

Qualitative National Report

ITALY

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1. The phenomenon of female migration in Italy. Background data

1.1. The Female Population

At the beginning of 2011 foreign residents in Italy amounted to 4.570.317 - of whom 51.8 percent were women – corresponding to 7.5 percent of the total population residing in Italy (60.626.442). In 2010, the number of foreign citizens grew by 335.258 persons. This was mainly due to those foreigners who registered at the local registry office (+ 424.499) and secondly to foreign children born in Italy (78.082 in 2010).

The increasing length of stay or the number of migrants who have bought a house in Italy unequivocally indicate that Italy is no longer regarded as the main gateway to Northern Europe as well as to the overseas countries but it has rather become, over the years, a stable place to live. Besides, the growing presence of migrants in towns other than the provincial capitals attests that migration has to be considered as a national phenomenon. This 'mobility' factor concerns also Italian universities where nearly 50.000 foreign students are enrolled, marking a twofold increase compared to 10 years ago. Interestingly, the enrolment figures at the Italian universities show that among the first-year students (about 10.000 each year), 60 percent are women¹.

According to the last immigration statistics report published by Caritas/Migrantes² there are 2.369.000 foreign women legally living in Italy. The European nationalities that have a predominantly female presence are Romania, Ukraine and Estonia, while among the Latin American nationalities there are Dominican Republic, Brazil, Ecuador and Peru. As regards Africa, the countries with a large percentage of female migration are Ethiopia, Madagascar, Cape Verde, Nigeria and Kenya. Also among the Asian nationalities female presence is significantly high especially from China, Philippines and Thailand. These estimates witness a gradual but continuous and significant feminization of the current immigration panorama in Italy.

The analysis of the age composition shows that about 280.000 women are aged between 26 and 30 years, nearly 400.000 are aged between 31 and 35 years and 350.000 are up to 40 years of age, thus indicating a strong concentration of migrant women in the so-called 'active' age group. It is also particularly significant the presence of over 200.000 female children aged between 0 and 6 who are permanently living in the country.

1.2. Women and Labour

In 2002, a broad process of regularisation for migrant workers put in place through the Law No. 189 and the Law No. 222, known as the 'Bossi-Fini law', involved in about half of cases (341.000 people) the regularisation of female migrant workers employed in domestic work or as caregiver for old or disabled people.

As a matter of fact women are more and more the protagonists of migration phenomenon in Italy and above all their activity rate exceeds 60 percent. However, female employment has very different percentages according to geographical areas. The increasing presence of female migrant workers in Centre and South of Italy is due to a fair presence, in these geographical areas, of the most evocative migrant employment in terms of gender, that is domestic and care work. Also, it is due to the fair female participation in the agriculture sector which in the South is one of major employment sectors for migrants. There is a greater presence of women in the highest age groups. In fact, female workers, about half of whom are employed in tertiary sector (care work and the production of services), are over 40 years old on average.

Among the countries of origin whose female citizens are represented in the labour market with

1 IOM (International Organization for Migration), *Le migrazioni in Italia, 2011* [NdT Migrations in Italy]

2 Caritas/Migrantes Statistical Dossier on Immigration, 2011

values lower than 25.8 percent there are: Albania, Morocco, Macedonia, India, Tunisia, Senegal, Algeria, Bangladesh, Egypt and Pakistan. Women from certain Asian and African countries have, therefore, greater difficulties in entering the labour market – probably for cultural reasons – or they are employed in irregular positions to a larger extent than men.

Countries where female presence not only exceeds the average of 42.1 percent but it represents more than half of workers are the 'new immigration' countries (Ukraine, Russia, Poland, Moldavia) or the older immigration countries where the migration process has been consolidated by the regularisation in 2002: Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Peru, Philippines, Brazil, Nigeria. It is clear, in this case, how are especially women from South-America and Eastern Europe to enter the labour market – mainly the home care sector. The only exception are Filipino women.

More generally, compared to men women are underrepresented in self-employment (where the average between artisans and merchants is 27.25 percent), in subordinate and agricultural employment while they represent more than three quarters of employed people in domestic work and caregiver. There is obviously a bias against them which leads to an undeserved identification of migrant women with home care work regardless of their high education level.

In the **home help [home care] sector** – whatever is the work carried out (housekeeping and childcare, providing care for elderly dependents or disabled people) the percentage of women migrant workers out of the total of migrant workers in the domestic service is 87.5 percent which exceeds 90 percent in some geographical areas (for instance, in Emilia Romagna this percentage reaches 93.8 percent, in Veneto 93.6 percent and in Piemonte 92.5 percent) and in many provinces such as Gorizia where the percentage is 97.84 and Isernia where it reaches 97.53 percent.

In **subordinate employment** (excluding housemaids) women represent 29.3 percent of migrant workers with slight differences according to the geographical areas: North West 26.6 percent, North East 32.1 percent, Centre 29.1 percent, South 29.3 percent and Islands 30.4 percent.

At regional level, the number of women employed in subordinate works is higher in regions such as Lombardia, Veneto, Emilia, Tuscany and Lazio.

In **self-employment**, women represent 11.04 percent (4.128) of total artisans, 71.5 per cent (767) of total farmers and croppers and 43.47 percent (9.331) of total merchants³.

Another interesting information is provided by Istat⁴ (National Institute for Statistics) as regards tourist residence permits. As a matter of fact, a new type of female migration has taken place just recently: some women leave their own countries and reach Italy with a tourist visa in order to work for three months and then go back. Once back to their own countries they will apply for a new tourist visa again and repeat the experience for other three months and so on. The purpose is to reduce the time away from their families in order to more easily manage the detachment [departure] and reintegration. In this regard, the research carried out by Iref-Acli, 'Il welfare fatto in casa'⁵ (NdT 'Homemade Welfare'), confirms that domestic sector is the major employment sector for migrants especially for migrant women and shows that 75 percent of women who have been interviewed wish to go back home and they planned to stay in Italy only long enough to save some money and then to return home.

