

# Immigration to Italy and return policies: a provocation, a wishful thinking or an opportunity?<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In Italy, the return of immigrants to their country of origin is practically absent in the media and in the debate among the operators or the general public. In the countries of arrival, immigrant labour, at first, alleviates pressure on the local labour market with a beneficial effect, but in time might also cause competition with local labour, impede renovation of production and keep the situation stationary. On the other hand, in the countries of origin, several authors have underlined the damage of massive population emigration of the young and skilled workforce and explored ways to encourage emigrants to come back with the intention of taking part in the development process.

The present paper invites discussion on the subject of returning migrants, a phenomenon which is now being addressed by ongoing legislation. The policies that will accompany the return and reinsertion of immigrants in their native societies should connect the phase of arrival to that of return, promoting a comprehensive project based on the possibility of returns, multiple family permits, rotation of permits among family members, and enterprise planning.

**Key words:** Italy, return policies, assisted returns, return actions, co-development.

## Resum. *Immigració a Itàlia i polítiques de retorn: una provocació, un desig o una oportunitat?*

A Itàlia, el retorn dels immigrants als seus països d'origen és un tema pràcticament absent en els mitjans de comunicació i en el debat entre els agents o el públic en general. En els països d'arribada, el treball dels immigrants alleugera, en un primer moment, la pressió sobre el mercat de treball local amb un efecte beneficiós, però, a còpia de temps, pot competir amb el treball local, impedir la renovació de la producció i mantenir la situació estancada. Tanmateix, en els països d'origen, diversos autors han alertat del perjudici de l'emigració massiva de població jove i preparada i han reivindicat la necessitat d'explorar maneres d'encoratjar els immigrants a tornar a casa amb la intenció de prendre part en el procés de desenvolupament del seu país.

L'article invita a discutir sobre el tema del retorn dels immigrants, un fenomen tractat actualment per la legislació vigent. Les polítiques sobre el retorn i la reinserció dels immigrants a les seves societats nadiues hauria de connectar la fase d'arribada amb la de

1. Correcció de l'anglès feta per Gerda Priestley.

tornada, promoure un projecte integrador basat en la possibilitat dels retorns, de permisos de família múltiple, de rotació de permisos entre els membres de la família i de la planificació d'empreses.

**Paraules clau:** Itàlia, polítiques de retorn, retorn assistit, accions de retorn, codesenvolupament.

**Resumen.** *Inmigración en Italia y políticas de retorno: ¿una provocación, un deseo o una oportunidad?*

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En Italia, el retorno de los inmigrantes a sus países de origen es un tema prácticamente ausente en los medios de comunicación y en el debate entre los agentes o el público en general. En los países de llegada, el trabajo de los inmigrantes aligera, en un primer momento, la presión sobre el mercado de trabajo local con un efecto beneficioso, pero, con el tiempo, puede competir con el trabajo local, impedir la renovación de la producción y mantener la situación estancada. Además, en los países de origen, diversos autores han alertado del perjuicio de la emigración masiva de población joven y preparada y han reivindicado la necesidad de explorar formas para animar a los inmigrantes a volver a casa con la intención de tomar parte en el proceso de desarrollo.

El artículo invita a discutir sobre el tema del retorno de los inmigrantes, un fenómeno tratado actualmente por la legislación vigente. Las políticas sobre el retorno y la reinserción de los inmigrantes en sus sociedades nativas tendrían que conectar la fase de llegada con la de su vuelta a casa, promover un proyecto integrador basado en la posibilidad de los retornos, de permisos de familia múltiple, rotación de permisos entre los miembros de la familia y planificación de empresas.

**Palabras clave:** Italia, políticas de retorno, retorno asistido, acciones de retorno, codesarrollo.

**Résumé.** *Immigration en Italie et politiques de retour: une provocation, un désir ou une opportunité?*

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En Italie, le retour des immigrants aux pays d'origine c'est presque oublié dans les médias et dans le débat entre les acteurs sociaux ou le public en général. Dans les pays d'arrivée, le travail des immigrants soulage positivement, au premier moment, la pression sur le marché de travail local, mais au cours du temps il peut entrer en compétence avec le travail local, éviter la rénovation de la production et maintenir étanchée la situation. En plus, dans les pays d'origine, des auteurs ont remarqué des aspects négatifs de l'émigration massive de population jeune et préparée et ils ont revendiqué le besoin d'explorer d'autres formes d'animer aux immigrants à retourner chez eux avec le but de prendre partie dans le processus de développement.

