

Intersecting Margins: Analysing the Integration of Global South Student Migrants through Migration, Labour Market, and Housing Patterns in Italy

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the intersection of migration, labour markets, and housing patterns through the experiences of student migrants from the Global South, with a particular focus on Italy. As student migration from the Global South increases, countries such as Italy face both opportunities and challenges in integrating these students into their socio-economic structures. The paper focuses on how race, legal status, and national policy environments shape access to employment, housing, and long-term settlement. Drawing on human capital theory and migration decision-making perspectives, the paper examines how Global South student migrants represent potential sources of skilled human capital for Italy, while highlighting how labour market barriers, housing constraints, and institutional conditions influence whether this potential translates into long-term integration.

However, many face structural barriers, limited access to part-time jobs, labour exploitation, racial discrimination, and exclusion from affordable housing, often resulting in onward migration or return after graduation. These dynamics raise questions about inclusivity, development, and the effectiveness of EU regional policy. We propose the need for more structured pathways for student retention in Italy, despite persistent challenges.

Through a mixed-method approach, the study combines secondary data (Eurostat, OECD) and survey responses from students and recent graduates (2022–2025). The research illustrates how national and institutional contexts shape individual migration trajectories. The findings underscore the centrality of housing access and labour market participation in shaping graduate retention decisions, with broader implications for debates on brain drain, brain gain, and brain circulation, that is, whether migrant talent is lost to origin countries, retained in destination countries, or circulated transnationally. We argue for inclusive policy frameworks at both national and EU levels to support Global South student migrants, particularly racialized individuals, as vital contributors to economic growth and regional development.

Keywords: Global South student migrants, Labour market, Housing discrimination, Italy

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a surge in student mobility in tertiary education, paving the way for students seeking access to prestigious educational programmes, world-renowned institutions, and advanced professional prospects in more developed countries (OECD, 2025). Although this recent surge is notable, the desire to pursue

higher education outside one's country of origin is not new, as students have long sought to broaden their educational and cultural horizons (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011).

After years of growth driven by internationalization strategies, there are indications that perspectives toward international students are beginning to shift in some major destination countries. Recent viewpoints question whether international education is fully delivering on its potential. International students have become vital to university funding, local economies, and labour markets, while also serving as a key source of future skilled workers, particularly in STEM fields, supported by rising demand from major sending countries (Collett, 2025). The demand for international education is expected to increase further, and the value of the skills, competencies, and global outlook gained abroad continues to gain currency (Bhandari et al., 2018).

The pursuit of international education is projected to grow, with the skills, experiences, and transnational perspectives acquired abroad increasingly shaping how student migrants from the Global South navigate integration into Italy's labour market and housing landscape. Italy occupies a distinctive position in the history of international knowledge exchange. Its universities, among the oldest in the world, have long attracted foreign scholars and students, sustaining intellectual traditions that predate modern internationalisation policy (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011). In the accession process toward a more integrated community, the European Union has developed educational policies that member states can replicate to advance innovation and reduce existing knowledge disparities.

Despite this historical openness, a persistent and well-documented deficit remains in both the supply of affordable housing for international students and in their access to formal employment opportunities (FuturesAbroad, 2024). This paper therefore proposes a framework for more substantive integration policies, policies that move beyond narrowly academic inclusion and directly confront the twin precariats of housing and labour that Global South students routinely navigate. These structural constraints are perpetuated by policy frameworks that have not kept pace with the realities of a more diverse international student body, thereby undermining the very mandate of knowledge exchange and scholarly continuity that internationalisation is meant to serve.

This study aims to investigate how migration status, labour market participation, and housing intersect in shaping the integration of international students, with particular attention to the challenges faced by students from the Global South in Italy. The following chapter presents the literature review, offering a structured overview of student migration in Europe, integration policy, mobility dynamics between the Global South and Global North, and existing research gaps. The subsequent chapter outlines the theoretical framework, drawing on economic perspectives, including Swarnjit S. Arora's (1974) conceptualisation of expected utility, which compares anticipated future opportunities abroad with the utility of remaining in the country of origin.