3 INPS (Italian National Social Security Institute) data, 'Un fenomeno complesso. Il lavoro femminile immigrato', 2010. [NdT 'A complex Phenomenon. Female Migrant Labour']

4 Istat, Rapporto sulla popolazione, 2009 [NdT Report on Population]

5 Iref-Acli, 2009 Rome

These women migrant workers mainly come from Romania (19 percent), Ukraine (17 percent) and Philippines (12 percent). On average, they are 40 years old, they are married with children and in 72 percent of cases they send back the money earned in order to maintain the family (55 percent), to pay for their children's education (23 percent), to purchase or build a house (15 percent)⁶.

Over time, the unbalances in terms of gender have been reduced by stabilisation processes that have taken place through family rejoining, new marriages and birth of children. Only fifteen years ago, women barely exceeded 40 percent of migrant population. This evolution is a reflection of the migrant settlement process even though the continuing gender unbalance in some communities testifies to the continued existence of very different migration patterns depending on nationality.

Also, age and marital status differ a lot from group to group. For instance, one out of ten migrant women from Egypt or Tunisia is single, while the percentage of unmarried women is much higher (60 percent) among Peruvian and Ecuadorian migrant women as both in Peru and Ecuador women are the main protagonists of migration process and work-related immigration is predominant (Istat, 2009). Completely different is the case of the recent migration of Ukrainian women. Usually, they are over 40 years old, they emigrate alone and to seek work, and even though they have been married or have children they leave their own family in the country of origin⁷.

In 2010, in Italy migrant women accounted for half of new intake workers, thus confirming that they play a protagonist role in the labour market. Nevertheless, they are discriminated in terms of possibility to combine family commitments with work. Besides, in order to access social welfare benefits (such as the child allowance) and rent benefits, a substantial period of residence is often required by several city and regional governments.

The specificity of the home care and help sector, where migrant women are massively employed, implies a strong existential precarity. The estimates are alarming: one third of women employed as domestic workers live within the employer's household with excessive work pace and working hours for any regular contract. One out of five do not even have a day off a week. Many migrant women are, therefore, not only isolated from their own family but also from friends and the immigrant community. There is a real phenomenon of domestic exploitation: the fact that the work is carried out in the private sphere of the home makes these workers particularly vulnerable and dependent on their employer. In addition, when they are hired on the black market they are often left without papers and thus they cannot be protected by labour laws and take legal action in case of abuse.

Besides, many of these women are overqualified and overeducated for the tasks they carry out and thus, they are underemployed. There is a strong gender and ethnicity segregation in domestic and professional home care work which not only reduces the possibilities of integration of migrant women but it also affects their social mobility.

Also, there is still a lack of access to the National Health System for migrants. Besides, work precarity heavily affects housing conditions; according to Istat 34 percent of migrants experience poor housing (against 14 percent of Italians). There is also a remarkable gap between home owners: 21.3 percent of migrants own a house against 71.6 per cent of Italians (Caritas/Migrantes Dossier 2011).

6 'Un fenomeno complesso. Il lavoro femminile immigrato', 2010. (NdT 'A complex Phenomenon. Female Migrant Labour')

Coordinamento e Supporto Attività Connesse al Fenomeno Migratorio, INPS. (NdT Coordinating and Supporting Activities Related to Migration Phenomenon)

7 L. Mencarini, Le nuove Italiane, 2009 www.golemlindispensabile.it

2. Fieldwork

2.1. An Introductory Note on Methodology

Sixteen migrant women have been interviewed using the qualitative interview method conducted through the *Informal Conversational Interviews* technique where questions emerge from the immediate context, the interviewer only controls the topic of questions, so the wording of questions and even their order are not predetermined (Patton, 1990; Kvale, 1996). The topics controlled by the interviewer were obviously the same as the FORWARD Questionnaire. The choice of using this interviewing technique is closely linked to the specific contents, general aims and methodology of the FORWARD research: identifying migrant's knowledge and skills through unfolding the meaning of their stories and uncovering their lived world as well as their ability to gain and elaborate experiences. Thus, paving the way for the collection and valorisation of their resources through creating and developing a competences Portfolio.

The interviews have been recorded after having acquired the *informed consent* from women who have accepted to take part in the research (the informed consent included information about aims of the interview, guarantee of anonymity [use of false names, preservation of anonymity of employers in case the women interviewed were employed, etc.], possibility to stop the interview at any time in case they felt ill at ease, permission to record the interview, etc.). The interviews lasted between 50 and 75 minutes, depending on the degree of personal privacy, the depth of the experience and/or the greater or lesser knowledge of Italian by the respondents. The recordings of the interviews have been transcribed extracting the contents and arranging them according to the structure of the FORWARD questionnaire in order to answer all questions concerning personal information and the 5 macro-areas constituting the questionnaire: migration process; family; training (with respective sub-areas); settling in and living in the host country; cultural differences.

In the selection of the sixteen women interviewed (see Table 1) it was taken into account: a) their country of origin (in order to cover all ethnic groups and geographical areas where migrant women living in Italy come from); b) number of migrant women within their respective community; c) the two major age groups including the majority of first generation migrant women: 26-40 years old and 40-60 years old, that is the so-called 'active' age groups.

Table 1

COUNTRY	AGE	RELIGION	EDUCATION	EMPLOYMENT IN ITALY	YEARS IN ITALY	FAMILY IN ITALY
1) Philippines	41	Catholic	Diploma in Nursing	Cleaning lady	12	Husband + 2 children
2) Columbia	45	Catholic	Degree in Psychology	Shop assistant in a jeweller's shop	20	Italian husband
3) Moldavia	45	Catholic	Diploma in Accounting	Cultural Mediator	15	1 son
4) Belarus	51	Catholic	Degree in Economics	Self-employed business	12	1 daughter and Italian husband
5) Moldavia	41	Orthodox	Diploma in Pedagogy	Cleaning lady	8	Husband
6) Peru	52	Catholic	High School Diploma	Self-employed business	20	1 son
7) Romania	26	Orthodox	Degree in Economics	Shop assistant in a parapharmacy	5	Single
8) China	27	Buddhist	High school Leaving Certificate in China	Waitress in Thai restaurant	7	Chinese fiancé + Chinese uncles
9) Libya	39	Muslim	Diploma in Beauty Therapy	Beautician	10	Single
10) Romania	31	Orthodox	Degree in Sports Management	Cashier and running her family's coffee bar	8	Italian husband
11) Romania	39	Orthodox	Senior High School specializing in modern languages	market research interviewer	10	Italian husband + 2 children + both parents+sister
12) Romania	34	Orthodox	Senior High School specializing in classical studies	Cleaning lady	8	Romanian husband+ sister + brothers in law
13) Philippines	26	Catholic	High School + 2 years at University	Baby sitter	6	Single + mother + aunt
14) Poland	56	Catholic	High School Leaving Certificate + Teaching singing	Unemployed	25	2 children (Italian citizens)
15) Albania	29	Catholic	Degree in Training and Human Resources	Unemployed	9	Single + both parents

