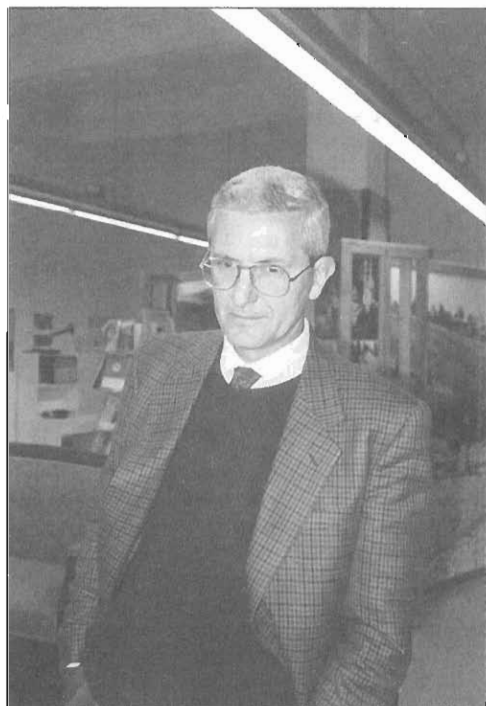


Italy – a New Country of Immigration

Historically, Italy was a country of emigration. In the one hundred years following the unification of the country in 1861, approximately 27 million Italians left their homeland and, in all likelihood, at least one-half of them settled abroad permanently.

Italian migratory flows – like in most other countries – have been intimately linked with the development of Italian society. In the 1880's, the agricultural crisis precipitated a great exodus. Soon after, the forces of industrialization, which started and accelerated until World War I, stimulated heavy migrations abroad and within the country. Later on, the policy of colonization and the military expansion of the fascist regime resulted in population resettlements. Finally, the freedom of movement affirmed after World War II encouraged heavy new migration flows.



Professor Francesco P. Cerase, University of Naples, Italy, visited the Institute of Migration on May 24, 1991. He spoke about present immigration to Italy which reminds the Finnish situation when a country of emigration is turning to a country of immigration.

In the course of time, however, migratory flows have ceased to be a national phenomenon; they have become regionalized and primarily confined to the south of the country. It is not too approximate an estimate to say that well over 70 % of all Italian emigrants between the 50's and the 70's came from south of Italy.

But ten years after the First National Conference on Emigration in 1975, a radical transformation in the migratory situation of the country was already obvious to everyone and it has opened up a completely new phase in the history of Italian migration. Two main changes in particular have occurred, leading to a complete reversal of previous trends.

The first is the virtual end of out-migration even from southern regions, despite the high unemployment rates which in the late 80's in some parts of the south were close to 20 %. Although many push conditions seem still to exist there, a young unemployed person from the south of Italy generally does not consider migration abroad – or, for that matter, to other parts of the country – as a solution to his individual unemployment problem. The changing living conditions which Italy as a whole has experienced have raised the expectations, and out-migration is no longer regarded as desirable.

The second, and undoubtedly the most relevant, feature emerging in the last decade or so, is the growing number of immigrants to Italy from African, Asian and Latin American countries.

The demographic, economic and social context of the 80's

In the last quarter of a century Italian society has undergone a deep transformation which reached its peak in the 80's. The main changes in which this transformation occurred, concern **birth rate and population structure, the labour distribution by production sector, changes in social stratification, income and consumption level.**

Once one of the western countries with the highest birth rate, Italy had in 1989 little more than 9 births per one thousand resident people, and the center-north part of the country the birth rate was only slightly over 8 per thousand.

No less impressive are the figures concerning the changes in the labour distribution by production sector. In the mid-60's out of some 21 million employed people, a little less than 30 % were still employed in agriculture, around 37 % in industry, and close to 35 % in the service sector. In the late 80's the number of employed people

had not changed much, but less than 10 % were employed in agriculture, a little over 30 % in industry, and close to 60 % in the service sector.

This massive shift of the labor force from one sector to another has in turn had many effects. The main one, however, is that "peasant" society which up to the early 60's had fed a consistent flow of Italian emigrants, has been completely disrupted, and has now all but disappeared.

