

Migrants as co-development actors. Transnational traits of the migrant presence in Italy

The main purpose of the article is to emphasize the most important questions attending the relationship between migration and development. The article considers in particular the situation in Italy in light of the migratory flows and in accordance with the IOM approach to the theme

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The concept of *transnationalism* is used in migration studies to acknowledge migrants' agency and their capacity to influence the societies and contexts that they bridge in economic, social, political and emotional terms. In the same vein, the notion of a *migration-development nexus* (Faist 2008) has been investigated by both development and migration scholars, who have scrutinized multiple interconnections of the two concepts at the micro (migrant and their families), meso (local communities) and macro (countries of origin and destination) levels.

Migration and Development: a two-way relationship

Research and policies on migration and development can be summarized in two main areas, that are based upon two underlying questions: 1) How does development affect migration? and 2) How does migration affect development? (Carling and Talleraas 2018).

Theoretical and practical answers are found in research publications since the 1960s. The interest in this area however has increased in the last 20 years in parallel with an growing interest in the causes and drivers

of migration, with the recognition of the role of remittances as a fairly stable and substantial source of financial flows for receiving countries (comparable in size to the official development aid from the 'developed' to the 'developing' countries), and the prospect of more diversified development funding which has encouraged private initiatives and bottom-up approaches from local communities and stakeholders has also contributed to a growing attention. Multilateral dialogue about migration governance has also been facilitated by framing migration and mobility in a development context and



highlighting also the positive social and economic aspects of this phenomenon. In the last 15 years, this dialogue has been promoted also by the United Nations High Level Dialogue Migration and Development (in 2006 and 2013) and the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GDMD)¹ which is a global, non-binding multilateral forum that has convened yearly since 2006 and which in 2015 endorsed a GFMD Business Mechanism.

In the Europe Union, after the introduction of the ‘Global Approach to Migration and Mobility’ (GAMM) in 2005², dialogues between Europe and Africa on migration, mobility and human development have flourished at the regional level (see for example the ‘Rabat Process’³ and

the ‘Khartoum Process’⁴) and at the bilateral level with ‘Mobility Partnerships’ with African countries of origin and transit⁵. More recently, also special trust and emergency funds – such as the EU Trust Fund for Africa⁶ – have been made available.

As these partnership initiatives are mostly led by European priorities and concerns, most of the policy debate has not engaged until recently with migration flows as such, but has rather focused on how to improve the development impact of migration (Carling and Talleraas, 2018). Moreover, especially since the beginning of the so-called “migration crisis” in 2015, migration management objectives and development priorities have been increasingly integrated within the EU migration policy

and external action, with some raising concerns among some about the diversion of development funds for migration management and border controls’ purposes.⁷

IOM’s approach to Migration and Development

Against this general background, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) understands the relationship between migration and development as reciprocal and consistently recognizes migration as an inherent element of social change, which clearly impacts development processes occurring in ‘developed’ or ‘developing’, ‘origin’ or ‘destination’ countries.

In practical terms, the Organiza-



Fig.1 Italian cities of registration of the 18 migrants' associations admitted to the A.MI.CO training courses 2018
Source: IOM Italy (2018)

tion implements migration and development (M&D) programmes to harness the development potential of migration for the benefit of societies and of migrants involved and to contribute to the sustainable development goals (SDGs).⁸ IOM acknowledges the role of 'diaspora' and transnational communities of developing countries as 'development actors' in their countries of origin and destination and implements a range of activities under its M&D Units, such as research, community development and capacity building initiatives, engagement of diasporas, promotion of migrant entrepreneurship with a transnational and development component, in partnership with relevant institutions, authorities and business. Moreover, IOM is also increasingly focusing in facilitating economic remittances as a bottom-up leverage for development of their communities of origin. The next paragraphs explore IOM involvement's in these fields, with some practical examples from current programmes and projects in the area of migration and development in Italy.

Diaspora engagement and capacity building

IOM has a long-standing experience in projects aimed at diaspora engagement in development processes, based on three principles: engaging transnational communities by understanding their characteristics, needs, motivations and capabilities and reaching out to them; supporting the creation of enabling conditions for transnational communities to develop their full potential in the societies that they bridge; and contributing to empowering transnational communities so that they can become agents of development, if they so wish. Hence, IOM has progressively developed a comprehensive strategy on how to embrace a co-development approach and to recognize most migrants' willingness to maintain close links with their origin countries and to contribute with various forms of 'capital' (human, social, cultural and financial) to local sustainable devel-

opment processes. Through transnational circuits migrants possess and mobilize different resources and capital. Embracing a co-development perspective means facilitating migrants' full participation (i.e. social, economic, cultural, civic and political) and contribution to development, both in the countries of origin and of residence, and implies a political consciousness about the positive contribution that migrants bring to the economies, societies and cultures of any given context. In a recent publication, IOM Italy (2017) presents its most updated lessons learned on the empowerment of members of transnational communities willing to drive co-development processes, as derived by the MIDA Youth experience with the Somali diasporas in Italy.⁹ One key component for the success of these kind of projects is clearly that of capacity building: in MIDA Youth, as well as in the currently active A.MI.CO project¹⁰, capacity building activities – unlike generic



Fig. 2 Countries of implementation of projects proposed by the participants to the A.MI.CO training course in 2018
Source: IOM Italy (2018)

trainings on project cycle management – emerge as a fundamental tool to address most compelling needs of individuals and groups in terms of specific skills transfers and knowledge formation. These trainings often entail a coaching component where groups benefit from tailored technical support and whereby the continuous empowering process of diasporas communities and their members is strengthened.

