

Vademecum for PhD students in Physics and Astronomy

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

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Contents

1	Support and Resources	3
1.1	Contact people	3
1.2	Useful links	3
2	Academic Requirements	3
2.1	Courses	3
2.2	End-of-year Reports and Seminars	4
2.3	Mandatory Period Abroad	4
2.4	Thesis	4
3	Bureaucracy	4
3.1	Signing up for <i>gestione separata</i>	5
3.2	Unemployment	5
4	Bureaucracy at the University	5
4.1	IRIS-BOA	5
4.2	ORCID identifier	5
4.3	Personal MUR page	6
4.4	Personal Budget	6
4.4.1	Missions	6
4.4.2	INFN Missions	7
4.5	Regulations for the use of BiCoQ Center funds	7
4.6	Badge	8
4.7	ISEE	8
4.8	Help and Information on bureaucracy	8
5	ADI (Associazione Dottorandi e Dottori di Ricerca in Italia)	8
6	Problems with supervisors, harassment, etc.	9
6.1	Commission for Inclusiveness and Gender Issues	9
	A guide for international PhD students in Milano	10
7	Being an international PhD student at Milano-Bicocca	10
8	Bureaucracy	10
8.1	Codice Fiscale	10
8.2	The problem of PhD students: not a student, not a worker	10
8.3	Residence Permit: difference for EU citizens vs non-EU citizens	10
8.4	Residency	11
8.5	Bank Account	11
8.6	Health Care and Tessera Sanitaria	11
8.7	Accessing health services without tessera sanitaria	11
8.8	Phone/Internet	12
8.9	INPS and Pension	12
8.10	Unemployment	12
9	Bureaucracy at the University for International students	12
9.1	ISEE: additional information	12
9.2	Italian language classes	13
10	Housing	13
11	Public Transport	13
11.1	ATM	13
11.2	Trenord	13
11.3	Trenitalia	14
11.4	Strikes	14
11.5	Abbonamento	14
11.6	Discounts for PhD students	14

11.7 Abbonamento annuale 50€	14
12 Culture and Sports	15
12.1 Theater and Opera	15
12.2 Museums	15
12.3 Concerts	15
12.4 Football	16
12.5 Hiking	16
12.6 Swimming	16
13 Holidays	16

1 Support and Resources

1.1 Contact people

1. Representatives of PhD Students: [Pietro Rescigno](#) (XXXVIII cycle), [Rodolfo Carobene](#) (XXXIX cycle), [Anna Scanu](#) (XL cycle)
2. PhD Coordinator and Vice-Coordinator: [Prof. Stefano Ragazzi](#), and [Prof. Laura D'Alfonso](#)
3. PhD Secretary: [Francesca Centrone](#) (to be added in CC every time you need to contact Stefano / Laura).
4. Department Secretary: [Valeria Bechis](#)
5. PhD representative in the commission for inclusiveness and gender issues: [Irene Ferranti](#)
6. Erasmus coordinator: [Prof. Pietro Govoni](#)
7. [Confidential Counselor](#)
8. [Payment office](#)
9. [Taxes, ISEE, housing, canteen](#)

1.2 Useful links

1. [Latest version of the PhD Vademecum](#)
2. [Introductory slides \(e-learning\)](#)
3. [Commission for Inclusiveness and Gender Issues](#)
4. [UniMiB rules for missions](#)
5. [Reimbursement procedure](#)
6. [Useful PhD Documents \(forms and certificates\)](#)

2 Academic Requirements

2.1 Courses

You need to collect **11 CFUs** over three years during your PhD. It is common to complete this requirement within the first or second year of your PhD. You will need to have 3 CFUs from [interdisciplinary courses](#), and 8 CFUs from [Physics courses](#). You are automatically enrolled in all courses offered by our Department, which are listed on the e-learning platform. Professors will announce courses well in advance, along with detailed syllabi and relevant information. **Please note that starting from the XL cycle, you will also need to compile a study plan and enroll in exams via [Segreteria Online](#).** You will have the opportunity to edit the study plan periodically, and the PhD office will notify you by email whenever modifications are allowed. Additionally, you should regularly check for the opening of *appelli* (exam dates) and book them as needed. You may take the exam at your convenience, subject to the professor's arrangements. The professor will notify you, Prof. Ragazzi, Prof. D'Alfonso, and Francesca Centrone via email to confirm that you have passed the exam. Once an official date for the exam is available, the professor will record the result in your official academic transcript.

For interdisciplinary courses, you should enroll via [Segreteria Online](#). To do this, go to the Registrar's Office section of the page and select "Elective Courses". From there, you can enroll in your preferred courses. Keep in mind that enrollment periods are not always open, and some courses have limited spots: if you're interested in a specific course, make sure to note the enrollment start date so that you don't lose your spot! You can find all information regarding these courses [here](#). Additionally, all courses are typically introduced during the PhD welcome day, which takes place during the first month of your program (you will receive an email from the PhD school about it).

If you attend a PhD School, you can earn **up to 4 CFUs** by giving seminars about the content of the school you attended. A 30-minute seminar on one or more topics covered during the school (with more than 8 hours of coursework) earns 1 CFU, while a 45-minute seminar on topics covered in more than 16 hours of coursework earns 2 CFUs. These seminars are typically organized in **October and March**. To participate, inform either your PhD representatives or Francesca Centrone in advance.

2.2 End-of-year Reports and Seminars

At the end of each academic year (typically around September), you are required to complete a *report* summarizing your activities or the year. The report template can be found at [this link](#).

In addition, during your first and second year, you will need to present 15-minute and 35-minute seminars, respectively, with an additional 5 minutes for questions. These seminars should review all the relevant results of your PhD projects. You will be contacted and asked to form a committee of at least three members, **including your Tutor**. Committees are often organized in groups of PhD students to optimize time.

Please ensure that all seminar details, including the date, time, committee composition and cycle, are sent to prof. Laura D'Alfonso (see sec. 1.1), who will add all this information in a dedicated Indico page.

2.3 Mandatory Period Abroad

Regulations regarding the mandatory period abroad may change frequently, so staying updated is essential. As a general rule, you must comply first with the conditions outlined in your specific PhD grant, and then with those applicable to your PhD cycle (i.e., the year in which you enrolled).