			Development airport security officer			
16) Poland	27	Catholic	Vocational Qualification as nurserywoman + Accountant	Airport Security Officer	5	Single, lives together with her Italian boyfriend

2.2 The Interviews

2.2.1 Migration Process

The decision to emigrate made by the 16 women interviewed is basically due to two of the five female migration typologies listed in the Theoretical Framework⁸: 'protagonists' and 'target-earners'. Six of the 16 women interviewed belong to the first typology and ten to the second one.

The prevalent feature of 'protagonists', i.e. those women who emigrated to meet their need for freedom and emancipation, can be found in **Li Sun**⁹ and **Alba** who respectively come from China and Albania with the specific goal – then achieved – to enrol at University and graduate in Italy; it can also be found in **Cristina** who came from Poland 28 years ago in the pursuit of political and religious freedom that back in those days the communist regime even though in decline would deny to her; and again, it can be found in **El Kayat** who came from Libya 10 years ago to escape the oppressive Gaddafi regime and to prove herself professionally; in **Olga** who came from Romania to Italy on vacation and then she decided to stay here even against her family's will; and finally it can be found in **Clara** who emigrated from Columbia, where she used to work as a psychologist at University, “to pursue a dream: living a better and more interesting life”.

The remaining ten, the target earners, immigrated to Italy in order to earn a more decent income than they did in their country of origin. In fact, all these women used to work in their own countries but their income was barely enough to survive.

The decision to emigrate has been made autonomously by the 16 respondents along with their family of origin or at least with some of their family members, except for **Olga** (about whom we talked above), **Tamara**, from Moldavia, whose family was against her going out the country as they reckoned that her stable job as teacher was a good position and that it did not make any sense to emigrate and **Larisa**, from Belarus, whose mother agreed with her about emigrating and looked after her daughter while she was away as she left the country without letting her husband know about it for their relationship was heavily compromised.

8 Favaro G., Tognetti Bordogna M. (1991), Donne al mondo. Strategie migratorie al femminile, Guerini e Associati, Milano. Depending on the migration project, the following female migration typologies have been identified: 'Protagonists', those who leave their own country to meet their need for emancipation, freedom and independence; 'Breadwinner', those who are able to promote chain migration for their family and friends; 'Target-earners', whose migration project is relatively short and mainly focused on saving a targeted amount of earnings; 'Subordinates', those who follow their husbands or rejoin their husbands who had previously emigrated; 'co-protagonists', those who are involved in planning and carrying out the migration project as the rest of their family members. Obviously, these typological distinctions serve to highlight the prevailing aspect of the migration project but they are not meant to be considered as strict typologies. As a matter of fact, none of the above typologies present themselves in a pure state, i.e. 'protagonists' for instance can become 'breadwinner' or 'target-earners' can be at the same time 'protagonists' and 'breadwinners'.

9 This name, as well as the others used, is a false name.

Among the sixteen respondents, only two have had already emigration experiences¹⁰ in other countries before getting to Italy: **Nina**, who emigrated from Romania to Serbia when she was 22 years old and where she lived for 6 years before rejoining her family who already lived in Italy, and **Sabrina**, who emigrated from Poland to Germany when she was 18 years old. She lived in Germany for a year and a half, then she moved to Denmark where she lived for 6 months, after that she went to England for another year and a half and finally she moved to Italy where she has been living for 5 years.

2.2.2 Family

Family status in the host country. The civil status of the 16 respondents includes: 4 single women, 2 of whom live alone and rent an apartment while of the other 2, one (Li Sun) lives with her Chinese fiancé and they rent an apartment and the other one lives with her family's boyfriend, who is Italian, in their own house. The civil status of the remaining 12 is the following: 7 are married or live with their partners along with their children (for instance Nina from Romania), 3 of these 7 women live in their husband's or partner's house; 5 are separated or widows and rent an apartment. Six respondents out of sixteen live in Italy with their children. All of them have grown children who study and work (such as Cristina's sons and daughters) or they only work, except for one respondent who comes from Philippines and whose children are still young. In some cases their sons or daughters are even married and have their own children.

Family status in the country of origin. All of them, except for **Nina** (from Romania), have left their parents, brothers and sisters back in their country of origin. Also, **Tamara** (from Moldavia) left her mother and one brother in Moldavia while the remaining 4 brothers live in Russia, Ukraine, Spain and Italy; while **Ali Maria** (from Philippines) left part of her family in the country of origin but some other family members live in Iran and Canada.

Financial support. Women who have entrusted their young children to their mothers have ensured them a steady financial support, but after their children grew up or when they rejoined them in Italy, they stopped providing financial support to the family of origin. Exceptions to this trend are **Mercedes** (Philippines), who regularly keeps helping her family of origin, **Ali Maria** (Philippines), who does it sporadically and **Tamara** (Moldavia), who helps out her mother and brother just to cover exceptional health care costs. At the moment, none of them receive or give any financial support.

