

# Should I stay or should I go? Exploring migrants' intentions. The case of Italy

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## 1. Introduction

Recent official statistics have indicated that the ongoing economic crisis has slowed down inflows into Italy. In addition, nearly one million foreigners included in the Population Register until 2011 were missing at the last census, and have presumably left the country (Istat, 2012; Blangiardo, 2012). Such a scenario suggests that re-emigrations<sup>2</sup> have become an Italian issue as well.

There is no clear consensus among scholars on the causes for re-emigration, and to the best of our knowledge, there are few studies about return migration as regards Italy. However, some investigations into migrant assimilation in the labour market (Strom, Venturini and Villosio, 2013; Dell'Aringa and Pagani, 2011) have found a selection process in the decision to return: migrants with higher wages or higher experience are more likely to leave Italy, and according to Coniglio et al. (2005), this finding can be extended to include irregular migrants.

Given this background, we make the following research hypotheses about the possible determinants of the new waves of re-emigration from Italy.

1. First, we speculate that there may be differences between onward migration flows and return flows to the countries of origin (e.g. Nekby, 2006). In fact, while the decision to return to the country of origin marks the conclusion of the migration project, onward migration is more likely to represent a quest for better opportunities outside Italy.

2. Following the New Economics of migration theory, we hypothesize that the family has a central role in decisions about migration (as stated by Dustmann, 2003). As a consequence, our models include information about the possible presence of family members in emigration.

3. We also formulate the hypothesis that, except for forced migrants (such as asylum seekers or refugees), migration to Italy is still for the most part

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<sup>2</sup>Re-emigrations include both emigration to the country of origin and to a third country (onward migration).

economically driven. We expect covariates about employment to be highly related to future intentions regarding mobility.

4. Lastly, we speculate that the economic crisis plays an important role in the intention to leave the host country. We therefore expect the likelihood of leaving Italy to increase in the more recent waves of the surveys included in the analysis, in line with the economic cycle.

## **2.Data and Methods**

The data for this analysis come from the Italian ORIM survey on immigrants in Lombardy, carried out routinely by the Lombardy Regional Observatory for Integration and Multiethnicity. The figures are based on an annual cross-sectional survey consisting of face-to-face interviews carried out using the Centre Sampling statistical procedure (Baio et al., 2011). These surveys are of particular interest as they also include information on irregular migrants. In our analysis, we used a pooled dataset of the last three waves of the survey (2010-2012) in which information about future intentions of mobility was available. The final sample consists of 22,399 migrants aged 14 and over from heavy pressure emigration countries, and includes undocumented migrants, naturalized citizens and second-generation migrants.

For our specific purposes, these data have two limitations, one connected to study design and the other to the fact that, although a dedicated question about return intention was included in each wave, these surveys were not conceived for the sole purpose of studying migrants' intentions about returning to their home country or about secondary migration. The first kind of limitation is the selection effect produced by the use of a retrospective survey, since data was obtained only from migrants who had not returned to their countries of origin or moved to other countries up to the time of interview. This bias is likely to be higher for long-term migrants who are a selected sub-population of survivors of secondary migration. The second limitation is the lack of crucial information about the family's migration history and economic condition, since detailed information is only available regarding the person interviewed. We speculate that, especially for family migrants, information about the year of arrival and the breadwinner's work situation would provide a clearer explanation of their return intentions. For this reason, only models for female workers are given here. In fact, housewives decisions about their future in emigration are also a consequence of the male breadwinner's work situation, and since this information is not available, housewives might bias the female model.

As the analysis is based on cross-sectional data, the direction of causality has to be explained with caution.

Finally, we consider the respondent's intention to leave Italy in the 12 months following the survey as a proxy of re-emigration. Of course, detailed data on true re-migrants would be preferable. However, in our view, the specification of a short, well-defined, fixed term is of more use in helping us to identify real future emigrants.

On the positive side, these data represent a precious, up-to-date source of information in the Southern European context about determinants of re-emigration during the current economic crisis. The inclusion of second-generation migrants, undocumented migrants and overstayers, along with the large size of the sample, makes it an invaluable tool for trying to work out migrants' re-emigration intentions.