For currently active cycles, the general minimum requirements for time spent abroad are as follows:

- **38th Cycle:** 1 month
- **39th Cycle:** 3 months
- **40th Cycle:** 3 months

Please note that some grants may impose stricter requirements. For instance, PNRR-funded scholarships (DCM 351/352, 117/118 and 629/630) typically require a minimum of 6 months abroad. Again, this is true unless something different is explicitly stated in your specific grant.

The period abroad does not need to be continuous; however, brief stays (e.g., a few days) will not be counted. To be considered valid, each stay must last at least 15 days and must be pre-approved by the PhD Board through the appropriate form available on the [Module page](#). The form signed by the Coordinator must be sent to dottorati@unimib.it at least one month before departure. Any variation in the duration of the period abroad must be communicated in advance.

During the period abroad, PhD students are entitled to a 50% increase in their monthly scholarship to be requested with the related module. The 50% monthly increase only applies for each **consecutive** 30 day period that you spend abroad. Additional funding may also be available through Erasmus+ (for destinations within Europe) or the Extra program (for destinations outside the EU).

2.4 Thesis

Before submitting your thesis, you are required to complete a survey in AlmaLaurea, which can be accessed through your personal page on Segreteria Online. After providing all the necessary information about your thesis, you will be prompted to pay a 32€ tax stamp.

Once this step is completed, you will be able to upload your thesis. A template for the title page is available in a .docx format, but we recommend exploring Overleaf templates for UniMiB PhD theses, such as the one available at [this link](#).

In addition to the PDF of your thesis, you will need to upload a **report** detailing your activities throughout the three years of your PhD. This includes schools you attended, talks given, publications, and other research-related activities.

Please note that you *must not* contact your referees directly to request the submission of their final reviews. Additionally, you *must* attend your thesis defense in person, as remote defenses are not currently permitted by the PhD School.

3 Bureaucracy

This section of the handbook provides general information. For specific assistance as an international student, refer to sec. 7, which offers a more detailed guide on the necessary bureaucratic procedures.

3.1 Signing up for *gestione separata*

A small part of your PhD stipend goes to the INPS (L'Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale) for your pension and as insurance for unemployment. To have access to the money the university pays to INPS you need to sign up for the *gestione separata*. You need to do that online at [the INPS website](#). Signing up for the *gestione separata* is relatively straight forward. Use the search field to type in "gestione separata" and select *Iscrizione dei Lavoratori Parasubordinati alla Gestione Separata*. By clicking on Utilizza il servizio you can start the process of signing up for the *gestione separata*. At the end of the process, download the confirmation that you enrolled for the *gestione separata*, since you will need it for the application for unemployment money at the end of your PhD (see sec. 3.2).

3.2 Unemployment

After your PhD you can apply for unemployment money to help you bridge the time until you find either a postdoc or work in the private sector. You can apply for the *disoccupazione* (unemployment) via the [INPS website](#). You need to log in with your personal account (for international students, see sec. 8.9 for details on how to get an account) and apply online. When logged into your account, type in *dis-coll* in the search bar and select "DIS-COLL: indennità mensile di disoccupazione". You can then click on Utilizza il servizio to start the application procedure. Most documents needed for the application you should already have or be able to download them from u-web, like your payslips. The only document missing is a document that shows how long the PhD lasted. For that you need to write to dottorati@unimib.it and ask for "una copia dichiarazione Università attestante il periodo di dottorato". They will then forward your request to the responsible office and after a few days you should receive a PDF via email.

In case you successfully manage to submit your request for unemployment money and the request gets approved, you will receive about 70% of your last income each month (which should be around 900€, unless the PhD stipend gets increased at some point). You can receive the unemployment money via a bank transfer only if you have an Italian bank account.

4 Bureaucracy at the University

Apart from the bureaucracy with the Italian state, there is also bureaucracy at the university. This includes reimbursement for conferences, calculation of the ISEE, and Italian language classes. If you are an International student, please refer to sec. 9. Luckily, this bureaucracy is a bit easier than the one with the Italian state and is usually solvable. Below we discuss the most important things.

4.1 IRIS-BOA

To keep track of all the scientific output that is produced by researchers in Bicocca (and in order to be judged positively by the Ministry), our university requires every publication (papers, proceedings, your PhD thesis etc.) to be indexed in an official catalog, called IRIS-BOA (Bicocca Open Archive), which you can access at [this link](#). You can access your personal page with your university credentials. Every time you publish something, you (or any one of your co-authors who are also affiliated to Bicocca) should upload the publication's data to BOA, including a pdf version. Try to be as complete as possible, especially in fields which are marked as important for the so-called VQR (Valutazione Qualità della Ricerca), which is the set of criteria with which the Italian Ministry for University and Research (MIUR) assesses the quality of research performed by Italian universities. You can find explanatory guides and tutorials on how to upload publications in BOA in the home page.

4.2 ORCID identifier

It is **required** that all Ph. D. students create an ORCID account. This is in general a very useful thing for your academic career, as it offers a unique identifier to which your research products (papers, proceedings...) are linked to, and many scientific journals encourage or require authors to specify their ORCID id. You can find all information and create your account on the [ORCID webpage](#). Alternatively, you can create an ORCID account which is automatically linked to your university credentials directly from your IRIS-BOA page. If you log onto your BOA page and you have not yet associated an ORCID id to it, you should get a notification offering you to create one. If you create an ORCID id independently from BOA (or if you already have one) remember to associate it to your BOA account following the same notification.

4.3 Personal MUR page

All students must have an account set at the site of the Italian Ministry of Research and Education: [Login Page](#).

Your personal page could already exist. If this is not the case, please find registration instruction here: [Signup Page](#).

4.4 Personal Budget

As PhD students, one of the most important parts of our work is going to conferences to present our research results. Furthermore, we can also attend summer/winter schools and workshops. Since this counts as work, we have a certain budget that can be used for it. This money is **not** given to you physically or on your bank account each year, and it can also be used to buy equipment (computers, screens, etc).