L'article invite à la discussion autour du thème du retour des immigrants, un phénomène qui est en cours de débat dans la législation actuelle. Les politiques sur le retour et la réinsertion des immigrants dans ses sociétés natives devraient connecter l'arrivée avec le retour, promouvoir un projet d'intégration basé sur la possibilité du retour, des permis de famille multiple, rotation des permis entre les membres de la famille et la planification des entreprises.

**Mots clé:** Italie, politiques de retour, retour assisté, actions de retour, co-développement.

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### Summary

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A Rumanian shepherd said to a Sardinian journalist: «I learned how to milk, how to raise a flock. Now I know this trade, how to be a shepherd. I shall have my own flock, down there in Rumania, maybe in a few months, I hope». (Ghirra, 2005)

### Foreword: the actuality of return policies

The return of immigrants to their country of origin has always been part of any migration project, even if it does not always come true. While departures may be a mass movement, returns—at least voluntary ones—are always individual. Today's massive arrivals in the EU will certainly leave behind important mixed blood offspring and changed populations. But returns have not disappeared from today's international mobility, and globalization certainly does not work one way only. Most returns are natural, and will follow departures according to a varying succession of events and situations, often completing a preconceived plan on the part of the emigrant and his/her family. A return project might give sense to a lifetime of work abroad, or, in the case of young returnees, start another project of life and work.

Even though there is general indifference to this topic, nevertheless the problems and policies related with return should be examined more closely: will the immigrants now entering Italy go back to their countries of origin, and when? How quickly will they return? Will only a few of them return, or a large proportion, as was the case with the great migration from Italy between the 19th and the 20th century? Some years ago a well known book on international migration to Europe (*Here for good*, Castles, 1984), predicted a stabilization of immigration with very few returns, if any. This is quite a complicated question, which is also tinted by the feeling that it is «politically incorrect» to speak of or to plan the return of immigrants<sup>2</sup>.

It is true that in Italy the topic of return is rarely found in newspapers, legal texts, or scientific and general debates. Until very recently little was

2. Nevertheless, experiments do take place nowadays: the Commune of Rome is now starting a program of voluntary return involving three Rumanian communes and some Italian firms now present in Rumania, with the aim of reducing immigration to Italy from this country and of facilitating the return home of Rumanian citizens now living in the capital (*Migranti. press*, n. 26, 2007).

published on the problems of return projects or aid for returns. As a response to the stimulus from European discussion about immigrants' acceptance and immigration regulations, a significant report is worthy of mention: *Return migration: the Italian case* (IDOS, 2006). A contribution to the third pilot study, entitled *Return Migration in the EU Member States*, it reconsiders the topic of return, and, with the aim of finding a productive connection between immigration and return policies, it examines two different moments in the migration process. The new attitude towards population movements must include the return home as a planned conclusion of migration, either as a prologue to further migrations or as a part of resettling in the country of origin. The research hypothesis concerning migration holds that more freedom of arrival and departure seems desirable in order to assist the migrant to react to ups and downs in the labour market, and to adapt to change. On the contrary, a rigid system does not easily permit constructive responses by the migrant, and seems both absurd and damaging. In the face of continuous arrivals some people think that the returns are not yet part of the picture, because society back home is not ready to meet the needs of the returning migrants. In addition, the rotation policy was stigmatized long ago and it is not easy to turn back and look at it from a renewed perspective.

In the 1970s, research and debate on returning migrants peaked, paralleling the numerous returns resulting from the oil crisis and the consequent blocking of immigration by countries which had been very receptive to immigration in Europe<sup>3</sup>. In return countries measures were implemented to help the economic system to integrate returning labour, whilst in their adopted countries, incentives were given to foreign workers to encourage their departure. Return policies were imprinted in public opinion; they were meant to send back immigrant workers no longer needed, foster circulatory mobility, and promote a rotational model in the workforce. However, many papers and books on this subject were strongly marked by social pessimism (Signorelli *et al.*, 1977; Kubat, 1984; Reyneri, 1979). On the other hand, some authors emphasized the potential development which could result from returns (Saraceno, 1981; Grossutti, 2007; Sori, 2007; Gentileschi, Simoncelli, 1983; Belencin Meneghel, 1983).