The methodology chapter adopts a mixed-methods approach and employs SPSS to analyse data collected through questionnaires, grounded in a human-needs-based perspective. The results chapter examines migration patterns, labour market participation, and housing experiences. Finally, the discussion and conclusion highlight key implications and advocate for more inclusive policies for international students, particularly those from the Global South.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

Student migration has steadily increased over recent years. Studying at foreign universities imbues students with indispensable life experiences while enhancing their prospects in the global labour market (Guzi, 2023). As active contributors to economic growth, students carry diverse experiences that collectively shape their engagement with new environments. Their importance is particularly visible within the context of globalised knowledge production, where increased international student mobility presents a significant opportunity for European regions to attract global talent. International students also contribute economically to local labour markets, reinforcing patterns of attraction and retention across Europe (Guzi, 2023).

However, within knowledge production, scholars from the Global South often receive limited visibility, while academic contributions from the Global North are disproportionately foregrounded. This imbalance is also reflected in the treatment of international students, particularly those from the Global South. Addressing these disparities requires institutional policies that prioritize growth, diversity, and inclusiveness, values that remain unevenly institutionalized across European academic settings. Such an approach could help bridge existing gaps arising from non-inclusive policies and promote the retention of young scholars migrating to Europe.

Within this analytical context, Italy represents a compelling case. The Italian Republic continues to welcome global talent, sustaining a legacy shaped by intellectual exchange. However, despite this openness, there remains a significant gap in legal and policy frameworks that adequately address the needs of international students residing in Italy.

Between 2015 and 2023, international student migration experienced a marked increase, with Global South students, particularly from India, accounting for a significant share. This trend is expected to continue, positioning Italy as an increasingly preferred destination for international education (KC Overseas Education, 2025). The expansion of internationalisation strategies, globalised labour markets, and scholarship availability has facilitated this growth.

Conversely, many international students from the Global South remain confined to precarious, low-wage, or part-time employment in Italy. Braverman's (1974) analysis of labour degradation under capitalism provides a useful, if partial, foundation. His framework traces how capitalist reorganisation systematically deskills and devalues labour; however, it largely overlooks the additional sorting functions performed by race and legal status. For Global South student migrants, marginalisation in the labour market cannot be explained by class position alone, racialisation and immigration status operate as compounding mechanisms that channel educated, credentialled workers into insecure, low-wage employment regardless of their human capital. Similar dynamics emerge in housing, where discriminatory practices against Black and non-EU students reproduce exclusion and vulnerability. Factoring race into labour process analysis demonstrates how capitalist labour relations and racial hierarchies jointly produce compounded inequalities that hinder integration.

Higher education institutions serve as central arenas for evaluating internationalisation trajectories and remain pivotal actors in global competition for talent (Cerna & Chou, 2023). In fulfilling this role, higher education institutions implicitly draw on human capital theory, which treats education, skills, and experience as investments that enhance individual productivity and long-term earnings (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1993). Tassinopoulos, Werner, and Kristensen (1998) further emphasise the importance of the EU's four fundamental freedoms, particularly freedom of movement, which is critical for migrant inclusion and regional development. As Bauschke-Urban and Dedgioni (2025) argue, student mobility from the Global South must be understood within the broader dynamics of brain drain, brain circulation, and brain waste, where the outflow of talent may benefit destination countries while depriving origin countries of skilled human capital.

According to the International Organization for Migration, there were approximately 281 million international migrants worldwide in 2020, with migration accelerating due to intensified globalisation. While countries and institutions have introduced policies to facilitate integration, challenges persist, particularly within the European Union. The EU continues to experience integration difficulties linked to increased migration flows, including the growing presence of Global South students.

