



MFJMCE GRADUATE STUDENT EU RESEARCH GRANT Interview with grantee Ernesto Fiocchetto



Ernesto Fiocchetto is a Ph.D. Candidate in International Relations at the Department of Politics & International Relations, Steven J. Green School of International & Public Affairs, Florida International University, and a Graduate Assistant at the Miami-Florida Jean Monnet Center of Excellence. He received the Miami-Florida Jean Monnet Center of Excellence Graduate Student

EU Research grant for his research "LGBTIQ + Asylum Seekers in Europe and the Role of Faith Actors" this year. He sat down with Christine I. Caly-Sanchez, Associate Director of the Miami-Florida Jean Monnet Center of Excellence, to answer a few questions about his research.

MFJMCE: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and what studies you pursued at FIU?

I am Ernesto Fiocchetto. I am a sociologist from Argentina. I arrived at FIU in 2017 and earned two Masters: Religious Studies in 2019 and International Relations in 2021. Now, I am working on my dissertation project to get a Ph.D. in International Relations. My research interests and publications center on the intersection of migration, religion, and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI).

MFJMCE: Can you tell us in a few words what the focus of your EU research project is?

Many refugees and migrants flee from their countries because they suffer severe human rights violations due to their sexual orientation and gender identity. The EU has set high standards for inclusive and sensitive asylum procedures for LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers. In the case of Spain, Germany, and the United Kingdom, they seem to be a safe space that become an attraction center for many LGBTIQ+ asylum seekers, given their progressive legal development. However, these individuals are disadvantaged in specific ways within the asylum process and also experience hostility and marginalization in those host countries. LGBTIQ+ refugees undergo several tensions that go from the acceptance/rejection of the claimants based on religious values to the integration challenges in the host societies. In this regard, Faith Actors (FAs) play a crucial role at several levels in the reception and integration stages of forcibly displaced people who claim asylum based on their SOGI in Europe. In my research work, I am focusing on such actors and their agency toward LGBTIQ+ refugees.

MFJMCE: What are your plans for the research you are conducting?

The project involves qualitative research at three levels. First, it aims at exploring the existing literature on the issue. Second, it entails analyzing legal cases of SOGI based asylum claimants in the three countries. Third, it envisions participating in workshops and summer university programs to socialize the preliminary findings, receive feedback, and get new perspectives on the explored issue.

MFJMCE: How do you hope your research will contribute to the field of International Relations?

It is my hope that my work will contribute to the International Relations literature on the role of FAs in the asylum process of LGBTIQ+ refugees in European countries by addressing the intersections of the social, legal, and religious dimensions that FAs inhabit. The agency of Non-State Actors, including FAs, is of tremendous significance in the context of forced migration. Therefore, the more we understand the complexity of these actors, the more we will be able to contribute to the reception and integration of refugees in host societies.

MFJMCE: Why do you think this research is essential to conduct at the present time? Once completed, this project "will help foster..."

The expected contribution of my work entails different levels, ranging from legal aspects to the FAs' strategies toward LGBTIQ+ refugees. In my research, I show that FAs are beneficial for integrating LGBTIQ+ in host societies, and they articulate their mission within the European legal system. However, they also reproduce the religious heteronormativity from the refugees' countries of origin and embody European heteronormativity or, conversely, an idealization of queer identities through institutional expectations around sex, gender, and sexuality. Thus, at social, legal, and religious levels, FAs both allows and constrains the processes of identity configuration and integration in the host societies. I hope my work will foster a better understanding of such complexity and, therefore, sheds light on the concrete action of FAs. Furthermore, it will provide policy advice to the European Union and the specific countries under study.

MFJMCE: Do you have any last thoughts to share?

I want to thank the Miami-Florida Jean Monnet European Center of Excellence for this grant. I also extend my particular thanks to Dr. Markus Thiel and Madame Christine Caly. The constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic have been really challenging for us researchers. In such a context, the financial help and the moral support of the center were essential to my research work.

By Christine I. Caly-Sanchez