As a consequence, many years later, the topic of return policies is still considered as negatively tainted and returns are not yet accepted as a natural stage of the migration experience. The metaphor: «the migrant goes though a revol-

3. Italian immigrants to central Europe in the 1970s lived this phase with less tension in comparison with their colleagues from outside the EEC. Application of the Treaty of Rome legally entitled them to remain in the countries to which they had immigrated. Even though they were free to go back home and return later to seek work after the economic depression was over, most Italians chose to return home. Long-term plans for further departures in a more promising future situation were not fulfilled, because an expanding labour market in Italy proved to be more attractive.

ing door, and, why not, he might come back» (quoting from a recent meeting, Sori, 2007) expresses how easily the migrant can be motivated to leave and return. Attention has been captured by the arrivals and their connected problems, by the question of integration, or of expulsion, and only seldom have returns been seen as a simple development of planned and voluntary decisions.

Behind this choice —not to dwell on the matter of return— there is the idea that Europe needs more immigrants, possibly a young and cheap workforce, willing to meet the demand of unwanted jobs and to pay for the welfare state. In fact, demographic decline of Europe, in contrast with the growth of practically the rest of the world, is seen as the worst of evils. The possibility even of a *soft* decline, and the eventual, related advantages (diminishing population density, re-naturalization of mountains and hills, elimination of three-D jobs, etc.) is not even discussed. The success of books such as *La decrescita felice* (Palante, 2005) does not extend outside limited circles. A re-equilibrium of the age classes of the population which would restore the balance of jobs and workforce, seems far away<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, some areas which are among the most densely inhabited and congested in the world (Naples and its surroundings, the province of Milan, the Milan - Bergamo - Brescia belt) continue to be the magnet attracting immigrant labour and families.

Few politicians and economists are considering return policies. Whatever plans the immigrant has, these are seen as his personal problem. Not all immigrants want to integrate and settle in Italy. On the contrary, many want to save some of their earnings and go back to their country of origin. They should be helped to fulfill this project. In the sending countries the weight of factors such as remittances, plentiful availability of a young workforce, the lack of adequate job offers to meet local demand and that of returning workers, all converge in raising strong fears. Even if family reunification works in favour of stabilization, many migrant families still plan for the future of their offspring in the home country. On the other hand, the ageing migrant communities in the arrival areas should not be seen as a minor problem (Gallou, 2001). (For a general portrait concerning the main European countries, see de Haas, 2006).

### Evaluating the size of return flows

More recently, return flow rates seem to coincide more closely with departure flows. Estimates of the intervening delay differ very much, according especially to distance, economic relations between countries, type of work permit

4. In Northern Europe, where the demographic transition took place earlier, the situation reached stability and then saw a further decline in birth rates. The Italian population is simply stationary, but not yet stable. The increase of the birth rate there is the result of the immigration of young families, whilst in some northern European countries it is more the outcome of changed behaviour fostered by specific policies.

and of permit to stay<sup>5</sup>. The length of stay is a matter of guesswork: departing emigrants seldom notify the local authority or the police. Since the work market is fragmented into a myriad of different activities and niches, arrivals and returns tend to be more simultaneous.

The geographical position of Italy —between North Africa and central Europe— is probably leading to an increase in the rate of mobility. While Italy is considered a land of passage, a country like Germany was and still is —in the eyes of most potential migrants at least— seen as a country of destination and

5. Italian statistics only register indirect information on returns, through comparison of the number of new permits granted each year and the stock of existing permits at the beginning and the end of the year. Departing emigrants do not necessarily inform the authorities about their decision, and also quite a number of legally registered migrants simply become irregular when they do not request or are not accorded renewal of the permit. In December 1990, there were 781,000 permit holders, including 235,000 permits granted under law nr. 39/90 (Bonifazi, 1997, p. 41).

In December 1999, permit holders totaled 1,341,000; in the decade 1990-99, the new legal admissions (apart from short stay permits and according to the evaluation made in *Dossier*, 2006, p. 85), added up to 664,000. A further 461,000 permits should be added to this total, deriving from new amnesties, with the exclusion of those granted under the amnesty arising from Law nr. 39/90 (235,000, as stated above) and that have already been taken into account. The total number of permits granted during the decade is therefore 1,125,000. From this total, the newborns of the period, as well as other minors, are excluded since they are not granted permits separately from their family.

Adding 1,125,000 to the 781,000 permits as the initial figure, the new total of 1,906,000 is considerably higher (565,000) than the number of permits in existence in 1999. Although the basic data is far from perfect, we may conclude that departures intervening in the period were very numerous, averaging 63,000 persons per year. We do not know how many departures were returns home and how many were displacements towards other countries of arrival or simply due to becoming irregular.