Italy's attractiveness as a study destination is driven by academic excellence, relatively affordable education, simplified admission procedures, and a wide range of English-taught programmes. Additionally, regional scholarships and regulated work opportunities (up to 20 hours per week) support students from lower-income backgrounds (FuturesAbroad, 2024). Despite these advantages, integration challenges persist, particularly in housing access and labour market discrimination, disproportionately affecting non-EU students.

This study examines how migration status, nationality, and racialisation intersect with labour market and housing experiences among Global South student migrants in Italy. It highlights the growing diversity among international students and underscores the need for policies that support equitable integration into housing and labour markets. When afforded fair opportunities, Global South student migrants can play a substantial role in economic growth, particularly in lagging regions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is primarily guided by Human Capital Theory (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1993), which conceptualizes education, skills, and knowledge acquisition as investments that enhance individual productivity and future economic potential. Within the context of international student migration, higher education represents not only an individual investment but also a potential source of human capital accumulation for receiving societies. International students contribute to knowledge exchange, innovation, and future labour supply; however, the realization of these benefits depends on whether institutional environments enable successful transitions from study to employment.

While international education can facilitate the accumulation of human capital, this process does not automatically translate into socio-economic integration. For Global South student migrants in Italy, the conversion of educational credentials into labour market opportunities may be constrained by legal status, limited employment pathways, language barriers, housing insecurity, and experiences of discrimination. Therefore, this study examines integration not simply as educational participation, but as a process through which acquired human capital is either converted into meaningful social and economic inclusion or restricted by structural barriers.

To understand students' decisions regarding mobility and future settlement, the study incorporates Arora's (1974) expected utility migration model as a complementary analytical perspective. The model suggests that migration decisions are shaped by comparisons between expected opportunities in the destination country and expected utility in the country of origin. Formally:

$$\Delta U = [pU(Y_m) + (1 - p)U(Y_s)] - U(Y_0) - C$$

where p represents the probability of achieving favourable labour market outcomes in Italy, Y_m and Y_s depicts the potential income in successful and less successful employment scenarios, Y_0 captures expected income at home, and C reflects the full cost burden of migration, encompassing travel, tuition fees, and bureaucratic processing costs; housing costs in Italian cities, which are documented as disproportionately high for non-EU students, are treated here as a recurring component of this cost structure rather than a one-time migration expense (Eneje, 2025; Yamin, 2025).

In this study, the expected utility model is not tested econometrically. Rather, it provides an interpretive framework for understanding how employment uncertainty, housing affordability, and institutional barriers influence students' decisions to remain in Italy, return to their countries of origin, or pursue onward migration.

Furthermore, an intersectional perspective is incorporated to examine how migration status, nationality, racialisation, and language proficiency may produce unequal experiences among Global South students. This perspective is particularly relevant because international students do not encounter labour and housing markets as homogeneous actors; rather, their opportunities may be shaped by social identities and institutional categories attached to their migration status.

Thus, the analytical framework adopted in this paper conceptualizes integration as a process in which human capital acquisition interacts with institutional conditions. Labour market access, housing stability, and experiences of inclusion operate as key mechanisms determining whether international students successfully transition from temporary educational migrants into longer-term contributors within Italian society.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study conceptualizes the integration of Global South student migrants as a process shaped by the interaction between human capital acquisition and institutional conditions. The framework proposes that international students arrive in Italy with accumulated educational aspirations and skills; however, their ability to convert this human capital into long-term socio-economic integration depends on access to employment, housing, and inclusive institutional environments.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between human capital accumulation, institutional conditions, structural barriers, and integration outcomes among Global South student migrants in Italy.

