lower scores for emotions such as hatred (M=1.22; SD=.64), disgust (M=1.26; SD=.76), anger (M=1.33; SD=.820), fear (M=1.59; SD=.907), discomfort (M=1.59; SD=.897), distrust (M=1.60; SD=.875), and insecurity (M=1.69; SD=.983). However, the results also suggest that students associated emotions such as compassion (M=3.29; SD=1.44) with migrants.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In general, the results indicate fairly favourable attitudes from the participants towards the migrant population. For example, respondents are in favour of equal rights and opportunities in the host countries. Similarly, they report that migrant integration into European society does not weaken culture, does not displace natives in the labour market, and does not appear to be a factor contributing to higher taxes or a deterioration in social services.

However, the results also suggest some discrepancies in the attitudes of university students. Specifically, that migrants should accept customs or that their values and beliefs about social relations are not compatible with those of the host country.

These findings are complemented by the emotions students reported when seeing or interacting with migrants. For example, emotions such as respect, admiration and sympathy were scored highly, unlike others such as hatred, disgust and anger, discomfort, insecurity and distrust.

However, the findings also indicate that emotions such as compassion are associated with the migrant population. This is a perspective that should be worked on through the project's actions, based on the adoption of an intercultural approach in which the emphasis on principles of equity and social justice contribute to the empowerment of all people.

In conclusion, it worth noting that the results of our preliminary report represent a starting point for universities and social organisations to work together, bringing the realities in which migrants live, or in which they have to move, closer to the academic and student

communities of higher education, thinking about strategies that help university students to see themselves as agents of social transformation and, consequently, involved in defending the values of equality and mutual respect.

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