Between 2000 and 2005, the number of permit holders grew from 1,388,000 to 2,272,000, an increase of 884,000 units. This figure encompasses the permits granted under the latest amnesty (law 189/02 and d.l. 195/02, validated by law 222/02), which totaled around 650,000. The growth of permit holders, divided over the 6 year period, represents an average yearly increase of 147,000 units.

In order to appreciate the magnitude of the yearly change, the data below reconstruct the series of arrivals, as evaluated by Caritas, under the item «visti per inserimento» (integration visa), after eliminating the «immigrazioni di breve durata» (temporary immigration, see *Dossier* 2000, p. 80):

- In 2000, around 202,400 (*Dossier* 2002, p. 65).
- In 2001, around 306,000 (*Dossier* 2002, p. 65).
- In 2002, around 80,000 (the amnesty year, when there were few newcomers, *Dossier* 2003, p. 92).
- In 2003, around 107,000 (*Dossier* 2004, p. 94).
- In 2004, around 131,000 (*Dossier* 2005, p. 78).
- In 2005, around 224,000, amounting to more than 200,000 newcomers (*Dossier*, 2006, p. 77).

During the period between Jan. 2000 and Dec. 2005, total permits (including new arrivals and 650,000 permits arising from the amnesty) should consequently give a yearly increase of permits holders in Italy of 197,000, against a growth which was only of 147,000 yearly. Therefore we can evaluate departures (together with those slipping into irregularity) around 50,000 units per year. No doubt that these calculations are highly questionable.

a promise of stability. Even so, mobility across frontiers is high: looking at the data of immigration and re-emigration between Germany and the 10 PECO countries (East Central new European Union members, excluding Malta and Cyprus), only between 1988 and 1992 were arrivals significantly higher than departures, whilst in the last few years the size of the flows was almost equal (Haug, 2002). In Germany, between 2001 and 2005, net migration has been decreasing, both as a consequence of increasing returns and of diminishing arrivals (*BiB - Mitteilungen*, 2006). This is one proof that returns do play a role. Even Netherlands witnesses many departures: in 2002 there were 121,000 immigrants, 12,000 fewer than in 2001. Considering the arrivals between 1995 and 2002, in 2003 one quarter had already left the country, a tenth of them in the first year only. Two out of three immigrant workers and 60% of the refugees had already left within five years from arrival (Nicolaas *et al.*, 2004).

### Problems in the arrival areas

The fear of being invaded by immigrants originating from the 10 new member countries in May 2004 was at the root of some Western countries' decision to opt for a transition period of limited entrances, which can cover up to seven years. According to different projections, the displacements from new member countries towards old member countries were estimated at figures varying from 70,000 - 150,000 (cfr. [www.stranierinitalia.it/news](http://www.stranierinitalia.it/news), 9/2/2004) to 220,000 units per year (*Fondazione UE per il miglioramento delle condizioni di vita e di lavoro / Eurobarometro*). Austria and Germany are probably the most cautious in allowing new arrivals, while the United Kingdom and Ireland the most liberal. Anxiety rapidly receded, also taking into account that some of the countries that have recently joined the EU, such as Poland, Ireland and Cyprus, will also be facing a demographic decline, albeit delayed, similar to that of Western Europe (Farina, 2004). The population of the 27 countries of the Union, amounting to 490 million at the beginning of 2007, is on the increase in all countries, with the exception of Poland, Hungary and the Baltic states, where figures have fallen in comparison with the previous year, as a result of migration and a negative natural balance.

In Italy the reaction to the incoming wave has been more relaxed: Rumania, Albania, Poland, together with some non-member countries, such as Ukraine and Moldova, made up 52,7% of the clandestine amnesty applications submitted in 2002, against 37,4% of permit holders from the same countries already in Italy. The same group of countries originated 35,5% of the total of permit holders at the end of 2005, further proof that the much feared invasion had not taken place and that the balance of arrivals/returns is already taking a share of the stock. The opening of the frontiers leads to an increase of mobility, but in both directions. The immigrant can easily adapt to fast developments in the labour market, since more than often he /she has less property and fewer family ties and is therefore more mobile and ready to pur-

sue new opportunities. Only with time, higher formation and better revenues, as well as home property, more services and acceptable environmental quality will stabilize part of the population in the richer areas.