The budget available for conferences, workshops, summer schools, and equipment varies and depends on your PhD cycle. It consists of around 1600€/year (it corresponds to 10% of your annual stipend). If you are lucky and you are hired on an ERC or PRIN project, or your supervisor has some extra money, there is even more money you can use for conferences, and such. However, for the ERC and PRIN money, if available, you need to ask your supervisor for permission, while you can use the money allocated to you for travel, conferences and equipment as you wish without asking your supervisor for permission. This is important in case your relation to your supervisor is not the best (see e.g. sec. 6). We will now explain how buying equipment and reimbursement for conferences, workshops, and schools work.

Buying equipment. To buy equipment you need to find the responsible secretary of your department; then, you write an email to the secretary saying what kind of equipment you would like to have (laptop, screen for your desk etc). The secretary can then place the order and a few weeks later it should arrive.

Conferences, workshops, schools. If you are going to a conference, workshop, or summer/winter school this can be paid from your personal budget for travel/equipment. Usually, you make the bookings for your flights/train/bus, hotel and pay the conference fee. After the conference, you can then ask for reimbursement of all the expenses, including food. To claim the reimbursement after your trip it is important to keep **all** the receipts, especially the ones for food: note that without receipts, you are not going to receive a reimbursement. There is also the possibility that the secretary is paying upfront for certain expenses directly from your budget, e.g. for the conference fee in case the fee is too high to pay it out of your own pocket. If you want to do that, you need to contact the secretary from your department well in advance, and ask for the payment upfront: in that case, you do not need to include that in your reimbursement.

Period abroad. During your PhD, you will *need* to spend a certain amount of months abroad (see 2.3), either at PhD schools or visiting Universities or research centers. These months can be organized as you (and your Tutor/Supervisor) prefer. Note that a minimum of 15 days must be spent abroad in order to be acceptable as a contribution to the total. If you reach the minimum period of 30 days (with the “quantum” of time being 30 consecutive days, for a maximum of 6 months for each PhD year, i.e. November-October), you are also allowed to ask for an increase of 50% in the PhD Scholarship: check the [Vademecum](#) for further information. Note also that you are allowed to use your personal funding for your period abroad.

Erasmus opportunities. To spend your period abroad, you can also consider participating in an Erasmus program. You can find all information regarding selection notices, destinations, etc. [here](#) (please note that the English version of this link is not as complete as the Italian one). To participate in the Erasmus program, you must first obtain an authorization from the Academic Board, and then you can apply to these calls and comply with the procedures established for mobility by the PhD Office (dottorati@unimib.it). Note that, while for other students the minimum time to spend abroad is equal to 2 months, for PhD students the program must have a minimum duration of 3 continuous months (or 92 days) carried out *entirely* abroad.

Important: note that the request for an increase of 50% of your PhD scholarship is compatible with Erasmus funding, and therefore you should look into this option.

4.4.1 Missions

Before the conference/workshop/school, you need to go to <https://unimib.u-web.cineca.it/> and open a mission. From there, you click on *Le mie missioni* and then on *New Claim* on the top left. Then you need to enter the location and the duration of your trip. After that, you are asked to provide information on the title, type of request, head of project, and many more things. An example on how to fill out the request for a mission on U-Web can be found in fig. 1. Remember that you have to change the *Head of project*, *Project*, *Structure Concerned* and *Paying Structure* to fit your department. For us, the missions with PhD funding are *always* opened under “Missioni su progetti” and the head of the project is the PhD Coordinator (currently Stefano Ragazzi).

In accordance with the PhD coordinator, you can either ask for a flat-rate reimbursement (*rimborso forfettario*, which consists of a certain sum per day, according to the files you can find at [this link](#)) or for an analytical

reimbursement (*rimborso analitico o a piè di lista*, in which case you'll have to keep all your receipts and bring them back as explained later in this paragraph. The *Head of Project* is the responsible person for your PhD school. Selecting these options is actually the way in which you (indirectly) access your yearly budget of 1624€. At the end, you need to give an estimate of the expenses (i.e. add together transportation costs, hotel, and conference fees and add some money for the food). As soon as you return from your conference trip you need to ask for reimbursement. Although you do not have to ask for the reimbursement immediately, it is advised to do it straight away because it can take up to several months until you receive the money. Once the reimbursement request has been completed, remember to *scan* and carry (in this order) your physical receipts to the Department secretary (Valeria Bechis), alongside with the recap you can download directly from U-Web after submitting the refund request. So, the earlier you ask for the money the earlier you will receive it. For more information, check out [UniMiB rules for missions](#).

You also have the possibility to **book everything through an agency**: to do so, you need to log into the INFN portal for missions, and after submitting a mission request (and having it approved), you should click on "Cisalpina", and it will take you to the agency's website.

Figure 1: Example on how to fill out the mission on u-web. Remember that you have to change the *Head of project*, *Project*, *Structure Concerned* and *Paying Structure* to fit your department. *Head of Project* is the PhD coordinator (currently Stefano Ragazzi).

To ask for your reimbursement after the conference, the first step is to check whether your mission has already been approved. In a perfect world, the mission should be approved when you return from your conference or school. However, there are departments where the *Head of the project*, i.e. the head of the PhD school, who has to approve the mission is not doing it in time. In this case, the best thing is to either send regular email reminders or to directly track down the head of the project in his/her office to remind them that they should approve your project.

As soon as the mission is approved, you can start the reimbursement process. You need to go again on *U-Web* to your mission and add all your expenses together with a copy of your receipts. When this is done, you need to print the request for reimbursement and bring it together with all the original receipts to the responsible person for reimbursement in your department. After a couple of weeks (6 to 12 weeks, usually) you will receive your money.

4.4.2 INFN Missions

For INFN missions, the procedure is quite similar to that of UniMiB: you need to open it well in advance at [this link](#), indicating the project (ask your Tutor) and estimated costs. Note that you *always need* to open a UniMiB mission with 0 total cost as well, and add the number of that mission as a note to the INFN one.