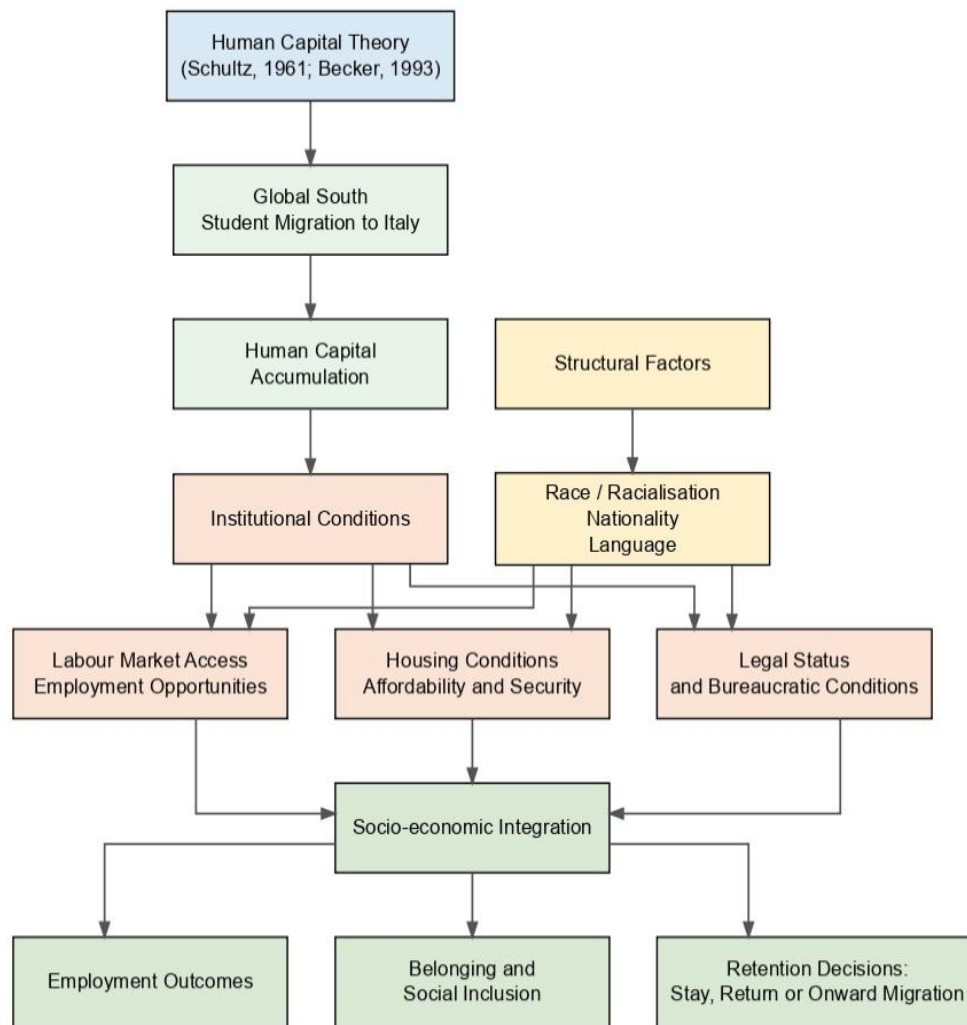


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The framework draws primarily on Human Capital Theory while incorporating expected utility migration theory to explain mobility decisions and intersectionality to analyse unequal experiences across migrant groups.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper addresses one key question: How do labour market participation and housing experiences shape the socio-economic integration trajectories of Global South student migrants in Italy?

This question is addressed through the following sub-questions:

- What employment patterns and barriers do Global South students experience in Italy?
- How do housing conditions influence students' perceptions of belonging and future settlement intentions?
- How do legal status, language ability, and nationality intersect with labour and housing experiences?
- What institutional policies could improve graduate retention?