### Problems in the areas of origin

According to a forecast made by Caritas (Forti *et al.*, 2004) immigration from eastern countries would soon decline, since «The eastern countries are not an unlimited reserve of workforce, so much as aging and demographic decline are also taking place in these countries, although not at the rate of Italy». Those who had already had the experience of living in Italy would then wish to return to the east, especially «those workers who had acquired or improved their skills and set aside enough savings to start their own businesses back home». As a matter of fact, some of the Italian firms that opened business in these countries, have fulfilled a role in the migrants' resettlement, by taking advantage of the skilled workers returning from Italy<sup>6</sup>.

In fact, while the arrival countries have been fearing or still fear invasion, the sending countries are worried about being abandoned by the best «brains» and the most highly qualified human resources. Among them, there are many examples of how the loss of skilled workers hinders development and modernization. Poland, for instance, resents the departure of quite a number of young people towards UK and Ireland, which both thrive on immigrant skilled workers. In 2004 Poland was the first PECO country in number of citizens who had emigrated to the 15 members Union. In 2007 there were 900,000 Poles abroad in Union countries, amounting to around 3% of the Polish population in the working age group. While Ireland profits from the bounty of young, skilled newcomers, the most important entrepreneur association of Poland complains about the scarcity of good quality labour. In addition, the drain of medical personnel towards western hospitals creates gaps in the Polish health service. Nevertheless, unemployment in Poland is still high, notwithstanding a yearly growth of 5,9% of the national GDP (Purvis, 2007, Paggi- ni, 2007). On the other hand, Albania, with a population of only 3 million, in 2004 had one million migrants (Government of Albania, *National Strategy on Migration*, as quoted by King and Vullnetari, 2006): the villages are left to old people, while the young are abroad. Should the elders join their offspring in the more prosperous neighboring countries?

In Rumania, sad and worrisome comments now follow the exodus of some 750,000 emigrants to Italy only. A competent observer, don Domenico Locatelli of Migrantes, defined the situation as «Really disgraceful for this country, which sees today the departure abroad of almost a whole generation, which is

6. An Italian firm which opened in Bacau, Rumania, recently engaged 185 skilled Chinese workers, following the departure abroad of Rumanians to western Europe, after completing the formation course paid by the firm itself (Cfr.: «En Roumanie, les travailleurs chinois remplacent les émigrés», *Le Monde*, 19/09/06).

very much needed in a situation of slow and painful recovery of the economy and the society» (*Migranti.press*, 28, n. 9, 2006, p. 5). The Rumanian president, Basescu, expressed the same view in a recent interview for *Gazeta Româneasca*, an emigrants' newspaper in Italy, when he said that, out of a population of 21 million citizens, almost 800,000 are now abroad, perhaps one million from some estimates. He invited his own countrymen to return now that Rumania is a member state of EU. Accordingly, Rumanian entrepreneurs denounce the scarcity of the young, skilled workforce that has gone west without waiting for the recovery of their country's economy reputed to be too slow. Generally speaking, people are aware that mass emigration is leaving behind a dismembered society, and especially the old and the needy will suffer the loss.

Not all Eastern European citizens favour the arrival of foreign firms and capital that buy factories, buildings and land. The emigrants from these countries feel that they are being expropriated of their belongings that will be in other hands when they return. Already, in some areas, foreign technicians, skilled workers and professionals must be beckoned from Turkey, China or Moldova, since the local manpower has rapidly sought their fortune abroad (Gulli, 2006). Eastern European countries are now becoming a new frontier for other nations further east, where they are seen as arrival—or more often—transit countries. A society so deeply disturbed by population movements will certainly in a short time become destructured and unable to profit from the positive changes which lie ahead.

Whilst the «syndrome of the Polish plumber» is fading somewhat in Western Europe, heads of state and governments in the eastern countries emphasize the needs of their own expatriated citizens. The appeal found support from Pope Benedict XVI, who recently declared that migrants should be helped to resettle in their home country. Such numerous departures were rightly defined as an exodus and considered a mixed blessing - full of disquieting implications (Purvis, 2007). Unfortunately, the positive inheritance of the socialist period, i.e. a widespread education and professional formation, is turning from a potential asset to a more serious loss through mass emigration.

Much the same was said about the damage to African development as a consequence of high emigration rates. The past president of Nigeria, Mr. Obasanjo, recently traveled abroad looking for his dispersed countrymen, encouraging the skilled ones to return to Nigeria and strive together for the development of their own country, now facing a more promising future. Even if they prefer not to go back, he considers that they should, at least, feel a certain obligation towards their home country and cooperate with its aims and policies.