As our dataset has a hierarchical structure, with migrants (level 1) nested in communities (level 2), we used a multilevel approach. Due to this structure, the odds of experiencing the outcome of interest are not independent, because migrants from the same country of origin share a common exposure to observed and unobserved community characteristics. We think that the multilevel approach is always to be preferred when dealing with datasets like ours, which include information on migrants from different communities, and we therefore chose a generalized linear mixed-model approach, fitting a two-level random intercept logistic regression. This model accounts for the non-independence of observations within groups. We fitted different models for the intention to re-emigrate to another country (model 1) and for the intention to return to the respondent's country of origin (model 2), taking as our baseline the intention to stay in Italy. We also fitted different models for men and women; for the latter, we provided a model only for those women who said they were not housewives.

### **3.Results**

How widespread is the intention to leave Italy among migrants? Nine out of ten say that they intend to stay in the host country for at least one more year. Among those who wish to leave, there is a slight preference for returning home, which increases over time.

Both models 1.1 and 2.1 indicate that women have lower odds of expressing the intention to leave Italy compared to men, and the odds of expressing the intention to re-emigrate are also considerably lower (0.38).

In line with hypothesis 1, the two flows do indeed show differences in their driving factors. Onward migration would appear to be related more to a search for better opportunities on the part of graduate migrants, and these are primarily a solution to unemployment: the odds of expressing the intention to move to another foreign country is more than twice as high among those who lost their job in the

year before the interview and among the long-term unemployed. In the case of working women, having a job which is considered as a niche for foreigners (such as working in a family as a housemaid, baby sitter or caregiver) reduces the odds of re-emigration. The type of residence permit held is also significant: undocumented migrants are more likely to express the intention to migrate, but so are those with a legal status allowing permanent residence (EU or naturalized citizens, holders of long-term EC residence permits). The latter in particular are allowed to travel and work legally in any EU country without restriction. Self-reported ability to set aside monthly savings, as well as house ownership, is also related to lower odds of onward migration.

**Table 1 - Model 1: two-level random intercept logistic regression move to a third country (baseline intention to stay in Italy) Odds Ratios and significance.**

Note: significance \*\*\*<0.001; \*\*<0.01; \*<0.05

	Model 1.1 ALL		Model 1.2 MALE		Model 1.3 FEMALE		Model 1.4: FEMALE (no housewives)	
	OR	sign.	OR	sign.	OR	sign.	OR	sign.
Female [ref. male]	0,3805	**						
Age	0,9811	**	0,9862		0,9741	*	0,9886	
Partner citizenship [ref. The same]								
Italian	1,0049		1,3395		0,7361		0,8536	
Other citizenship	2,1604	***	2,3383	***	1,8630		1,6264	
No partner	1,3383	*	1,6246	**	0,8714		0,7283	
Educational level [ref. none]								
Compulsory	0,8657		1,1110		0,4722	*	0,3891	*
High school	0,9530		1,2217		0,5211	*	0,5184	
University degree	1,7841	**	2,4039	**	0,8995		0,6635	
Homeowner [ref. not]	0,6973	**	0,7083	*	0,6815		0,6504	
Employed	0,8926		0,8347		1,2700		0,5003	*
Loss of the work in the last year	2,8059	***	2,9074	***	2,2605	*	0,8334	
Long-term unemployed	2,6032	***	2,5121	***	3,0336	**	0,4227	
Cohabitation with at least a family member [ref. no]	0,7399	*	0,7184	*	0,8344		0,8042	
Possibility of stay [ref. temporary]								
Permanent	1,3671	**	1,3262	*	1,4950	*	1,5916	
No valid permit	1,8148	**	1,8633	**	1,2872		1,4334	
Children [ref. All in Italy]								
All in the country of origin	1,4635	**	1,4652	*	2,1669	*	2,4221	*
No children	1,3248	*	1,2429		1,5116		1,6900	
Some in the country of origin some in Italy	1,8190	**	1,6790	*	2,1915	*	2,0899	
Ethnic niche	1,0065		1,1137		0,6462		0,6087	*
Year of the survey [ref. 2010]								
2011	1,2749		1,3327		1,1657		1,0871	
2012	1,7473	***	1,7317	***	1,7659	*	1,3598	
Savings	0,7629	**	0,7969	*	0,6882	*	0,5220	**
Constant	0,1920	***	0,0474	***	0,0546	**	0,1241	***
$\sigma_u$	0,5028		0,5066		0,5972		0,6962	
$\rho$	0,0714	***	0,0724	***	0,0978	***	0,1284	***