But the above figures are only a rough indicator of the radical reorganization experienced by the Italian productive structure after the crisis of the 70's, which has turned Italy in one of the seven most industrialized nations in the world. But this, of course, may not necessarily imply an overall well being of the population.

Indeed – and this is probably the main national problem at the moment – the transformation I have just referred to has been not evenly distributed throughout the country. Deep disparities and unbalance remain between different parts of Italy, in particular between some southern regions and the rest of the country.

Let's look at the pro-capite gross national product (GNP). In the course of the 80's it increased enormously, but at the end of the past decade, in the southern regions of the country, it was under 57 % of the gross pro-capite product of the other regions.

It is also interesting to note, however, than in the same period the pro-capite home consumption of the southern regions was more than 75 % of that of the other regions of the country. The sharp difference between pro-capite gross product and pro-capite home consumption is an indication of the considerable public transfer which takes place in many ways from one part to the other of the country and, incidentally, may very well help to explain why emigration is no longer an attractive possible solution to economic problems.

The immigration flow of the 80's

It is against this background that in the course of the 80's, but in particular in the last few years, Italy has experienced a massive and above all a sudden inflow of migrants from numerous African, Asian and Latin American countries.

To understand both the size and the suddenness of the phenomenon, however, some additional comments are required besides the ones already mentioned. That is, they can be better understood also in the light of the radical changes in migration policies which have taken

place in most Western European countries in the last decade and which have left less and less space for "free" new entries (with the exception of family members, political refugees or similar categories of people) in those Western European countries which have over the time been the chosen destination of emigrants from less developed countries.

This has certainly contributed in making Italy also a desirable immigration country – although in this respect the same is true for most other Southern European countries like Spain or even Greece.

The point is that Italy was culturally and administratively unprepared for a massive and sudden inflow of migrants. Why administratively unprepared? First of all because there existed no laws or regulations – except what were basically tourist regulations or police measures – which could be immediately applied to keep the incoming of persons from countries which do not belong to the European Community under some kind of control. Nor was there any statistical procedure immediately available which could be used to provide a reliable estimate of the number and composition of the immigrants.

Indeed, on one hand the figures based on resident permits do not take into account incomers with no paper (or who simply do not register) and provide no information as to what happens after a resident permit expires. On the other hand, municipal registry offices – the chief channel for keeping track of population movement – have no record, of course, of undocumented persons; moreover, immigrants moving from one town to another, and even from one country to another, before settling definitively, can hardly be expected to register.

However unprepared the country may have been administratively speaking, it was even more unprepared to regulate the relationship of immigrants to the labour market. In a country where a substantial sector of the economy, particularly in certain regions, in any case escapes formal, legal regulation, it comes as no surprise that the inflow of immigrants has provided employers with further opportunity for illegal employment, particularly when it concerns undocumented persons. Both sides have an objective interest in keeping the presence of foreign workers concealed. To put it shortly, any figure regarding the number of immigrants living in Italy today, as well as any information regarding the country they come from, can only be a rough estimate based on indirect sources of one kind or another but

which tends to leave out undocumented persons whose number can only be guessed at.

The same is true for the demographic and social structure of immigrants. The only source of information concerning their age, gender, occupations, etc. is a growing number of local surveys and research studies conducted here and there, mostly by university research groups.

But the country has shown itself to be also culturally unprepared to receive immigrants. One may very well say that, due to deep rooted historical and religious traditions, Italian society is on the whole an open society, not at all closed to foreigners, and above all quite ready to manifest solidarity and provide help to peoples in need. But, of course, to face a sudden inflow of several hundred thousand people so different in their cultural habits, behaviour, religion, etc., is quite another matter.

It may seem a paradox, but after having asserted for years that our emigrants abroad were people who had the right to claim the same citizenship rights (civil, economic and social rights) granted to indigenous people we have found ourselves as a country culturally unprepared to realize that immigrants are not only in need of a job or simply of means of subsistence, but also in need of a shelter, of health care, social insurance, and other forms of social security.