### **Accompanying policies for a sustainable return**

The directive approved on 18th June 2008, by the European Parliament, while inviting the member states to exert stricter control on illegal immigration, also encourages the implementation of incentives to return, so that sound return poli-

cies will integrate a coherent body of comprehensive migration policies. The aim of the return of the immigrant should, in fact, be achieved through positive measures, with recourse to funding available from the European Fund for Returns. Such an initiative has been introduced by Spain, where the *Strategic Plan 2007-2010* (Secretaría de Estado, 2007), designates a key role to co-development. In the planning of returns, the immigrant should become an actor of development and the immigrant associations should be encouraged to participate in decision-making on migration planning. Returning home will then achieve an acceptable level of dignity and sustainability, and help to avoid re-emigration. Strategies and actions are being defined in a quest to identify and promote development opportunities. For several reasons, countries such as Ecuador, Morocco and Senegal are being accorded priority.

The many aspects of a sustainable return fall in different categories of analysis and can be differently influenced by policies. From the geographical point of view, the way the return will interact with the system of local factors seems the most important. Therefore, the place to which return will lead the migrant is the first condition: has the context remained the same as when he/she left or has it changed? The migrant him/herself is certainly a different person, but the context might be the same. This was not the case with former emigrants returning to Veneto and Friuli - Venezia Giulia in the 1970s, where the economic situation was offering more space for individual firms and the labour market was rapidly expanding. Hence, one only had to put supply in touch with demand to create opportunities for work and success. But this is not yet the case with most developing countries. Rather, better opportunities exist in limited areas, such as seaports, capitals and main cities, and perhaps mining and industrialized areas. The returnees can be expected to converge spontaneously towards the privileged areas and forget their places of origin, possibly still unaltered and devoid of opportunities. As a result, return will include an internal move, from poorer to richer areas. An analysis of the «trajectory of returns» to Spain in the 1960s/1980s (Berrocal, 1984) demonstrated that young migrants usually returned to a city or to a developed area. In fact, it was found to be a function of the age of the migrants, together with the length of stay abroad, the amount of savings accumulated, and marital and social status. «Euromigration», as the Spanish called it, finally produced a rural exodus. Under certain conditions the outcome follows a logical pattern. Why insist on inhabiting parts of the country that are undergoing severe stress under poverty and relative overcrowding? Well designed return policies should therefore consider helping the returnee to settle, if not in the most developed areas, at least in their proximity.

Measures such as return primes could be linked more to specific areas, instead of to the migrant as an economic actor. At present, support is clearly directed towards the person, especially if he/she is skilled. Such co-development is intended to help individual projects. If sustainability means creating jobs that will last over time and will integrate the system, then the interests of the area should be given first priority.

On the side of the migrant and his family, sustainability means that the migrant himself will find stability, but this does not include all the other members of the family. Giving a permit to the younger members, once the father goes back home was also discussed as a possibility. In fact, the immigrants that arrived twenty years or more ago are near retirement age. They should have full rights to a pension and related fringe benefits independent of their place of habitation.

The best migration policies will seek to regulate the circulation and re-circulation of the majority of migrants (Weil, 2002). They should promote the circulation of workers, and thus create a more liberal environment. In fact, circular migration is considered more advantageous for the migrants themselves, as well as for departure and arrival countries. The latter might have a period of greater need of manpower because of an ageing population. However, an ageing population is not a permanent trend, but rather is likely to veer towards regaining equilibrium though time.

The promotion of a circulating migration system can be set up gradually, by introducing new rules in the quota system, without removing controls (*Risoluzione sulle migrazioni*, 2002). On the contrary, such a system can only work if there is certainty of rules and control. The proposed *legge-delega Amato/Ferrero* for the reform of the regulations concerning immigration, contemplates such rules, and includes programs supporting voluntary repatriation and repatriation of immigrants in a state of need, as well as incentives for productive returns, of either a temporary or permanent nature. Changing regulations will result in the renovation of residence permits which will give the immigrant worker more freedom to come and go, to make repeated migrations and therefore adapt to changing demand. Being in touch with the society and regional context of origin will allow the emigrant to evaluate opportunities for return and resettlement better.