Critiques of European Regional Policy, including rent-seeking and inefficient spending (Ederveen, Gorter, Nahuis, & de Groot, 2002, 2006), minimal returns on education-focused funding (Rodríguez-Pose & Fratesi, 2004), and persistent regional productivity gaps despite structural funds (Aiello & Pupo, 2012), provide a useful backdrop for understanding the challenges facing Global South student migrants in Italy. While migration is often framed as a driver of growth, increasingly restrictive policies have curtailed student mobility. In Italy, non-EU

students experience limited part-time work opportunities, racial discrimination, and acute housing insecurity, intersecting pressures that often compel them to leave after graduation rather than integrate into the labour market or local communities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected between August 2025 and September 2025 through an online questionnaire distributed among Global South student migrants currently enrolled in Italian universities. The study employed a non-probability sampling strategy, combining elements of convenience and snowball sampling. The initial respondents were identified through academic networks, student associations, and migrant community groups, after which participants were encouraged to forward the survey link to peers within their institutions and social circles. This approach was appropriate given the absence of a centralised list of international students from the Global South in Italy and the difficulty of accessing this population through random selection. Consequently, the sampling strategy facilitated broader participation across nationalities and regions while capturing diverse experiences of migration, labour market engagement, and housing conditions that shape the integration processes of student migrants.

The survey instrument comprised 23 questions in total, of which 21 were closed-ended items using structured response categories and 2 were open-ended fields inviting free-text responses. The questionnaire was organised around five thematic domains: (i) socio-demographic and academic background, including gender, age, country of origin, enrolled university, Italian language proficiency, and academic status; (ii) labour market participation, covering employment type, monthly earnings, income sufficiency, and experiences of difficulty in accessing legal employment; (iii) workplace composition and discrimination; (iv) housing conditions, including housing type, affordability, discrimination, and tenure security; and (v) post-graduation intentions and policy perceptions, encompassing plans to remain in Italy, onward migration preferences, the factors shaping those decisions, perceived challenges, and recommended policy reforms. The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms to Global South students currently enrolled in or recently graduated from Italian universities between 2022 and 2025. All closed-ended items were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics, with cross-tabulations employed as the primary analytical technique given the exploratory nature of the study and the constraints of the sample size (N=53).

In line with the theoretical model, our SPSS cross-tabulations operationalise economic marginalisation through observed differences in employment probability, income sufficiency, housing burden, and discrimination across gender, ethnicity, region, and Italian language proficiency.

In addition to closed-ended questions, the survey included optional open-ended fields where participants could describe their most significant challenges, experiences of discrimination, housing difficulties, and policy suggestions. These written responses were analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and to provide qualitative depth to the quantitative findings. Direct quotations are presented below to illustrate the lived experiences of Global South student migrants in Italy, while preserving complete anonymity.

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles governing social research involving human participants. Survey participation was entirely voluntary, and all respondents were informed of the study's purpose prior to completing the questionnaire. No personally identifying information was collected, and all qualitative quotations presented below have been anonymised to protect participant confidentiality. Future research should employ stratified sampling across universities and Italian regions to capture differences between institutional contexts and geographical labour markets.

RESULTS

Due to low expected cell counts, the chi-square test results are not reported, and the analysis focuses on descriptive patterns observed in the cross-tabulations. Variations in valid response counts may reflect question sensitivity, survey length, a respondent uncertainty. This is a common limitation in self-administered surveys and does not affect the overall interpretation of trends. Tables 1 through 9 present the frequency distributions and cross-tabulations that summarize key aspects of the study.

Table 1 – Employment Status vs. Income Sufficiency

Employment Status	No (insufficient)	Yes (sufficient)	Barely (manageable)	Total
Unemployed	8	8	7	23
Part-time	5	7	0	12
Full-time	0	2	1	3
Occasionally	10	1	0	11
Total	23	18	8	49

Note. Only respondents with complete data on both variables are included (valid N = 49 out of 53 total). Missing responses excluded listwise.

The cross-tabulation reveals a nuanced relationship between employment status and income sufficiency. Full-time employed students report the highest income satisfaction (67% 'Yes'), followed by part-time workers (58% 'Yes'). However, unemployed students show a mixed pattern: only 35% report income insufficiency, while 35% report sufficiency and 30% report borderline adequacy. This suggests that many unemployed students rely on non-labour sources of support (e.g. family remittances, scholarships). In contrast, students who work only occasionally face severe financial strain, with 91% reporting insufficient income. These findings indicate that labour market participation improves but does not solely appears related to financial well-being for Global South student migrants in Italy.