Emotional split and distance management. Most of the respondents have suffered – and actually still do – for living away from their families. It is interesting noticing that during the interviews the word that the respondents most frequently used was 'empty' as to describe the way they feel. These feelings were certainly stronger among those who had left their young children in the country of origin while they were less strong among those who were singles when they emigrated. On the contrary, emotional split and the resulting emptiness was not felt by the 'protagonists', or by Nina (Romania), who left only distant relatives in the country of origin (nevertheless, Nina, who is about to obtain Italian citizenship, wants to keep Romanian citizenship

10 We have not taken into account the countries that have been crossed in order to get to Italy as their journey has been direct from the country of origin to the country of destination and they briefly stopped just to rest and feed themselves, except for Tamara who during her journey from Moldavia to Italy stayed 8 days in Romania and 3 weeks in Hungary. Therefore, we have not considered relevant the information on countries that have been simply crossed before getting to Italy.

as well because as she says: “I will be Italian but I will always be Romanian”). Besides, distance has opened wounds that still bleed after a long time in those women who have lost a parent and who have not been able to take care of him/her during the final stage of his/her life or could not even take part in the funeral. Distance management is basically based on telephone communication (using cheap bill pay plans or international calling cards) and above all on *Skype* or *Messenger* as they allow a face to face communication although in a virtual way. At the same time, this kind of communication helps both migrants and their relatives remained in the country of origin to develop IT skills (Internet). **El Kayt** (Libya) integrates the use of these technologies (phone and internet) with a Sky TV subscription that allows her to see TV channels and programs in Arabic language.

2.2.3. Training

Formal Education. The level of formal education achieved in the countries of origin is medium-high. Nine migrant women out of sixteen had a high school diploma when they left their country, i.e. their formal education lasted between 11 and 12 years, depending on the different school system adopted by the country of origin. One of these nine women, **Mercedes** (Philippines), had undertaken a University course in *Information Technologies* without completing it; another one, **Alba** (Albania), graduated in Italy and **Li Sun** will graduate within the current academic year. Therefore, we can say that among the migrant women in our study, 7 hold a high school diploma and the remaining 11 have a higher education qualification (a three-year or four-year degree).

IT Skills. All respondents declare to have computer knowledge and/or skills. Only three of them say to have just a basic knowledge: **Maricica** (Romania) uses only Messenger to chat with her mother; **Cristina** (Poland) has basic knowledge of word processing but cannot use the Internet and she always uses phone calls to communicate; **Larisa** (Belarus) uses the Internet occasionally to chat with her mother, otherwise she prefers to rely on her daughter who has a good command of computer. The other 13 women use the computer daily and have a good command of it. They basically use it to communicate with their friends (Facebook) or at work or in both cases. All of them use Skype or Messenger weekly to chat with their family members remained in the country of origin, except for Nina (Romania), whose family lives in Italy so that they talk by phone or meet in person. All of them, except for Maricia, have a computer at home. Six of them have affirmed to have a very good command of computer since they studied IT at school and practised a lot, as **Mercedes** and **Ali Maria** (both Philippines) said, or because they got a certificate in computer studies in the country of origin, like **Olga** (Romania) did, or because they are self-taught computer users (like **Sabrina** from Poland) or finally because they use it at work as **Nina** (Romania), who works for a market research company as interviewer, and **Lina** (Romania), who uses Office Package, the Internet and specific accounting software for managing her family's business. Generally speaking, we can say that IT skills emerge as key competences for all of them. On the one hand, these competences help them communicate with their families and thus nourish their cultural roots without which they would lack of identity, therefore resulting in a poor self-image. On the other hand, IT skills gained help them at work, either when looking for a job or when consolidating their professional career.

Language Competences. With regards to language skills, it should be distinguished between language knowledge acquired by migrant women at school in their respective countries of origin and actual language competence currently possessed. If, as according to Chomsky (1957 and 1965), by linguistic competence we mean the ability to produce a potentially infinite number of sentences

from a finite set of grammar and syntactic rules; that is, if by linguistic competence we mean the ability to appropriately and effectively communicate orally and through writing in different life and work contexts, we reckon that we cannot classify as linguistic competences actually possessed by migrant women the rudiments of foreign languages learned at school in their countries of origin without ever having put them into practice or not having put them into long-term practice. Therefore, in the following analysis we shall distinguish between language knowledge and language competences.

Language knowledge and competences apart from mother tongue (that we take it for granted) *and Italian* (that we shall examine later on). Women coming from Eastern European countries possess a broader stock of language knowledge than migrants coming from other geographical areas, who just in a few cases have studied two or more foreign languages apart from their mother tongue. Particularly, we can see that the 9 migrant women (10 if we include the Albanian woman) possess a broad and varied stock of linguistic knowledge that in some cases can be regarded as a real language competence or as a real good command of a specific language. In fact, **Larisa** (Belarus) has studied Russian, German and French; **Alba** (Albania) has studied English and French; **Tamara** (Moldavia) has studied Russian and Romanian; **Marianna** (Moldavia) has studied Russian; **Sabrina** (Poland) has studied English and German; **Cristina** (Poland) has studied Russian and English; **Olga** (Romania) has studied French and English; **Livia** (Romania) has studied English and French; **Maricica** (Romania) has studied Russian, French and Latin (she attended the equivalent of Italian Liceo Classico – i.e. secondary school focusing on humanities); **Nina** (Romania) has studied Croatian, Serbian, Bulgarian, English and French. Among them all, we would like to highlight the following cases by adding further information: **Larisa** has studied semiotics and has particularly deepen her knowledge of Russian and English and although she has not used these languages for many years, she says that she still has a fair command of them; **Alba** studied foreign languages in high school and University in Albania before moving to Italy where she graduated in Training and Human Resources Development and where she keeps using English at work, thus declaring to know this language very well; **Sabrina** has studied German and English in high school and then she kept on studying and practising both in Germany and in England where she lived for a year and a half; in Italy she uses English as the main language of work; finally, **Nina** has worked as translator of Croatian, Serbian, Bulgarian and English for the Serbian government for 6 years. In Italy, she uses a lot both English and Italian at work. All remaining migrant women say that not having used a lot foreign languages studied at school they have a very basic survival knowledge of foreign languages.

Knowledge of and Competence in Italian Language. Learning the language of the host country, in our case Italian, depends on a set of factors, among which we would like to highlight: the linguistic group they belong to and the specific mother tongue-root; their general education, and particularly language education, acquired in their country of origin before emigrating; the length of stay in Italy; having attended Italian language courses in Italy or Italian schools; the contexts (life or work) in which they use Italian. Given the above considerations, all respondents have on average a good command of spoken Italian. However, the level of knowledge of Italian is higher among those whose mother tongue belongs to the Indo-European language family, reaching peaks of excellence among those who speak Neo-Latin languages (Romanians and South-Americans), particularly when they studied foreign languages in their countries of origin, when they attended Italian language courses after arriving to Italy and when they use Italian at work.