Co-development has now become the keyword of a successful recipe which will accompany the emigrants on their return journey<sup>7</sup>. The word in itself implies the implementation of policies of cooperation and aid to development which will also produce migration control, but it does not necessarily include returns. The key note is solidarity, but a form of solidarity that does not neglect sound economic design. Projects might relate to emigrants' remittances, sent home from abroad, or to the investment of their savings as well as of their skills, once they have gone back and resettled in their home country. In preparation, formation and training geared towards future jobs and enterprises in the country of origin would be arranged while the emigrant is still in the country of arrival, possibly in connection with firms that plan to open businesses abroad. A positive link could be established, starting at the pre-emigration stage, and would select the prospective emigrants and prepare them for certain jobs. Agreements between governments along such lines already exist. The

7. See *Co-développement ou immigration choisie*, in Co-Développement.org, 1st July 2007)

economic side of migrations would in this way include the promotion of migrants' competences and skills, their insertion in the country of arrival and, finally, guidance towards an individual activity which could contribute to the development of both the country of emigration and the country of origin. The target would be an individually based action of cooperation and investment that would, at the same time, be defined by an agreement between the two countries. A set of actors is implied: the emigrant and his family, a family enterprise, the local government and that of the country of immigration, the formation system, and finally those non-governmental organizations that might have a role in this context. As the French say, *le développement partagé* (shared development) has many partners.

On the whole, researchers record several cases of local measures which were based on return plans to the countries of origin, such as Mali and Algeria, some dating back to the late 1970s (Lacroix, 2004; Gómez Gil, 2005). The French experience was the best consolidated and most varied. The first programmes —*aide au retour* (1977-1980) and *aide à la reinsertion* (from 1983)— were unsuccessful and therefore gradually abandoned. In 1995 new measures were applied in connection with the engagement of Senegalese migrants in agricultural development along the River Senegal, although success was not achieved for a number of reasons. With time the projects became more orientated towards the principles of cooperative development and also included illegal migrants. More recently the project's philosophy has aimed at guiding migrants' savings towards productive investments and mobilizing the Diaspora elite for the development of their countries of origin (De Haas, 2006). Several reports are available on how policies and measures have changed through time in various European countries (Bonjour, 2005; Aumüller, 2004).

While the return of the migrants in their country of origin remains a target, on the other side, cooperation towards development could be a good strategy to discourage immigration (Marín Sánchez, 2006), although not all observers agree on this option (Herrera Muñoz-Cobo, 2008; Naïr, 1997; Sandoval Ruiz, 2006). The overall context would therefore still be that of spontaneous returns, difficult to govern and to arrange, both for the institutions and for the social actors. Furthermore, in a come and go situation and a transnational system, it is difficult to bring the various choices and behaviours under control. A few, simple rules could meet the problems better than sophisticated projects. To date, planning special formation, helping new enterprises, giving counseling and evaluating results, all seem quite complicated missions (Villan, 2007, p. 91). A certain length of permanence —at least three years— would be a requisite and some economic sectors are probably more promising than others. Rural tourism development in places of interest, such as sea coasts, hills or forests, can constitute a successful investment both for skills and experience in tourist trade and for savings, as has been proved by the cooperation carried out through some *projets de co-développement* experimented in France by North African immigrants (Ma Mung, 1997; Gentileschi and Pisano,

2006). There are hardly any doubts that the emigrant's experience can be positively deployed in a family guesthouse, a very common enterprise.

«Co-development policies will magnify migrants' enterprises which contribute to the improvement of their home countries» (Vladychenko, General Director at the Council of Europe, 2007). This simple statement points out how to connect governmental action and spontaneous enterprise: it is better to wait until the migrant (or the past-migrant) finds his/her own way, and selects a feasible project. France is perhaps the country where this type of action is most advanced and carefully pondered. A myriad of different activities are now sustained by co-development projects, where public funding is being integrated with migrant families' savings<sup>8</sup>. Such a result can hardly be achieved in the case of a very poor family. Rather, a successful migrant must be the possible actor.

The use of the word «development» seems excessive to more than one observer, since the fragmentation of investments in a thousand small enterprises can hardly generate true development, and only succeeds—at its best—in solving individual family problems. The countries of origin could also promote various forms of cooperation aiming at the return of their emigrant citizens (Albanese, 2007). Another viable measure is the basic education of children. Immigrant families are seeking to maintain the roots of their children by learning their mother tongue and their original culture and are even prepared to pay for it. As far as possible, the education system should include the teaching of the mother tongue, so that the link with the country of origin will remain. «Plural identities» is now the new frontier, which means producing an identity for an individual who can live as effectively in the country of arrival as in that of origin. Returning emigrants—even for a short period—bring new ways of life and new consumer choices to their societies. It is a well known fact that seasonal or short term migrant workers have a tendency to send larger remittances to their place of origin. Any measure facilitating freedom of movement and frequent displacements will work towards introducing change and fostering development (Dayton–Johnson and Katseli, 2006).