The overall result has been that a migration policy as such has had difficulty in taking a shape. Indeed, although we now have in Italy two major migration laws (L. 943/1986 and L. 39/1990), which incidentally are very liberal and advanced in their principles, they are far from being implemented in a substantial way. They have rather had so far the effect of stop-gap-measures. Of course one may well expect that matters will change after the establishment only a few months ago of a Ministry of Immigration.

General lines

According to some recent estimates about one million foreigners from non-EC countries were present in Italy in 1989, which means under 2 % of the Italian population. This figure, however, includes all foreigners, regardless whether or not they can be considered immigrants. In any case, according to other estimates immigrants represent at least 800 000 out of that number. They are not evenly spread throughout the country. Concentration is greater in certain regions (e.g. Liguria, in the north, Umbria and Latium in the center, but also Sicily in the south), as well as in cer-

tain large or even middle-sized cities, where it may reach even 3 and 4 % of the resident population.

The demographic and social structure

Rather than giving a general description of the characteristics of the different immigrant groups I shall try to focus on those features which can best serve the purpose of identifying the peculiar characteristics of immigration flows into Italy.

• *Ethnic structure*

The information available shows the striking multi-ethnic composition of immigrants in Italy. Although the most numerous groups – or course, when talking about immigrants whose country of birth could be ascertained – are Maroccans, Tunisians, Philippines and Slavic people. There also exist numerous Egyptians, Eritreans, Somalis, Nigerians, Ghanians, Capoverdians, Iranians, Senegalese, Latin Americans, as well as more recent groups from Asiatic countries – chiefly Pakistan and Bangladesh – and of course also from Eastern Europe, most recently from Albania.

As may be expected, each ethnic group tends to cluster in the same region or city, although this tends to be so in particular for the immigrant groups who have come to Italy less recently. For example, there is a high concentration of Philippines, Capoverdians and Eritreans in Rome, Maroccans in Emilia, Egyptians in Milan, Tunisians in Sicily and Senegalese along the coast of Tuscany and Liguria.

Of course this settlement pattern reflects a well-known immigrant tendency to establish ethnic communities in the receiving countries but it also reflects the kind of job or trade the different immigrant groups hold. Similar observations can be made regarding the demographic structure.

• *Demographic structure*

On the whole – as one may expect in any recent immigration wave – a large majority (at least 60 %) of the immigrants are males. Much less information is available for the age structure, although the great majority of immigrants is between 20 and 40 years old. But in respect to gender as well there is a striking difference from one ethnic group to another as reflected by the type of jobs held. For example, while there are very few women among North-African Arab groups, most Philippines and Capoverdians are women doing domestic work.

- *Education and occupational structure*

Another striking feature is the relatively high education most groups of immigrants have. It may be high-school level but in some cases they also hold some university education or fairly high professional qualifications.

To some extent this is also a result of the fact that young people who have come to Italy as students, often turn into "immigrants". However, very seldom they are able to find a job which corresponds in some way to their qualification or their level of education. In most cases they end up doing manual jobs in the service sector (food store, restaurants, transport), or in some cases as building or industrial workers, and quite a few of them become street vendors of one kind or another.

Thus, immigrants have filled in the jobs vacant, considered undesirable by the local labour force. This is certainly the case of Philippine or Capoverdian women who have filled the demand for domestic help which local supply did not satisfy and is also the case of Maroccans employed in certain manufacturing industries in Emilia, as well as the case of Tunisians engaged in fishing.

It is probably less so, however — and this represents a second type of situation — for those who have replaced local workers in seasonal agricultural jobs, for in this case there may have been an actual displacement, rather than replacement, do to the fact that the immigrants have been willing — or, one should better say, forced to accept lower wages.

Finally, other immigrants — and this is a third type of situation — have simply become peddlers swelling the ranks of those who sell all kinds of wares in the street and along the beaches in the summer. In the latter case it is still a debated question requiring further research, whether they respond to some kind of market demand, however marginal, or whether they have simply devised an individual strategy of survival.

What needs to be emphasized is that these three types of situation imply quite different patterns of relationships between immigrants and their receiving communities, and the grounds on which they can legitimately claim and expect that their overall needs should be satisfied are quite different.

Francesco P. Cerase