Work Experience. Current occupation. All respondents, except for Cristina (Poland) and Alba (Albania) are currently working. One is a self-employed freelance beautician (but works also for an

employer); 3 self-employed (one runs a laundry; one runs an import grocery shop; one runs a coffee bar owned by her husband); one is a waitress in an ethnic restaurant (Thai); one is a shop assistant in a jeweller's shop; one is a baby sitter; two are housemaids (covered under regular contract); one is a security guard; one is a shop assistant in a parapharmacy; one is a housemaid on part-time basis (partly covered under regular contract and partly paid under the table); one is a market research interviewer (covered under a project collaboration work contract).

Occupations held in the country of origin. Nina worked as beautician with her mother while she was attending the senior high school specialising in modern languages in Romania; Maricica (Romania) worked as dressmaker in a clothing factory; Livia worked occasionally as congress and conference hostess while she was studying at University; after graduating she taught gymnastics at a high school for a month; Olga (Romania) studied and worked part-time as sales representative for Avon just to have some petty cash; Cristina (Poland) taught singing at high schools; Sabrina (Poland) studied and in the meantime helped out her family in running their farm; Marianna was a nursery school teacher and then worked as teacher for disabled children in Moldavia; El Kayat worked as beautician in Libya; Ali Maria was housewife in Philippines; Clara was a university professor of Psychology in Colombia; Li Sun was a student in China; Alba was a student in Albania and Larisa worked as school principal in Belarus. The only two who had already migration experience and had worked in other countries before getting to Italy are Sabrina and Nina: the former lived in Germany for a year and a half where she worked as bartender for 5 months, as caregiver for a month and as dog sitter in a dog breeding for nearly six months (she comes from a peasant family, thus she has the aptitude for working with animals). Then she moved to England where she lived for a year and a half. In England she worked as an au pair, as waitress and as sales representative for a telemarketing company selling medical products. In this last job she worked in Polish as offers and selling were addressed to the Polish market. The latter worked, along with her Serbian husband, at the Romanian embassy in Belgrade as translator and interpreter (see previous paragraph).

All respondents who worked in their country of origin loved their job but they reckoned that the income they earned was low, and sometimes below the survival threshold. In fact, for this very reason they decided to emigrate. When they left they brought along both basic knowledge and competences and technical-professional knowledge and skills, that, however, have seldom used in Italy. As a result, these skills and knowledge became obsolete as in the case of Larisa's semiotics studies and managerial competences (see above) or as in the case of Clara who taught psychology at university while today, as we already know, works as shop assistant in a jeweller's shop after having worked, at the beginning, as shop assistant in several clothes shops. Those among them who went on using and strengthening some of their competences acquired in the country of origin or developed abroad are the ones we mention most frequently, i.e. Sabrina, Nina and El Kayat. The first two have managed to put into practice their competence in English, while the third one has been able to use a rare and very refined technical-professional skill, in fact, she works as beautician specialised in the technique of 'hair removal using silk thread' (a very effective natural technique) which very few people know in Italy and those who know it are not as good as El Kayat. All other respondents, once in Italy, have worked as housemaids, cleaning ladies, caregivers, bartenders and few of them, only after years, have set up a self-employment business. Therefore, all of them were not put in a condition to fully use their competences once in Italy. As a result, almost all of them had to re-calibrate their personal expectations and goals in order to make them exclusively coincide with their need to earn enough money to support their families left in the country of origin, particularly when they entrusted their young children to them, or to save money to purchase or built a house in their homeland, or to set up a self-employment business in Italy, as

the case of those who decided to stay permanently in the host country.

Only one respondent out of sixteen (Livia) has started the validation process of her studies acquired in Romania (Degree in Sports Management) in order to enrol at university in Italy to graduate in Economics and Trading and work as chartered accountant in the future. Then there is Sabrina who, although has a good command of computer, would like to attend an ECDL course and also a confectionery course as some day she would like to set up an employment business in this sector.

Discriminations. Only Cristina (Poland), who entered Italy 25 years ago as a clandestine, says to have experienced, particularly during the first three/four years, heavy discriminations at work (heavy working conditions, backbreaking working hours, low income, bad housing, any kind of blackmail). Most of Eastern Europe migrant women complain about having suffered attitudes of cultural distrust particularly from common people in daily life. Clara (Colombia) denounces, both at work and her daily life, the presence of rooted negative sexual stereotypes towards South-Americans in terms of regarding them as women of easy virtue.

2.2.4 Settling and living in the host country.

The first impact with Italy has been very hard for them all, except for Sabrina (Poland) who arrived to Italy – after having lived in Germany, Denmark and England – to follow her Italian boyfriend met in London and for Nina (Romania) who, after divorcing with her Serbian husband, decided to reunite with her family that had migrated to Italy nearly ten years ago. The main difficulties met by the others were mainly related to the knowledge of the Italian language. These difficulties varied depending on their mother tongue and the language group they belonged to. Therefore, Latin American migrant women met less difficulties than the Asian migrant women. Alba (Albania) and Li Sun (China) are the only ones whose qualifications have been validated, thus allowing them to enrol at university. Besides, only other two had their language skills socially recognised: Nina, who started to work (and still does) with a project collaboration work contract as interviewer (using both Italian and English) for a market research company specialised in surveys on financial flows related to Italian and international tourism, and Sabrina, who has been hired, after a job interview, by an American airline company as an airport security officer. To these two, we can add up El Kayat whose technical-professional skills have been recognised within free market. All sixteen respondents know their rights and duties very well. None of them is member of associations or institutional social networks, except for Marianna (Moldavia), who attends a Caritas centre as she currently works as cultural mediator (on the contrary, men – particularly Romanians – are often members of trade unions, mostly construction workers' union). Most of respondents use a lot *social networks* in order to communicate with their families of origin or with friends and countrywomen colleagues who are living in Italy or remained in the country of origin (see previous paragraph about computer skills). In general, major difficulties faced by those who do not live within the household where they work are related to the cost of renting a house. This problem forces them to live on the extreme outskirts (where renting is cheaper but the houses are often far worse), thus obliging them to commute for long distances to and from work.