Table 2 – Housing Type vs. Housing Affordability

Housing Type	No (unaffordable)	Yes (affordable)	Barely manageable	Total
University-provided housing	2	4	1	7
Private housing	3	9	1	13
Shared flat	4	12	9	25
With relatives/friends	2	1	0	3
No housing	1	0	0	1
Total	12	26	11	49

Note. Only respondents with complete data on both variables are included (valid N = 49 out of 53 total). Missing responses excluded listwise.

The cross-tabulation in Table 2 reveals a more complex picture than expected. Contrary to expectations, private housing shows the highest proportion of affordable options (9 out of 13, or 69%), followed by university-provided housing (4 out of 7, or 57%). However, shared flats present the greatest financial burden: only 48% report affordability, while 36% find them barely manageable and 16% unaffordable. Living with relatives or friends is the least affordable option (only 33% affordable). These findings suggest that institutional housing (university-provided) is not necessarily the most affordable; private market housing can be affordable for some students, while shared flats – often considered a budget option – actually produce high rates of financial strain. This highlights the need for nuanced housing policies that go beyond simply expanding university dormitories. The results are partially consistent with Eneje (2025) and Yamin (2025), who document structural exclusion in housing markets, but they also show that some Global South students access affordable private housing, indicating heterogeneity in housing experiences.

Table 3 – Country of Origin vs. Housing Discrimination

Country of origin	No (no discrimination)	Yes (discrimination)	Total
Nigeria	14	21	35
Pakistan	0	7	7
Iran	1	2	3
Middle East (Lebanon, Iraq)	1	1	2

India	1	0	1
Africa (Ghana, Ethiopia, Lesotho)	1	1	2
Total	18	32	50

Note. Only respondents with complete data on both variables are included (valid N = 50 out of 53 total). Missing responses excluded listwise.

Table 3 reveals significant variation in housing discrimination by country of origin. Pakistani students report the highest level of discrimination (100%), followed by Iranian (67%) and Nigerian (60%). Students from the Middle East (Lebanon, Iraq) and other African countries (Ghana, Ethiopia, Lesotho) report 50% discrimination, while Indian students report none (n=1). The single Indian respondent in this sample reported no discrimination; however, given that this sub-group consists of only one observation, no interpretive weight should be attached to this figure, and it is excluded from cross-group comparisons. These descriptive patterns suggest that nationality and perceived ethnicity may influence housing experiences among Global South students in Italy. However, given the limited number of observations within some national groups, these findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than representative. The findings are consistent with existing literature suggesting that racialisation and nationality may shape migrant experiences in European housing markets. The relevance of country of origin is strongly reflected in Yamin (2025), Eneje (2025), and Bulutbeyaz (2025). Yamin (2025) provides empirical evidence from Germany showing that migrants of Pakistani origin face high levels of discrimination linked to ethnicity, religion, and skin colour. Eneje (2025) documents similar racialised exclusion faced by African migrants in Italy, indicating that origin plays a central role in access to housing and social acceptance. Bulutbeyaz (2025) further demonstrates how ethnic and national background exposes non-EU students to discriminatory practices in European urban contexts. These findings collectively support the cross-tabulated analysis of housing discrimination by students' country or region of origin.

Table 4: Speak Italian vs. Employment Status

Speak Italian	No (unemployed)	Part-time	Full-time	Occasionally	Total
None	2	2	0	0	4
Basic	16	7	1	8	32
Intermediate	6	3	1	3	13
Fluent/Native	1	0	1	0	2
Total	25	12	3	11	51

Note. Only respondents with complete data on both variables are included (valid N = 51 out of 53 total). Missing responses excluded listwise.