How to channel returning emigrants and maximize their positive economic effect on the societies of origin is a double-sided problem. In Western Europe, the flows coming from North Africa are now being partly replaced by new intra-European migration and arrivals from Latin America, Asia, and non-EU Eastern European countries. Moreover, as far as returns are concerned, a profound difference will distinguish North African returnees from Eastern European returnees: while a circulation system will easily extend throughout the EU, exchanges within the Mediterranean basin will probably become more

8. Dissenting views, however have, been expressed: Sami Naïr («Les migrations, une chance pour l'économie», in *Le Monde*, 26/11/2006), past-delegate for international migrations under the Jospin premiership, contends that co-development can only be accepted as a way of integrating immigrants in French society and its economy and that it should not become an instrument for repatriation and a means of stopping further immigration.

difficult. Nevertheless, proximity to the African continent will make returns easier, while immigration from more distant countries will certainly be more long term or permanent.

### A geographical note

The evolution of the mobility system towards circulation and rotation is now seen as a positive outcome for many reasons (Golini, 2007). It is in the interest of both arrival and sending countries to promote policies which will encourage circulation and returns, through investments, portability of pensions<sup>9</sup>, offers of formation and scholarships, cooperation and co-development (GCIM, 2005).

Migration paths to Italy follow well known itineraries which are geographically linked. The very shape and geographical position of Italy presents a prime example of such dynamics. Protruding into the Western Mediterranean, Italy is within a short distance of the coasts and ports of Libya, Tunisia and Algeria. Moreover, the peninsula's proximity to the Balkan coast across the Adriatic Sea, as well as to the land frontier in the Eastern Alps, provides an open door towards the Slavic countries. In addition to some well established flows, on the eastern side new immigration waves are materializing, both from prospective EU member countries and from other countries farther away, such as Pakistan, China and India. From the south, the sea can also be traversed by sub-Saharan and Asian immigrants after crossing the desert (ISMU, 2004; Melchionda and Ricci, 2004).

Far from following the same paths, the geography of returns will easily find new interests and opportunities will appear along the way, so that final destinations might be different from the migrants' places of origin. Triangular returns will bring them back to large cities, seaside resorts, and maybe attractive areas in other countries. A similar tendency to that, concerning the movements of refugees and displaced persons, has already been noted, as these might continue travel to a different place from that of origin (Umek, 1999).

Again, the areas of departure of future returnees might be distributed in a peculiar way among Italian regions. Between 1991 and 2001 cities over 500.000 inhabitants in Italy saw a diminishing percentage of foreign born residents, in sharp contrast with the increase in the communes with 3,001 – 10,000 and 10,001 – 20,000 inhabitants (Blangiardo, 2004: 41, tab. 1.3). Foreigners are now known to decentralize from large cities towards neighboring communes,

9. A recent example comes from France, where a problem arose over how to allow non-French pensioners to receive a specific allocation from a solidarity fund reserved for immigrants who had spend a minimum of nine months a year in the country. One proposal was to reduce the minimum length of stay to three months, which could be spent in France on a purpose-built residential rotation basis, so that pensioners could live in their country of origin. Another proposal was to abolish this obligation altogether, allowing pensioners to live all the year round abroad (Barroux, 2006).

and to spread over the Italian territory. It is guesswork whether or not departures concern first arrival areas more than stable settlements, although it is probably the first option. Those areas where clandestine arrivals and first-comers are numerous witness faster change and rotation. Certainly frontier belts do too. Under unfavourable market conditions, where there are few jobs, low wages, and little choice of trade, departures and returns home should be more numerous. It is therefore probable that most returns will involve marginal areas and that the South of Italy will see more returns than will the Center - North. There are already indications that a period of prevailing returns might augment the differences between regions with high and low percentages of foreign labour. Among the wide range of possible differences to investigate is the incidence of returns in seasonal labour forces which could bring a higher rotation in fruit growing areas, tourist areas, and, generally speaking, in those parts of the country based on seasonal trades and production, which can be fare focused in the South rather than in the North of Italy. The frontier areas, such as the province of Trapani and the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, would obviously register more returns and probably higher rotation levels, because they are points of entrance and therefore of transit. This phenomenon has already occurred in Sicily, where early arrivals were later counterbalanced by departures, to such an extent that this region has now one of the lowest densities of foreign nationals in Italy. Understandably, the Tunisian government is supporting tuition for Tunisian children at the local school in Mazara del Vallo (Trapani), in the hope that they will keep their culture alive and continue to identify themselves as members of the Tunisian population.

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