Those who have all or some of their children in the country of origin are more likely to express the intention to re-emigrate: in this sense, having a transnational family indicates the need to continue the experience of emigration, given the fact

that part of the family has not yet migrated. The same relation is observed in those who are not cohabiting with any family member. Although we obviously have no information about non-cohabiting family members, we can make the hypothesis that when the partner and small children are not cohabiting, they are highly likely not to be present in Italy, being a proxy for transnational family ties.

**Table 2 - Model 2: two-level random intercept logistic regression return home (baseline to stay in Italy) Odds Ratios and significance.**

Note: significance \*\*\*<0.001; \*\*<0.01; \*<0.05

	Model 2.1 ALL		Model 2.2 MALE		Model 2.3 FEMALE		Model 2.4: FEMALE without housewife	
	OR	sign.	OR	sign.	OR	sign.	OR	sign.
Female [ref. male]	0,8159	*	.	.	.	.	.	.
Age	1,0289	***	1,0339	***	1,0247	***	1,0299	***
Partner citizenship [ref. The same]								
Italian	0,7099		1,0712		0,6608		0,6395	
Other citizenship	1,1733		0,7772		1,6998	*	1,8856	*
No partner	1,2796		1,4424		1,0783		1,0190	
Educational level [ref. none]								
Compulsory	0,5797	***	0,5630	**	0,5760	*	0,5011	*
High school	0,5907	***	0,5914	**	0,5740	*	0,5538	*
University degree	0,5761	**	0,5669	*	0,5830	*	0,4553	*
Homeowner [ref. not]	0,8050		0,9860		0,6278	*	0,6855	
Employed	0,5120	***	0,4801	***	0,6516	*	0,4048	**
Loss of the work in the last year	1,2925		1,3859		1,3249		0,7869	
Long-term unemployed	1,5216	**	0,3425		1,7629	*	0,3363	
Cohabitation with at least a family member [ref. no]	0,6240	***	0,6323	**	0,5667	**	0,5412	**
Possibility of stay [ref. temporary]								
Permanent	1,0510		1,2088		0,9055		0,7601	
No valid permit	1,6413	**	1,5511	*	1,7395	*	1,7179	*
Children [ref. All in Italy]								
All in the country of origin	2,1358	***	2,2476	***	2,4000	***	2,2462	***
No children	1,1709		1,4553	*	0,8843		0,8560	
Some in the country of origin some in Italy	1,9605	***	1,6235	*	2,3896	***	1,8282	*
Ethnic niche	1,2882	**	1,4442	**	0,9731		0,9324	
Year of the survey [ref. 2010]								
2011	1,2131		1,3668	*	1,0458		1,1602	
2012	1,4207	**	1,3838	*	1,4692	*	1,5163	*
Savings	0,7731	**	0,7889	*	0,7346	*	0,6487	**
Constant	0,0488	***	0,0272	***	0,0522	***	0,0935	***
$\sigma_u$	0,5157		0,44161		0,4441		0,4840	
$\rho$	0,0747	***	0,05596	***	0,0565	***	0,0664	***

Following the worsening of the economic situation, a stronger intention of onward migration is observed in migrants interviewed in 2012 compared to 2010.

Model 2 deals with intention to return to the country of origin. Education plays a significant role, indicating that the odds of non-educated migrants returning are greater than that of all migrants with a higher level of education. Older migrants are also more likely to express their intention to end the migration experience.

The role of the family is the same as that observed in the case of re-emigration intentions, but children left behind are a greater draw for women than for men. This is not surprising, since the perceived emotional costs of transnational families are higher for women. On the economic and legal side, intention to return to the country of origin is related to more precarious situations such as long-term unemployment and not having a valid permit.