Table 4 shows no clear association between Italian language proficiency and formal employment. Speakers with no Italian have a formal employment rate of 50% (2 out of 4), similar to fluent/native speakers (50%, 1 out of 2). However, basic speakers have only 25% formal employment (8 out of 32), and intermediate speakers 31% (4 out of 13). Notably, occasional work is reported almost exclusively by basic (25%) and intermediate (23%) speakers, while none and fluent speakers report no occasional work. The descriptive patterns observed in this sample do not indicate a straightforward relationship between Italian language proficiency and formal employment status; structural barriers such as discrimination, legal status, or network access may play a larger role. The small sample sizes for the lowest and highest proficiency groups caution against overgeneralization.

Table 5 – Employment Status vs. Stay After Graduation

Employment Status	No (will not stay)	Yes (will stay)	Undecided	Total
Unemployed	8	8	9	25
Part-time	2	6	4	12
Full-time	1	1	1	3
Occasionally	1	2	8	11
Total	12	17	22	51

Note. Only respondents with complete data on both variables are included (valid N = 51 out of 53 total). Missing responses excluded listwise.

Table 5 shows that part-time employed students are most likely to intend to stay in Italy after graduation (50%, 6 out of 12), compared to full-time (33%, 1 out of 3) and unemployed (32%, 8 out of 25). Students who work only occasionally have the lowest intention to stay (18%, 2 out of 11), and the highest rate of undecided responses (73%, 8 out of 11). These findings suggest that stable part-time work may encourage retention, but full-time employment does not substantially increase stay intentions over unemployment. The high proportion of undecided students across all groups (ranging from 33% to 73%) indicates significant uncertainty about post-graduation plans, likely due to broader structural barriers such as visa restrictions or labour market discrimination.

Table 6 – Current Region vs. Employment Status

Current Region	No (unemployed)	Part-time	Full-time	Occasionally	Total
North	15	4	2	6	27
Central	3	2	0	3	8
South	7	4	1	2	14
Islands	0	2	0	0	2
Total	25	12	3	11	51

Note. Only respondents with complete data on both variables are included (valid N = 51 out of 53 total). Missing responses excluded listwise.

Table 6 shows regional variation in employment outcomes. The South has the highest formal employment rate (36%, 5 out of 14), followed by Central (25%, 2 out of 8) and North (22%, 6 out of 27). The Islands have a 100% employment rate, though based on only 2 respondents. Notably, occasional work is most common in Central (38%) and North (22%), while South has the lowest rate of occasional work (14%). These descriptive patterns are surprising in the context of well-established regional economic disparities, and several explanatory possibilities warrant consideration: informal networks in Southern university towns, sectoral differences in available work, or the possibility that students self-select into Southern institutions partly on the basis of expected labour market conditions. Given the small sub-group sizes, these observations should be treated as preliminary and worthy of dedicated future investigation rather than as settled findings. Overall, small sample sizes for Central, South, and Islands caution against strong conclusions.

Table 7 - Challenges Faced by Global South Students

Challenge	Frequency	Percent %
Language Barrier	15	44.10%
Social Discrimination	6	17.60%
Bureaucracy	5	14.70%
Housing Problems	4	11.80%
Lack of Job Opportunities	2	5.90%
Financial Hardship	2	5.90%
Total	34	100%

Note. Only respondents with complete data on both variables are included (valid N = 34 out of 53 total). Missing responses excluded listwise.

Table 7 shows that language barrier is the most frequently reported challenge among Global South student migrants, cited by 44.1% of valid respondents (15 out of 34). Social discrimination (17.6%) and bureaucracy (14.7%) are the next most common challenges, followed by housing problems (11.8%). Lack of job opportunities and financial hardship are each reported by 5.9% of respondents. These findings highlight that linguistic exclusion is the primary barrier to integration, compounded by discrimination and administrative hurdles.