2.2.5 Cultural differences.

Most of respondents say to have gained a clear insight into Italian culture, mentality and cultural norms. This allows them to establish positive or at least not hostile relationships with their

employers (households or private firms), with the clients of the companies they work for (as for the case of shop assistants or waitresses) or with their own clients, for those who set up a self-employment business (such as coffee bars, shops, laundries, etc.). What we have defined positive or at least not hostile relationships are to be meant, of course, in a relative sense as in any culture and at all times foreigners have been treated with suspicion and distrust, that is as a potential source of danger (Herodotus in his *Histories* already described Greeks' and Persians' mutual astonishment towards the respective cultural models and reference values). In the case of our respondents, for instance, our study shows their difficulty in accepting individualism (sometimes bordering on selfishness) characterising Italians, as well as their lack of sense of community and/or the real fraying of family despite the family centred rhetoric or their religious faith which is loudly professed and not put into practice at all, etc. However, on the whole, this is not a ground for a real impediment or hindrance at work, maybe also thanks to the “permeable indolence of Latin peoples”, mentioned in *Strangers to Ourselves* by Julia Kristeva, that somehow facilitates immigrants settling in Latin countries. Immigration laws and the framework of their rights are well known by all respondents. About half of them have Italian husbands, boyfriends and partners or Italian children (i.e. born in Italy and their father is Italian). Nina, as we already said, is a perfect example of multiculturalism and multi-religious coexistence: she is Greek Orthodox, her partner is catholic, her two children (the one she had with her Serbian husband and the other one she has with her current partner) were both baptised according to the rite of the Orthodox Church, and her partner's mother is a Jehovah's Witness.

3. Conclusions

3.1 Introduction. The framework of migrant women competences emerging from our study is comprehensive and polychrome, contrary to how it is usually depicted when interpreting it through the *distorting lens of stereotypes*. But it is also a framework with fairly easily identifiable boundaries. However, in order to fully understand them it is necessary to distinguish between different levels of possible interpretation and link them to the Italian context and particularly to the competences and gender policy.

What emerges first is that migrant women are on average underemployed, that is they are employed in jobs that require less skills or training than ones acquired in their country of origin or during their migration process. This occurs to women who got a high school diploma in accounting or in classical studies in their country of origin and in Italy they work as housemaids; or to Larisa (Belarus), who used to work as a school principal, holds a degree in Economics and has studied semiotics while in Italy worked as caregiver before setting up a self-employed business (she runs a laundry); or, still, to Clara, who used to work as Psychology professor at university in Colombia while in Italy she works as shop assistant in a jeweller's shop. These examples are partly offset by El Kayat, who is employed in a job corresponding to her qualifications acquired in the country of origin; or by Alba e Li Sun, who came to Italy to study at University. The former already graduated and the latter is about to graduate. However, they both are unlikely to find a job corresponding to their qualifications as in order to find a job it is required to have a good command of Italian that they do not have yet, despite they speak a good Italian. Also, Sabrina's (airport security officer) and Anna's (market research interviewer) jobs are consistent with the skills they possess and the education acquired.

Therefore, it is not wrong to define their situations in terms of underemployment and gender segregation. However, it is necessary to clarify one important issue. Migrant women face the same condition of segregation as Italian women, who are involved in a downward spiral of competences and gender policy. In this regard, it is illuminating the Italian example of the so-called weak diplomas and degrees. An Italian woman who holds a diploma in accounting can aspire to work as waitress or shop's assistant in the city centre of Rome only on condition that she has a discreet command of English. Otherwise, she must be content with working as waitress or shop's assistant on the outskirts. It is unlikely that she can work as accountant. The same occurs to those who hold a degree in arts, humanities, sociology or psychology. It is not rare the case of psychologists who work as mechanic or sociologists who work as waiters or cooks in restaurants.

However, one feature that distinguishes migrant women from Italian women is the different experiences they lived and the meaning they give to these experiences: Italian women feel victim of a social landslide process which makes them perceive their jobs – that were traditionally carried out by women with lower levels of education or qualifications – as a weakening of their self-image and social identity. On the contrary, migrant women emphasise the economic aspect of their jobs and set it in a *bottom up* strategy to maximise the potential for growth for themselves, their families and their children. Cristina (Poland) feels rewarded for the unspeakable sacrifices made when she was an illegal migrant (at night she looked after terminally ill people and during the day she worked as cleaning lady) by guaranteeing her two sons the chance to study at university. She is proud of it.

3.2 A Brief taxonomy of competences of the 16 migrant women. The skills legacy of the migrant women emerging from the interviews focuses basically on three areas: basic competences, emotional competences (referable somehow to transversal competences of the Isfol model) and meta-competences.

- Basic Knowledge and Competences. They meet the need to help increase the chances to access the labour market. These competences allow also to deal with changes in working life, such as switching from one job to another one, from a production environment to another, from a production context to an association, recreational, training context, etc. (Isfol, 1997). The answers to the interviews reveal a basic competences map as follows:
- *Language competences* (intermediate level of Italian with peaks of excellence, knowledge and competence in basic English possessed by 13 out of 16. Some of them possess an upper intermediate level of knowledge of other foreign languages, beside their mother tongue, Italian and English);
- *Computer competences* (ranging from using only the Internet to communicate to using Office package, passing through some intermediate situations, such as the use of the Internet + word processing + applications software for certain jobs); *basic knowledge of mathematics and economics* (bank's conditions for current accounts, exchange rates, assessments in investment decisions, such as purchasing a house in the country of origin, investing in the education of their children, whether making these investments in the country of origin or in Italy);
- *Labour Law and Union Rights* (knowledge of the typologies of labour contract – that does not mean they always manage to have a regular contract as it depends on the bargaining power between them and their employer or on the advantage of working in the black market as it means higher pay -, knowledge of Italian immigration laws); *Active job search techniques* (knowledge of employment centres, knowledge of public and private employment agencies, ability to search for jobs on the Internet)

Emotional competences. We preferred to use the concept of emotional competences rather than the most common concept of transversal competences. In fact, the concept of emotional competences not only includes all contents of the concept of transversal competences but it also broadens and enhances its semantic extension. As Goleman (1995), by emotional competence we mean a *learned capability*, thus not innate, based on a set of abilities or potentialities such as: awareness and self-control, motivation, empathy, interpersonal skills. These abilities and potentialities develop two main typologies of competences: *personal competence*, that determines how we manage ourselves, and *social competence*, that determines how we handle relationships.