4.5 Regulations for the use of BiCoQ Center funds

The **Bicocca Center for Quantum Cosmology (BiCoQ)**, established within the framework of the "Departments of Excellence 2023–2027" project, has allocated a total of 100,000 euros for PhD students from cycles

38–41 to support advanced training and enhance the research resources available to them.

These funds may be requested for participation in schools, workshops, or conferences not otherwise funded. In *exceptional and well-justified cases*, it is also possible to request funding for IT or research equipment (granted on a loan-for-use basis) not available through regular funding sources.

Scientific approval of the funding request is the responsibility of the PhD Program Coordinator (Prof. Stefano Ragazzi). For accounting reasons, the expenditure must also be approved by the project fund coordinator (Prof. Tommaso Tabarelli), who will proceed only after obtaining the approval of the PhD Program Coordinator.

Instructions for using BiCoQ Center funds:

- Agree with the PhD Program Coordinator on the eligibility of the expenditure;
- Fill in the form – available at [this link](#) – specifying the expected cost;
- Enter the mission request in UGOV, specifying: **MISSION ON PROJECT; FUND MANAGER: TABARELLI DE FATIS TOMMASO.**

Requests and expenditures, both planned and actual, will be tracked using the Excel spreadsheet generated by the FORM.

4.6 Badge

Your university badge will be sent to you in the beginning via mail. You can use it as your bank card, if you wish to open the account (see sec. 8.5 in case you do not have an Italian bank account and you want to open one). It gives you access to the parking lots at the university, in case you have a car and bring it to Milano. Furthermore, you can ask for access to the university building outside the opening hours (e.g. if you need to access a laboratory or just want to work really late). If you have a disability, you can also ask to access special elevators which are reserved for employees. To access the university outside opening hours and to get access to employee elevators you have to ask for it online (through the [service desk](#) of the university). More information about the badge can be found here: <https://en.unimib.it/services/utilities/service-desk/university-badge>. The badge can also be used to access to favorable prices at the university canteens: check out the latest version of the official vademecum (in sec. 1.2) for more information.

4.7 ISEE

The ISEE (Indicatore della Situazione Economica Equivalente - Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator) is a tool used to decide whether one has access to certain bonuses and social benefits (e.g. a cheap annual ticket for ATM). Furthermore, it also decides how much we have to pay in enrollment fees each year at university. Therefore, each year we have to hand in our ISEE to the University (no worries: you will get regular email reminders about it).

There are two versions of the ISEE: the official one, and the one calculated by the university. The official ISEE has to be obtained in a CAF (Centri di Assistenza Fiscale - Fiscal Assistance Center), and is the prerequisite to get for example the reduced annual ATM ticket. You will need to pay a 10€ fee per year in order to receive their assistance and bring [all the relevant documents](#). However, to get the official ISEE at a CAF you need to have *residenza* (residency) in Italy which might be difficult to obtain (see Sec. 8.4). Since the University still needs your ISEE to assess how much you have to pay in enrollment fees, there is also the possibility to have the ISEE calculated by the University itself; the guide for calculating the ISEE can be found here: https://www.unimib.it/sites/default/files/2023-06/Guida%20ISEE%2023_24%20eng.pdf. If you need more information as an International student, please refer to sec. 9.1.

4.8 Help and Information on bureaucracy

For information about the administrative procedures of the PhD you can contact the *Doctoral School Department*. Their email is: dottorati@unimib.it. Alternatively, you can also always contact your PhD representatives. They are elected every year and you will receive an email with the information about who your current representatives are together with their contact information after each election (or check out sec. 1.1).

5 ADI (Associazione Dottorandi e Dottori di Ricerca in Italia)

The ADI (Associazione Dottorandi e Dottori di Ricerca in Italia - an association for PhDs in Italy) is the association that represents and protects PhD students in Italy; in a way, it is like a trade union for PhD researchers.

They can provide help with bureaucracy, give you help and advice when you have problems with your supervisor, in cases of harassment, or when you have problems with the university. That is, whenever you have a problem connected to your PhD or the Italian bureaucracy, you can ask them for help and advice (this includes legal advice!). As with every trade union, it is always good to become a member to support their work, but it is not necessary to receive help (and if so, they will let you know). The website of ADI is <https://dottorato.it/>. To contact the branch of ADI responsible for Milano use this email: milano@dottorato.it; they will then put you in contact with the person responsible for Milano-Bicocca.

6 Problems with supervisors, harassment, etc.

Pursuing a PhD is a job, and your workplace is the university. Like any workplace, issues such as harassment or mobbing by peers may arise. Additionally, you might face challenges with your supervisor, such as a lack of proper supervision or even being a source of harassment or mobbing. In any of these situations, it is important to reach out to someone and seek help.

The University of Milano-Bicocca has an official advisor (*consigliera di fiducia*) to whom you can report cases of harassment or mobbing. You will regularly receive emails with the dates and times when you can speak with this advisor. However, if the issue is urgent, please consider taking immediate steps by confiding in colleagues or peers you trust.

As a next step, you should reach out to either your PhD representatives (see sec. 1.1), to the the representatives from ADI (see sec. 5) or to the departmental representative for PhD students in the committee for inclusion and gender themes support (see sec. 1.1). In some cases, consulting all of them may be beneficial.

If the issue involves your supervisor, you can always talk to your PhD representatives or the ADI representatives. Additionally, for problems specifically related to your tutor, you have another option: your *supervisor(s)*. In fact, at the beginning of your PhD, you will need to appoint both a supervisor and a tutor. While these roles can be filled by the same person, it is recommended to choose a different person as your tutor.

Ideally, the supervisor acts as a secondary tutor who can step in if any issues arise with your primary tutor. However, whether your supervisor fulfills this role (or is willing to do so) depends on the specific department and the supervisor you choose.

6.1 Commission for Inclusiveness and Gender Issues

The University of Milano-Bicocca and the Physics Department "G. Occhialini" promote policies to protect the well-being of people who work and study there, and actions aimed at contrasting any form of discrimination, mobbing, abuse, harassment, and violence.

In the Physics Department a "*Commission for Inclusiveness and Gender Issues*" has been appointed, which is responsible for organizing initiatives aimed at fostering interest in Physics and Sciences among girls in general, initiatives in favor of equal opportunities and against any form of discrimination, while offering a safe space for listening.