Table 8 - Reasons why students intend to leave Italy

Reason	% of respondents
Better opportunities elsewhere	75%
Lack of job opportunities	70%
Immigration restrictions	40%
Discrimination	30%
Housing insecurity	23%
Family reasons	23%

Note. Percentages represent proportion of all respondents (N=53). Multiple responses allowed; percentages do not sum to 100.

Table 8 shows that better opportunities elsewhere (75%) and lack of job opportunities (70%) are the most frequently cited reasons for intending to leave Italy. Immigration restrictions (40%), discrimination (30%), housing insecurity (23%), and family reasons (23%) are less common but still significant. These findings suggest that push factors (limited jobs) and pull factors (better opportunities abroad) both drive onward migration, with legal and social barriers playing secondary roles.

Table 9 - Policy Recommendations Envisage by students

Policy Recommendation	Frequency	Percent (%)
Job Opportunities Support	9	24.30%
Immigration Reform	8	21.60%
Language Support	7	18.90%
More funding scholarships	6	16.20%
Housing support	6	16.20%
Anti discrimination policy	1	2.70%
Total	37	100%

Note. Valid N = 37 out of 53 total respondents (16 did not answer). Percentages are based on valid responses only.

Table 9 shows that job opportunities support is the most frequently recommended policy (24.3%), followed by immigration reform (21.6%) and language support (18.9%). More funding scholarships and housing support are each cited by 16.2% of respondents. Anti-discrimination policy is rarely mentioned (2.7%). These findings indicate that students prioritize labour market access and migration policy reforms over social policies.

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RECOMMENDATION

These experiences reflect wider structural challenges in Italy and the EU regarding labor and housing policies. True convergence across lagging regions is only possible within a more inclusive environment, one that acknowledges the compound marginalization faced by racialized, migrant students. Guided by the perspective of Barca et al. (2012), we argue for a regional development model that promotes convergence via development. European policy must better support labor and housing integration for migrant students, who bring innovation and competitive ideas. Without investment, migration is wrongly framed as a problem rather than a potential solution. Creating inclusive spaces, especially in underdeveloped regions like Southern Italy, could alleviate labor shortages, reduce housing costs and foster long-term growth. Understanding the experiential knowledge of migrant students is essential for designing more effective and humane integration policies.

Future studies would benefit from methodological diversification, including the use of facilitated dialogue and narrative inquiry approaches. As Helm (2021) argues, prioritising genuine comprehension over extractive data collection creates conditions in which participants' experiential knowledge can be heard on its own terms rather than filtered through pre-set analytical categories. Such approaches would complement the quantitative patterns identified here and generate the kind of contextually rich evidence that integration policymakers urgently need.

The work of Helm and Padovani (2019) demonstrates that universities can function as “temporary homes” where storytelling and active listening create spaces of solidarity and belonging. Furthermore, examining how Global South students’ identities are co-constructed in interaction with host-country actors, often under asymmetric power relations (Helm, 2017), would deepen the analysis of racialisation and discrimination reported in this study. Future research should also focus on gathering data particularly through semi-structured interviews, this will inform new research to understand the broad perspectives of these students, particularly analyzing things from where they are speaking from.

While Table 4 shows no straightforward linear association between Italian language proficiency and formal employment outcomes, suggesting that structural barriers beyond language are at work, language remains the most frequently cited integration challenge among respondents (Table 7, 44.1%). On this basis, we recommend that Italian universities offering English-taught programmes develop accessible, practically oriented Italian language modules, not as a prerequisite for enrolment, but as a supported pathway toward broader social and institutional participation. Language is a crucial tool for integration, and without it, Global South international students studying at Italian universities cannot fully integrate. Without adequate language proficiency, these students are likely to continue facing institutional and structural barriers in negotiating belonging.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors, Adesuyi Adetokunboh Adebayo and Kakar Fatima Qayyum, declare that there are no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research, analysis, or writing of this manuscript titled *"Intersecting Margins: Analysing the Integration of Global South Student Migrants through Migration, Labour Market, and Housing Patterns in Italy."*

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