Personal competence is made up of:

- knowledge about personal strengths and weaknesses;
- self-confidence in one's own abilities;
- maintaining standards of honesty and integrity;
- conscientiousness (i.e. the quality of acting according to the dictates of one's conscience and taking responsibilities);
- flexibility in managing change;
- the ability to feel at ease when facing new approaches and information;

- the readiness to take chances;
- the persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and failures.

We can find these features in all the 16 respondents even though in different degrees, depending on the different life experiences and their respective biographical paths.

Social competence is made up of:

- understanding of others;
- anticipating, recognising and satisfying a customer's needs;
- being able to grab the opportunities offered by different types of people;
- the ability to negotiate and resolve disagreements;
- the ability to foster and nourish useful relationships.

Again, not all respondents possess these competences at the same extent but they all can certainly fit in an hypothetical competences map of our target group.

Meta-competences. We preferred to extract three main groups of skills we have found in our target group from the emotional/transversal competences category (where they are usually placed in literature) and name them Meta-competences.

Meta-competence is made up of:

- the ability/willingness to learn always and in all contexts;
- the ability to move in intercultural contexts;
- the ability to read the territory and oneself within the territory.

In our specific case, these competences appear as second-level competences, i.e. as key competences that move and nourish other competences. Particularly, the ability of learning to learn is superior to any concept of basic learning and it is actually a resource that a person can use in different contexts (work, active citizenship, personal growth and development. The meta-competence of learning to learn implicates and mobilises its three major components: knowledge and control of its acquisition; knowing how and the relative control of acquiring, maintaining and developing; the sense of self-efficacy, motivation, causal attributions and volition.

If we should suggest a meta-competence standing out above all among our respondents we certainly would refer to learning to always learn in all contexts of education, work and daily life.

4. Focus Group

Main elements [fact]: the group of workers has been set up by putting together career counsellors, trainers and cultural mediators, thus trying to hold together professionals with different approaches. The group was made up of a majority of women and in respect of multiculturalism. Female cultural mediators from Romania, Peru and Bangladesh who had experienced migration at first hand were part of the group. Their contribution succeeded in gathering and combining life experience with professional remarks. In the group of workers there were also Italian professionals with competences in counselling, inter-cultural pedagogy and training.

4.1 Item: the causes of female migration to Italy

Women from Eastern Europe migrate to Italy in search of work opportunities and personal growth. They are driven by economic reasons and often they do not have a structured migration project. Information passed by word of mouth within the local communities of origin produces flows and movements that are strictly linked to this informal way of communication, thus encouraging even in Italy the creation of very closed communities. Women from same geographical areas or countries end up with living in the same neighbourhoods of Rome, working in the same fields [sectors], etc.

Women from South America also migrate for economic reasons and the role played by their community of origin is very much alike. The main difficulty they face is the knowledge of language. In fact, language is a very big obstacle that is often underestimated and that has the power to quickly destroy the original expectations.

Besides, Italian immigration laws do not facilitate this process as they allow migrant to enter Italy only if they have a job. On the other hand, for migrants being employed means not having time to study or to attend a language course to improve their integration, thus this condition constitutes a vicious circle.

4.2 Item: non-formal competences and migration process, education systems and qualifications validation

Both women from Eastern Europe and South America often arrive to Italy alone displaying great **courage** and **initiative**. The fact that they are the main breadwinners for their families of origin leads them to do heavy physical work and does not make it easy for them to return home. For instance, it often occurs that they entrust their children to their grandparents in their country of origin. They often experience 'caregiver syndrome' and they get used to long-distance parenting which produces a strong sense of guilt that will increasingly affect their relationship with their children when family reunification happens. This particular experience contributes to develop **non-formal competences such as handling emotionally difficult situations**.

On the contrary, women from Arab or Maghreb countries often arrive to Italy to reunite with their husbands who left long before and in most cases even when they just got married, thus their husbands are practically strangers to them. These women play a passive role in migration, language remains a huge obstacle to them along with the fact that the context receiving them tends to render them invisible. In this regard, the issue of education systems and qualifications

recognition is even more significant as on average they attained a high level of education but the education system in their country of origin is structured in completely different ways than those in the country of destination, such as the Italian one. Neither their non-formal nor informal competences are recognised and their skills as beauticians, cooks and dressmakers is not valued yet.

Women from South America or Eastern Europe are instead much more visible. They learn how **to implement network communication strategies**, they are able to access to social services and after a few years spent in Italy they usually try to set higher career goals that correspond to their original qualifications. However, changing occupation is hardly ever easy and they end up redirecting their goals towards a different vocational training such as social work, cultural mediation, interpreting, etc. The success of these aspirations clashes with men's attitudes who, when rejoining their wives, can barely stand women's desire for autonomy and achievement. As a result, couples break up or if they manage to hold together is just because women give up their life projects.

In this regard, **education and training systems do not understand understand the need to facilitate validation processes. Validation of qualifications obtained in the countries of origin is a long, expensive, tortuous and by the way never complete process.**

To give an example: in Italy, it is not required a language test in order to enrol at University but we cannot deny that not being fluent in Italian represents an insurmountable obstacle. This is also a cultural difference.

Summary: Which competences do migrant women bring along?

- ability to adapt to change
- ability to learn to learn
- competences related to qualifications and work experiences acquired in the countries of origin (even though they are not always used as migrant women are employed in other sectors and they are often underemployed)
- competences related to a different 'knowledge' which stems from belonging to another culture (traditions, customs, habits, values, knowledge,...)