One PhD student is elected to be part of this Commission and usually you will be informed on who you can refer to (see sec. 1.1). In case it does not happen, or in order to find more information on this Commission, you can always look up in the University website or refer to your PhD representatives.

7 Being an international PhD student at Milano-Bicocca

This part of the document is a guide for international PhD students to find their way at the University of Milano-Bicocca and in Milano itself. It also aims at helping them to deal with Italian bureaucracy. Some of the bureaucracy will be easy, while other parts might be impossible to do. But you will experience it yourself. The guide is built on the previous experience of PhD students who managed to complete the bureaucracy. Whenever the guide is incomplete previous PhD students did not manage to get it done, so it is the duty of the **University of Milano-Bicocca** to help with these tasks. However, often the only help you will get from the university is a link to yesmilano (<https://www.yesmilano.it/en/work/getting-started-guide>). Their *Getting Started guide* contains a lot of useful information and covers many of the topics in more detail that also we discuss here.

8 Bureaucracy

Dealing with Italian bureaucracy is a pain and the best advice is to avoid it whenever possible. However, there are certain things one has to do as an international PhD student, like getting a codice fiscale (Italian tax number). Other things can be avoided, like getting an Italian bank account. We will now discuss each subject individually.

8.1 Codice Fiscale

The very first thing you need to do when arriving in Italy is to ask for a *codice fiscale* (Italian fiscal code/tax code). You will need it for almost everything (renting a house, opening a bank account, subscribing to an internet/phone provider, health security...). Luckily, it is also the only thing in Italian bureaucracy that is easy to achieve. When applying for the PhD you already had to fill in a codice fiscale. This was possible since the codice fiscale is generated automatically according to your name, place of birth, date of birth, etc. So, the codice fiscale that you will receive will be the one you used during your application. However, it needs to become official, i.e. you need a paper from the *Agenzia delle Entrate* (Italian tax office). You can either go to one of the offices and ask in person or try to ask for it via email.

When going to the office in person, find the office that is closest to you and try to be there early to avoid queuing. First, fill in the form in the first queue as you enter, get a ticket, and then wait for your turn to enter the offices. Concerning paperwork, you only need a valid ID. Contrary to Italian-born people, you will probably not get an ID card for doing that. They will just give you a piece of paper. But make a lot of copies of it, you will need them for all the following paperwork.

During COVID, it became possible to ask for the codice fiscale via email. Fill out the application form that can be found here: https://conssanfrancisco.esteri.it/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/codice_fiscale_application_form_aa4-8_-_inglese.pdf. Send the application form together with a copy of a valid ID (passport) to the email address of one of the tax offices in Milano and explain that you are a PhD student in Bicocca. After a few days, you should receive your codice fiscale, which is just a piece of paper with your data and the codice fiscale on it. If the possibility of asking for the codice fiscale via email does not exist anymore, they will let you know. I would advise you to first try via email and only go to the office in person if they tell you that you need to come in person.

8.2 The problem of PhD students: not a student, not a worker

After receiving the codice fiscale the problems with Italian bureaucracy start. And one of the main reasons is the legal status of PhD students in Italy, because PhD students do not count as students. However, they also do not count as workers, since we do not get a working contract. Somehow, the Italian legislation just forgot about us. The consequences are that every step in the bureaucracy becomes particularly hard or almost impossible to do. Furthermore, we do not get discounts normal students get (see sec. 11.6). We will now discuss some of the most important parts of bureaucracy you should do (but probably won't manage to do due to Italian bureaucracy).

8.3 Residence Permit: difference for EU citizens vs non-EU citizens

There is a difference between being an EU citizen and being from outside the EU concerning the residence permit and being allowed to stay in Italy. If you are an EU citizen things are slightly easier for you, since you are allowed to stay in Italy and do not need a residence permit. All you need to do is to register at the *comune*. However, even that can be difficult to impossible to achieve (see sec. 8.4).

If you are from outside the EU you need a residence permit. For that, you need to go to the post office to pick up the application kit. To submit the residence permit you need a copy of your passport, a copy of your codice fiscale, and a housing declaration. A more detailed explanation on all the things you need can be found at yesmilano: <https://www.yesmilano.it/en/work/getting-started-guide/residence-permit>.

8.4 Residency

In Italy there is a difference between *residenza* (residency) and *domicilio*. For having a domicilio you do not need to do any special bureaucracy. It is simply the place where you live and receive your mail. *Residenza* on the other side requires you to register with the *comune* at the *anagrafe* office. To get *residenza* you need a valid rental contract for your house/flat/room (student residences do not count and cannot be used for the *residenza*) and a valid health insurance in Italy. In theory, as a PhD student, you can get a cheap health insurance (see sec. 8.6). However, in practice it is almost impossible to get it. This leaves you with the only possibility to get a private health insurance (which can be really expensive). More information on health insurance can be found in sec. 8.6. A more detailed explanation on how to get residency in Italy can be found on the website of yesmilano: <https://www.yesmilano.it/en/study/how-to/take-residence-milano-students>.

8.5 Bank Account

To receive your PhD scholarship you need a bank account. This bank account does not need to be an Italian bank account, it can also be a bank account from any other EU country. Since bureaucracy in Italy is a nightmare it is always good to avoid bureaucracy when possible. Therefore, if you already have a bank account in another EU country, you can simply use that bank account. However, there are certain services for which you need an Italian bank account, e.g. unemployment money after your contract finishes (see sec. 8.10). In case you want to open an Italian bank account, there is the possibility to use your university badge as your bank card (see sec. 4.6). You can find the information on how to activate the bank functions on your university badge here: <https://en.unimib.it/services/utilities/service-desk/university-badge>.

8.6 Health Care and Tessera Sanitaria

The *tessera sanitaria* is the health insurance card that you need whenever you access some kind of health care service (going to the doctor, getting vaccines, buying medicine in the pharmacy). In theory, PhD students can get relatively cheap health insurance for about 150€ per year. However, in practice it is difficult to actually get this health insurance in Italy (many international PhD students give up after trying several months to get this health insurance without succeeding). To get the national health insurance you need residency (see sec. 8.4) in Italy. But to get residency you need health insurance. In that way, you are trapped in an infinite loop that you can only break by buying private health insurance (which is expensive). If you manage to get a tessera sanitaria you will have to choose a family doctor. There are family doctors that speak English and it is advised to pick such a family doctor (unless you speak Italian really well).