The role of the ethnic niche is also interesting: men employed in sectors considered to be male ethnic niches (construction industry, agriculture, factory work and transportation) are considerably more likely to express the intention to return to their country of origin, while this relation is not observed in women. This confirms the findings of Paggiaro (2013), who noted that male immigrant workers are at greater risk of unemployment because their ethnic niches are the economic sectors most badly hit by the economic downturn. Female niches, on the other hand, are comparatively less affected by the crisis, as the need for care services provided by foreign women is driven by demographic factors and shortcomings in welfare. As with future onward migration intentions, a higher intention of return to the country of origin is observed in migrants interviewed in 2012 as compared to 2010, following the worsening of the economic situation, but for men the odds are significantly higher for the 2011 wave as well.

#### **4. Discussion**

Our work confirmed our initial hypotheses. The first interesting finding is that the two flows are different. The odds of onward migration are higher for male and graduate migrants and are higher both for the long and short term unemployed. Re-emigration is also favored by legal conditions such as EU citizenship and a long-term EC residence permit making it possible to work in another EU member state. Flows toward countries of origin, on the other hand, are less closely related to unemployment: only in cases of long-term female unemployment are the odds of expressing the intention to return home significantly higher.

Unlike the situation for onward migration flows, migrants with no education are considerably more likely to express the intention to return home: in this sense, if onward migration appears to be a quest for better conditions on the part of the migrants with the best potential, concluding the migration experience would seem to be related to a giving up on the part of those individuals with more limited capabilities. In fact, the odds of giving up and going home were higher among those who were working or had previously worked in male niches characterized by low-skilled jobs. In line with hypothesis 2, the role of the family network is significant (as stated by Dustmann, 2003). When children and family members live together in emigration, demonstrating the existence of a settlement project

involving more than one family member, the odds of moving are lower. Transnational families act both as push and pull factors. For those who choose to continue migrating, giving financial support to those left in the country of origin might be the reason for seeking better opportunities outside Italy, while those who choose to go home have the chance to reunite the family after migration. As we predicted in hypothesis 3, economic conditions prove determinant: in fact, the ability to save money is a significant factor in reducing the intention to move, and proved even more important than unemployment, being an indicator at the family level, especially in determining the decision to end the migration experience. Finally, in line with hypothesis 4, the odds of moving are indeed significantly higher in 2012 than 2010, and a clear relation emerges with the worsening of the Italian economic situation. For males, the odds of returning are significantly higher for 2011 as well.

In conclusion, a dual selection process may be observed, based on gender and human capital. As a consequence of the persisting economic downturn, men and women with less human capital might be more likely to give up on, or conclude, their migration project, being less well-equipped to tackle the worsening job market and the limited opportunities in a segmented Italian job market which is particularly hard on men. At the same time, highly educated men might be more likely to leave Italy, following the same pattern as educated young Italian citizens, as Nekby (2006) found in Sweden. Something similar was observed with regard to legal status. Not surprisingly, undocumented migrants have higher odds of having the intention both to emigrate to a third country and to return home. If migrants actually behave in accordance with their short-term intentions, we should expect a reduction in illegal migration. But just as for education, men with a greater possibility of free circulation in EU member states express their intention to use this possibility to re-emigrate elsewhere. Interestingly, such intentions are not expressed by women with the same education level or legal status. Women's lesser propensity to re-emigrate is interesting and worthy of further analysis. One possible explanation could be a higher perceived cost of re-emigration, and giving up the idea of migration because of the relatively better opportunities for women in Italy. A stronger commitment to the family and the higher costs (also psychological) of first migration could also determine women's greater reluctance to change the original migration project.

Interestingly, in our analysis, the number of years elapsing since migration is not significant, indicating that the mere length of time since migration does not automatically determine a higher or lower propensity to settle in Italy. Instead, a crucial role is played by the state of the economy, the job situation, and the presence of family ties in emigration, along with the migrant's personal capabilities.

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## Summary

In this paper we analyse re-emigration intentions using a pooled dataset on a sample of more than 22,000 migrants. The results show that while onward migration appears to be a quest for better conditions on the part of migrants with the best potential, going home seems to be related to giving up on the part of individuals with lower capabilities. Family network, gender, ethnic niche, legal status and the economic crisis also emerged as having a significant role in the decision process.

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