Summary: Using non-formal and informal competences acquired in the country of origin

- the use of competences related to cultural diversity depends on the degree of welcoming cultural diversity existing in the host country. However, in Italy there is a tendency to get in touch with migrant women (and migrants in general) in a very stereotyped way without setting up a real exchange and comparison on 'different ways of being and relating to each other'
- competences acquired through family management, home care, etc. are often redirected into jobs: caregiver, housekeeper, baby sitters, home care

Summary: Validation of diplomas and certificates acquired in the countries of origin

- there are two types of validation: the first type enables to practise a profession in the host country and can be obtained if the person had already work experience, the second one is related to qualifications and it often requires to sit some more exams at University

- usually procedures are long, bureaucratic and complex. Besides, they are expensive as translations about exams taken, programs, subjects and marks are required
- as a result, many women do not validate their qualifications as they think they cannot use them. Cultural mediators, for instance, are often graduated in different fields (psychology, anthropology, political science). Their 'profession' was mainly created during the 'first generation of mediators' from a core competence such as the knowledge of their own language
- there is also a **difference between being a EU immigrant or a non-EU immigrant:**
 - In the first case it is more common that the reasons for migration are not exclusively economic but rather personal (emotional, relationship, life experience). In this case, for instance, low-skilled jobs are 'transitional' and sooner or later migrants look for another job that is related to their competences and training
 - In case of non-EU immigrants, migration is more related to economic reasons, thus the urgent need of income leads them to get stuck in any job they found without being able to start a period of "adaptation/training/knowledge of the territory/specific search" that is necessary to understand "how to fit in their field"

4.3 Item: Which are the key skills for employability and which strategies have you developed to enhance them?

Linguistic competences are by far the most important. They are able to open any door. Women who arrive to Italy and are fluent in Italian are able to have gratifying experiences while those who do not speak Italian must rely on other people, thus their integration process is slower and more uncertain.

Women are often a reference point for other women. During social events within the community they have the opportunity to know each other and exchange information as well as to talk about themselves and their problems.

By observing these mechanisms, for instance, it has been developed for the South American community a women's information service that is directly managed and run by Latin American migrant women. They use this place to share experiences, knowledge and information about services, work, rights, housing, etc. They are aware of the importance of networking in the process of inclusion in a culturally diverse society.

Summary: Is the training system addressed to migrant women useful and sufficient?

- courses not always take into account their needs: timetables, accessibility, family conditions (e.g. women isolation in some communities)
- a training system addressed to 'migrant women' should be related to transversal competences and 'mixed' courses may have the potential to create greater exchange and growth
- funded training proposals addressed to migrant women refer to 'basic' qualifications such as *home care*, thus determining *a priori* potential areas of expertise [inclusion]

Summary: What competences do you reckon are necessary to work in this country?

- competences related to knowledge: Italian language
- competences related to knowing how to do: fulfil a task quickly and with care, problem solving
- competences related to knowing how to be: creative, flexible, able to act in a context

Summary: What do you suggest to boost women's employability? What projects or strategies or tools have you used and were useful to you?

Counselling that allows to:

- 'map' their own competences
- draw an integration plan that goes beyond the urgency to work and may turn into a personal/professional development plan
- places to meet and share knowledge
- promoting *empowerment*

5. SWOT Analysis

Italy: SWOT analysis

This brief SWOT synthesis comes out from the comparison activity realized by the project staff and the NSAG group, realized on the 21st of June 2012 at six in the evening at the "Romatre" University.

The intervening people of the NSAG group were: Tiziana Amori, teacher of Sociology at the Tor Vergata University of Rome, Sandra Huesca Avila Pedagogist and trainer in multicultural context, Fabrizio Lella Manager of the training area as well as for European project of the province of Rome. Conclusion coming out of the qualitative report were taken into consideration and the group stressed how the women acknowledgement of competences derives from an initial and essential element, that is to say the women awareness or at least her competence acknowledgement and her will of using her competences. This first element gives life to further actions, and takes the self to the realization of personal planning and researches thus allowing women to enter training path that could improve their professional position.

The Italian situation is not always comfortable and this year of heavy crisis that takes to strong cut to social expenses can be translate for the women point of view into a decrease in expectation. This keep them involved for long period in underdimensioned job considering their training, and only further difficult situation – that is to say the loss of a job- can take to the chance of taking into account the self potentialities. This often happen very late when a substantial part of professional competences are not updated anymore.

Jobs that mainly take to a process of social emancipation are those linked to cultural mediation of every field (school, family, social services) and paramedical. In this last field immigrant women working as nurses (three-year university path) in every field often represent an added value for their field (empathy, effectiveness, and precision).

The mentioned professional field are sharing emotional competences centrality and they therefore represent two example of how this competences are acknowledged, and improved throughout a specific training and the working field.

It however seems to be clear that only in this field we could give space to such an enormous richness as the one granted by women.

Different field such as accountancy remains closed despite the fact that a lot of women make that kind of studies or even worked in that field.

The dynamic feature of the commercial field as well as of handcraft activity represents a further chance of collecting and give value to the base competence as well as to transversal competences: in questi ambiti infatti le donne esprimono anche le loro capacità organizzative e gestionali nei confronti degli uomini e della comunità che le circonda sia essa quella italiana che di altri paesi. In questa direzione le iniziative di micro finanziamento all'autoimprenditorialità sono molto importanti.

Il problema del riconoscimento formale dei titoli e dei percorsi professionali, quello dei criteri per ottenere i permessi di soggiorno, come quello dei criteri per accedere a lavori nel settore pubblico è un ostacolo culturale e sociale ancora da superare. In questo senso può essere interessante l'applicazione del principio di *congruità* che si è adoperato in alcuni territori e che appartiene anche ai trattati europei in materia di occupazione.

Advice for the activities of the forward project can be synthesized as follows:

- 1) The portfolio for the collection of non-formal and informal competences becomes more important if it can be proposed and realized even for recently immigrating women. It should:

- have a clear and simple language;

- propose a classification of competences that can be transferred in a multicultural context
- 2) use the Portfolio in welcome services, immigrant women association or while entering a training course. It is therefore important that institutional actors can recognize the quality and the value of competences of immigrants women.

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