8.7 Accessing health services without tessera sanitaria

Even without a tessera sanitaria, you will need to access health care from time to time. Some things you can access without a tessera sanitaria (like vaccines); others you can access, but it is unclear whether you need to pay for it or not. If you are an EU citizen, your health insurance from your home country should be fine, at least for the moment, but it is still recommended to get Italian health insurance although it might be difficult to obtain it.

As soon as you have a *codice fiscale* (see sec. 8.1) it is possible to get vaccines, e.g. a flu shot, or the COVID vaccine. All you have to do is to go to a pharmacy and make an appointment for the vaccine. For example, at *Farmacia Zanotta* in Via Luigi Pulci, 19 they already know how to do the bureaucracy when you don't have a tessera sanitaria (see sec. 8.6) and want to sign up for the vaccine with your codice fiscale.

There might be a need for proper medical assistance in case of an emergency. In this case, you can go to any hospital and seek help. However, in the end, you will receive a bill for the service. Usually, they will tell you not to worry and send you away without making you pay the bill. However, you should not count on that and it is in general good to have health insurance. Long story short, you *should* get health insurance. However, it might be really difficult to actually get it. Especially, since there is basically no help from the university to get all the bureaucracy done.

8.8 Phone/Internet

As soon as you arrive in Italy you should get an Italian phone number. The main mobile phone companies in Italy are:

- Wind-Tre;
- Vodafone;
- Tim;
- Fastweb.

They are also internet providers. In Italy, calls to mobile phones of the same company as the one you use are usually free. To get a phone number you need your codice fiscale and a document (passport).

8.9 INPS and Pension

As you can read in sec. 3.1, you need to sign up to *gestione separata* in order for you to access to things like unemployment money and it's important because part of your stipend goes towards your pension. In order to do it, you need to access the INPS website (which you can find [here](#)). To sign up you need access to INPS, and the only way to get access for international students is via a PIN. You can request it online. You will receive one half of your PIN via email, while the other half will be sent to your home address. This can take several weeks; as soon as you have both parts of the PIN you can access INPS and sign up for the *gestione separata*. Signing up for *gestione separata* is straightforward: you can find out how to do it in the official PhD school Vademecum (you can find the most recent one in sec. 1.2), or in sec. 3.1 of this handbook. If you need help it is best to ask an Italian native speaker at your department. It is very important, as stated in sec. 3.1, that you download the confirmation of your enrollment to *gestione separata*, since you will need it if you wish to access the unemployment money (see sec. 3.2).

8.10 Unemployment

To apply for unemployment money, which is very useful as a bridge from the end of your PhD until you either find a postdoc or a job outside academia, please refer to sec. 3.2, for a general view of the procedure. Here you will find some additional information needed for non-Italian students. It is recommended to find yourself an Italian native speaker who can help you fill out the application form. You can ask any of your peers or representatives.

When you have completed the application process, as a non-Italian, you will need to present yourself at the Centro per l'Impiego (job center) which you had to name during the application process within two weeks. You need to go there in person and you need to be there early (before 8:00) since only a limited number of people without an appointment are allowed to enter each day. After waiting for an hour (until 9:00) when they start to let people in, you will then wait probably until noon for your appointment.

You can receive the unemployment money via a bank transfer only if you have an Italian bank account. If you don't have an Italian bank account, they will send you the money via mail (you need to go to the post office every month to pick up the money in cash).

9 Bureaucracy at the University for International students

Here you can find information which is complementary to what you can find in sec. 4, in particular regarding ISEE, and Italian language classes.

9.1 ISEE: additional information

As explained in sec. 4.7, there are two versions of the ISEE: the official one, that has to be obtained in a CAF and requires you to have *residenza* (residency) in Italy — which might be difficult to obtain (sec. 8.4) — and an ISEE calculated by the University itself. It is crucial to do this because this is an indicator that decides, for example, how much we have to pay in enrollment fees each year at university.

To obtain ISEE at CAF (if you have *residenza* in Italy) please refer to sec. 4.7. In case you need the one computed by the university, you need to send several documents via email to segr.studenti.tasse@unimib.it. The guide for calculating the ISEE can be found here: https://www.unimib.it/sites/default/files/2023-06/Guida%20ISEE%2023_24%20eng.pdf, and the important part for international students can be found in

Appendix 2. In case something is not clear, you can always directly write to the responsible office: their email address is **segr.studenti.tasse@unimib.it**.

Some of the documents that are required by the university to calculate the ISEE do not exist in other countries, e.g. a document about not owning property, documents of not having children, etc. In this case, you will send the documents you were able to acquire together with the filled-out ISEE application form (https://www.unimib.it/sites/default/files/2023-06/modulo_richiesta_calcolo_isee_residenti_allestero_ENG.pdf) and a copy of your passport to **segr.studenti.tasse@unimib.it**, where in the email you explain which documents do not exist in your country. You also need to make a statement about whether you own any property in Italy. If you do not own any property in Italy, you simply have to include the following statement in your email: "I do not own any property or movable assets in Italy and I also did not earn any income in Italy in [yyyy]" (you need to replace the year with the year that is asked for in the ISEE application).

9.2 Italian language classes

Learning Italian is essential for your life in Italy. It not only simplifies navigating bureaucratic processes, but also enhances your overall experience, making life in Italy more enjoyable. Furthermore, if you plan to stay in Italy after your PhD to pursue a career, proficiency in Italian is crucial for securing a job.

Luckily, the university is offering free Italian language classes. They usually start in November and go until the end of January for the first semester, and then again from the beginning of March until the middle of May. You should receive an email from the language department in September/October as a reminder to sign up for the classes. In case you do not receive any email, you should write one directly to their office and ask for information on the Italian classes. Their email address is **segreteria.lingue@unimib.it**. Since the rules for Italian classes and the deadlines for signing up change every year, it might be a good idea to just write to the language office as soon as possible to ask for information on the Italian classes.