Migrant entrepreneurs in Italy

Policies that support entrepreneurial skills of nationals and foreign residents have increased over the last 10-15 years at the European level. Especially after the economic and financial crisis in 2008, the role of small and medium enterprises and of self-employment in creating new jobs has been promoted all over Europe. The *Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan* released in 2013 by the European Commission urged all Member States to design measures to attract new foreign entrepreneurs and to support the activities of mi-

Migrant entrepreneurs	% by region	% on total firms
Lombardy	19.3	11.5
Latium	13	11.5
Tuscany	9.4	12.9
Emilia Romagna	8.8	10.9
Veneto	8.3	9.7
Italy	100	9.4

Tab. 1 Distribution of migrant firms by region and share of migrant firms on total firms in Italy (2016)
Source: *Fondazione Moressa (2017)*

grants already established in Europe, and identified a set of policies to address most common migrants' disadvantages in comparison with local entrepreneurs (e.g. knowledge of rules and regulatory framework, skills recognition, language, access to credit) to initiate an entrepreneurial activity.

Small and medium enterprises have been always a significant and vibrant part of the Italian economic system and the country ranks first in Europe by number of entrepreneurial activities (15.5% of all self-employed individuals of the EU. Unsurprisingly,

migrant entrepreneurship – enterprises led by foreigners – has steadily grown over the past twenty years and has maintained a positive trend also during the economic crisis started in 2008 (Fondazione Moressa 2017; IDOS 2017): Italy ranks third in Europe by number of foreign entrepreneurs (almost 600 thousand, or 14% of all foreign entrepreneurs registered in EU), and it ranks first by number of non-EU nationals among all foreign entrepreneurs (the 73% of foreign entrepreneurs in Italy is non-EU national) (Eurostat 2017).

Migrants at risk of unemployment during the crisis have significantly resorted to self-employment to avoid discontinuity of work and the related risk of losing their regular residence status in the country. Often, new migrant entrepreneurs started a business in sectors where they had been previously employed, providing services to their past employer (sub-contractors). Most migrants' entrepreneurial activities were in the wholesale and retail trade sector (35% of all migrant firms), which includes regulated street and market vendors, small shops and super-markets, followed by the service sector (22%) and construction sector (21%).¹¹ More than half of all migrant firms (51%) are registered in



just four Italian regions - Lombardy, Latium, Tuscany and Emilia Romagna – where migrant firms represent between 10 per cent and 13 per cent of the registered firms.

In this landscape, IOM Italy launched the *MigraVenture* project in 2015 to work on enhancing the role of migrants as entrepreneurs and potential agents of transnational development with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and in line with the 2030 Agenda. The initiative is for African entrepreneurs residing in Italy and who are interested in starting or consolidating a business activity in their countries of origin. *MigraVenture* selects the most promising business ideas and accompanies them to facilitate their

access to risk capital (micro-equity financial instruments) In the first 18 months of implementation, the project received more than a hundred business proposals: 41 of these were included in the training phase, 33 were accompanied through personalized coaching and 10 gained access to capitalization fund, with more than 460 thousand euros of a combination of public funds and financial equities mobilized to boost business ideas in Cameroon (6), Senegal (2), Nigeria (1) and Burkina Faso (1). The entrepreneurs involved attracted up to 49% of the risk capital needed for the business start-up, showing the strength of a public-private partnerships in promoting the role of diaspora as business development agents.¹²

As the economic value of migrant entrepreneurship becomes more evident and stable, IOM renews its attention to migrant entrepreneurs and diaspora associations as relevant actors in terms of employment creation and economic added value in all sectors and all regions of the country and spurs for more initiatives and coordinated policies at the national and regional that could at once acknowledge the importance of co-development and transnational entrepreneurial activities, and enhance migrant entrepreneurs' organizational, financial, technological and relational integration in the Italian production system.

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- ¹ See: <https://gfmd.org/>
- ² See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52011DC0743>
- ³ See: <https://www.rabat-process.org/>
- ⁴ See: <https://www.khartoumprocess.net/>
- ⁵ See: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/international-affairs/global-approach-to-migration/mobility-partnership-facility_en
- ⁶ See: <https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/>
- ⁷ See for example a report from Concord, an European consortium of development NGOs, on EU development and migration funding in Africa: <https://concordeurope.org/2018/01/24/monitoring-eu-trust-fund-africa-publication/>
- ⁸ See the brochure on how SDGs are reflected in IOM programmes: https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ICP/MProcesses/IOM-and-SDGs-brochure.pdf
- ⁹ See: <https://italy.iom.int/en/activities/migration-and-development/mida-youth-somalia>
- ¹⁰ Between 2011 and 2018, eight editions of A.MI.CO training courses were held in Rome, Milan, Naples, Bari and Catania with the participation of more than 140 associations connected with around 45 countries of origin around the world: <http://www.italy.iom.int/en/activities/migration-and-development/AMICOTrainings>
- ¹¹ For a more comprehensive discussion on main migrant communities by number of entrepreneurial activities in Italy, see IOM Italy's Briefing on the topic (IOM Italy, 2018)
- ¹² See <https://italy.iom.int/it/migraventure-edizione-20162017> for an introductory video on 2017's edition of MigraVenture project in part. The second edition of the project will select new business ideas for training and support activities as of September 2018

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7. IOM Italy (2017), Engaging, Enabling and Empowering the Somali diaspora in Italy: The MIDA Youth experience, International Organization for Migration