10 Housing

Housing in Milano is expensive. Luckily, the university offers student residences for students from far away. You can find information on how to apply for this housing here: <https://en.unimib.it/education/postgraduates/doctoral-research-phd-programmes/during-your-phd/how>. You can also write to **servizi.dsu@unimib.it** or **residenze.ristorazione@unimib.it** for more information on the possibility of housing in the university residences. More information on student residences can also be found here: <https://en.unimib.it/services/offices-and-facilities/bicocca-campus-opportunities-and-facilities/dining-and-accomodation/accommodation>. In case you want to live in your own flat or shared house in the city, the best websites to look for houses and shared flats are <https://www.bakeca.it/> and <https://www.subito.it/>.

11 Public Transport

Milano is well-connected with public transport and it usually also works quite reliably. This means public transport is a good choice for coming to university or doing trips on the weekend. Below is the most important information on public transport, tickets, and strikes.

11.1 ATM

ATM (Azienda Trasporti Milanese) is the public transport company in Milano (<https://www.atm.it/it/Pagine/default.aspx>). Single day tickets can be bought at kiosks, at the tabaccheria, or at the machines in metro stations. Alternatively, you can also use the official app. If you are using public transport on a daily basis it is recommended to get an abbonamento (monthly/half year/yearly ticket). For more information on the abbonamento see sec. 11.5.

11.2 Trenord

Trenord is the public transport company that operates regional trains in Lombardia. Tickets can be purchased at train stations, online (<https://www.trenord.it/>), or via their app. Since *Trenord* is part of *Trenitalia* (see Sec. 11.3), tickets can also be bought through the *Trenitalia* app or website.

11.3 Trenitalia

Trenitalia is the public transport company that operates long-distance trains in Italy. Tickets can be purchased at train stations, through their website (<https://www.trenitalia.com/>), or via their app.

Students (including PhD students!) from Milano-Bicocca are eligible for a 20% discount on all Trenitalia tickets. To access this discount, you need to download the app and register for the program. Detailed information is available at <https://www.unimib.it/servizi/studenti-e-laureati/opportunita-e-facilities/convenzioni-studenti/convenzioni-commerciali-attive/trasporti/trenitalia-welfare-plus>.

Additionally, Trenitalia offers a 20% discount for groups of three or more people traveling together (e.g. for conferences or short holidays). To benefit from this discount, you must purchase tickets online or via the app. The discount is automatically applied when you buy the same ticket for three or more passengers.

Freccia Rossa is a part of Trenitalia and operates high-speed trains. Its main private competitor is *Italo*. In general, train transportation in Italy is highly efficient and serves as an ideal mode of travel for attending conferences or taking short trips within the country.

11.4 Strikes

Strikes (*sciopero*) that involve public transport are common in Italy, and you will likely encounter them regularly. Strikes are always announced several days in advance, and it's likely that you will hear these announcements over speakers while you're on the transportation vehicles; additionally, the apps, websites, and Twitter accounts of ATM, Trenord, and Trenitalia provide updates on upcoming strikes. If you don't check in advance, you'll find out when you're waiting at the station.

For ATM, during a strike, service is guaranteed until 8:45 AM and again from 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM, ensuring you can commute to work and return home. Outside of these hours, you may be lucky and find that the metro lines you need are still running, or you might be unlucky and need to walk. If your commute involves using Trenord or Trenitalia services, the guaranteed service hours are from 6:00 AM to 9:00 AM and then from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM.

11.5 Abbonamento

If you use public transport to commute to university, it is highly recommended to purchase an abbonamento (monthly, semi-annual, or annual ticket), as it is much cheaper than paying for individual trips. Detailed information about the different types of abbonamenti is available on the ATM website (<https://www.atm.it/it/ViaggiaConNoi/Abbonamenti/Pagine/Tipologie.aspx>).

To obtain an abbonamento, visit one of the many ATM offices (e.g. at the central station). Once you have it, you can easily renew it each month using the ticket machines at any metro station.

11.6 Discounts for PhD students

There are no discounts on the abbonamento for PhD students. While there are discounts for undergrad students, postdocs, and professors, there are no discounts for PhD students. This is mostly because of the legal status of PhD students, which is not really a student, but also not really a worker (see sec. 8.2). They simply forgot about us.

11.7 Abbonamento annuale 50€

If your ISEE (see Sec. 4.7) is below 6000€ you can get the annual ticket for the public transport in Milano for only 50€. For this reduced annual ticket, you need to do the official ISEE at a CAF (see also Sec. 4.7) which requires *residenza* in Italy. Furthermore, you can only ask for this reduced ticket at one of the many CAFs. The documents you need for this ticket can be found at <https://www.atm.it/it/ViaggiaConNoi/Abbonamenti/Pagine/Tipologie.aspx> under the point *Abbonamento urbano annuale ridotto, in base al reddito*. Even if you manage to obtain an official ISEE and have *residenza* in Italy, you might not manage to get the reduced annual ticket. Some of the PhD students who did not manage to acquire all the necessary documents nevertheless managed to get this ticket, while others who had all the required documents did not. So, in a way it can also depend on the CAF you are going whether you manage to get the ticket or not. Therefore, it is at least worth a try (although it might be really frustrating dealing with the bureaucracy).

12 Culture and Sports

A PhD is hard and one also needs to rest and time off in which one can enjoy the beautiful parts of life. Luckily, Milano is one of the cultural centers of Italy and therefore offers a great variety of cultural events, from theater and opera, over museums and concerts, all the way to Serie A football games. Furthermore, Milano is perfectly located for outdoor sports like hiking or swimming. Below we give a short guide on some of the things one can do during one's free time.

12.1 Theater and Opera

The most famous theater in Milano is definitely *La Scala* (<https://www.teatroallascala.org/en/index.html>). It hosts Opera, Ballet and concerts of classical music. Tickets sell out fast and can cost up to several hundred euros. However, tickets for seats that do not offer a great view can be as cheap as only 20€. These seats are usually placed in front of columns. This is not a problem, since one can stand up to have an almost perfect view. Therefore, if you don't mind standing for two hours you can see amazing performances at *La Scala* for almost no money.

Other theaters are for example *Teatro Arcimboldi* right besides Bicocca (<https://www.teatroarcimboldi.it/>) hosting musicals, ballet and modern dance, *Piccolo Teatro* (<https://www.piccoloteatro.org/en?lang=es>) hosting classical theater plays, *Fabbrica del Vapore* (<https://www.fabbricadelvapore.org/>) hosting contemporary dance or *Teatro Franco Parenti* (<https://teatrofrancoparenti.it/>). Use the time in Milano to see as many shows as possible.

12.2 Museums

The many museums in Milano are the perfect thing to see when it is a rainy weekend. Luckily, there exists a special offer by the region of Lombardia which allows you to visit almost all museums in Lombardy with a single season ticket (*Abbonamento Musei Lombardia*). This Lombardia card (<https://www.regione.lombardia.it/wps/portal/istituzionale/HP/DettaglioServizio/servizi-e-informazioni/Cittadini/Cultura/Musei-ed-ecomusei/abbonamento-musei-lombardia/abbonamento-musei-lombardia>) only costs about 40€, i.e. it is a really good deal. If you do not want to pay for museums, many museums have free access to parts of the exhibitions once every month (usually the first Sunday of the month, but it is better to double check).

There are some museums that are not included in the Lombardia card but still worth a visit, like the *Mudec* (<https://www.mudec.it/en/>) or the roof of the Duomo (strictly speaking not a museum, but definitely worth a visit since the view is amazing). Finally, Milano also hosts one of the most famous paintings by Leonardo da Vinci, i.e. *The Last Supper* or *Cenacolo* in Italian. Tickets for the *Cenacolo* are released every three months and sell out pretty fast. So, if you want to see the *Cenacolo* you need to plan and book several months in advance. On the official homepage of the *Cenacolo* (<https://cenacolovinciano.org/>) you can buy the tickets and find all the information when the next patch of tickets is released.

12.3 Concerts

Since Milano is one of the cultural centers of Italy, each year many international artists come to Milano on their tours for concerts. The biggest concerts usually also sell out pretty fast. Therefore, to get tickets, just follow your most favorite artists and buy the tickets as soon as the concerts are announced.

However, apart from the big names, Milano also has a vibrant music scene with many small concerts by very good, but not well-known artists. Among the locations are the various *Arci* (<https://arcimilano.it/>) in Milano and its surroundings. You can find all the *Arci* in the Milano area on this map: <https://arcimilano.it/i-circoli-di-milano-lodi-monza-e-brianza/>. To find out which concerts will be happening, simply go on the website of the different *Arci* and look at their schedule. Apart from concerts the different *Arci* also host poetry slams, stand-up comedy, literature events, and discussions on politics and art. Therefore, they are one of the most important cultural institutions in Italy and if you are interested in music and culture you definitely need to check them out. To enter the *Arci* you need a membership card (*tessera*), which is easy to obtain. The first time you go to one of the *Arci* you fill out a simple form, pay ca 10€, and get your card. The *tessera* has to be renewed each year.

Circolo Magnolia (<https://www.circolomagnolia.it/>) and *Amelia* (<https://www.masadamilano.it/circolo-amelia/>) are two more institutions of cultural life in Milano which one has to know. They are not part of the *Arci* network, but work in a similar way, i.e. you need a *tessera* to get in. They also host concerts, but also parties, and electronic music. Other places with concerts and events are for example *BASE* (<https://base.milano.it/>) or *Bachelite CLab*. This list is not exhaustive and many more great venues for concerts exist in Milano.

12.4 Football

For every football fan, Milano is one of the best places to be, since with Inter Milano, AC Milano and Atalanta Bergamo there are several top Serie A teams in Milano or close by. Since football is a great part of Italian culture going to see at least one football match in the stadium should be on the to-do list of each international student. Tickets can be fairly cheap starting at around 20€ if the game is against a smaller team. Tickets can usually be bought online at the websites of the clubs. In Italy, for security reasons, one has to give one's passport details and at the entrance the IDs are checked. Furthermore, there might be restrictions on whether you are allowed to go to a game based on where your residence is. In general, in Italy, you are not allowed to go to the neutral section of a stadium if your residence is in the same province (or country for international games) as the visiting team.

12.5 Hiking

Since Milano is close to the mountains, it is also a good place to go hiking. There are many hikes, easy ones as well as more advanced ones, that are accessible by public transport. They are all located in the mountains close to lake Como or Lago Maggiore and in summer the hikes can be combined with swimming (see Sec. 12.6). A good starting point to plan your hikes is the website: <https://www.komoot.com/>.

12.6 Swimming

In summer it can get fairly hot in Milano. Luckily, lake Como is not far away and one can go there to swim and spend the day in a more acceptable climate compared to Milano. There are several public beaches where it is allowed to go swimming in some of the smaller towns along the lake, for example in Mandello del Lario or in Colico. All these places are reachable by public transport (trains).

13 Holidays

At [this link](#) you can check the academic calendar containing information on the days when the University buildings will be closed.

There are several public holidays in Italy, some related to religious (Catholic) traditions and some related to historically relevant events:

- 1st of January (New Years' Day)
- 6th of January (Epiphany)
- Easter Sunday and Monday
- 25th of April (Liberation Day)
- 1st of May (International Workers' Day)
- 2nd of June (Republic Day)
- 15th of August (Ferragosto)
- 1st of November (All Saints' Day)
- 7th of December (Saint Ambrose; only in Milano)
- 8th of December (Mary's Conception)
- 25th and 26th of December (Christmas and Saint Stephen)

If one of these holidays is on a Thursday or Tuesday people usually take Friday/Monday off as well (i.e. you should take holidays as well). During holiday periods, the university building will be closed. These periods are always announced via email. Furthermore, during the first three weeks of August basically all of Italy and also Milano is on holiday. Most shops and bars will be closed, so it is a good thing to plan not to be in Milano during this period. Especially because it is also too hot.

Welcome to Italy. Welcome to Milano.
And good luck with the bureaucracy. You will need it.