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**"Immigrants' Long-Term Integration Outcomes"**

**Comments by Ferruccio Pastore (FIERI) to the  
Centro Studi Luca D'Agliano Migration Observatory's 3rd annual Report**

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1. When speaking about migration, a lot of rhetoric is often used. And one of the rhetorical tricks that is most frequently played is what linguists call *synecdoche*. It is a figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole. At the height of industrial migration, for instance, Max Frisch famously wrote "Wir wollten Armen, Menschen sind gekommen", "We wanted just arms, but men have come". Wanting just a part, and getting the whole: a synecdoche.

Today, the synecdoche that is dominating the public debate on migration is a different one. **Taking just one very specific kind of migration, to discuss migration in general.** Namely focusing only on irregular cross-Mediterranean migrants as if they were representative of migration as a general phenomenon and as a component of European societies.

In other words, this is like watching obsessively just the tip of the iceberg, while completely neglecting and forgetting, symbolically erasing the submerged bulk, that is "normal migration".

2. This Report is a **perfect antidote to this kind of rhetorical distortion**, which by the way has several negative consequences at different levels. It is a perfect antidote, as it provides a very broad and deep picture, broad in space and deep in time.

By doing this, it delivers a few general and very solid truths that are essential to remind, to repeat and, as far as possible, to disseminate and to assert in the public debate, in the

hope that a wider acknowledgement of these few important truths may have practical consequences by affecting decision-making.

Some may retort that this is a naïve perspective in times of “post-truth politics”. Maybe. But still, there little else that we can do as scholars.

3. So which are the important truths that this report provides. I am not speaking of updated empirical evidence – there is plenty of it in these very dense fifty-something pages plus appendixes. I am talking of general statements, with important policy implications, that may be drawn from this evidence.

The first is that the so-called “migration crisis” in 2015-16 was definitely **not a migration crisis**, but just a peak in one very specific category of arrivals, what I called before “the tip of the iceberg”.

The 2015-16 anomaly is producing statistically sizeable effects in the composition of immigrant population in Germany and Sweden, but otherwise it is just a small ripple in the vast universe of 53.1 million immigrants in the EU (if they were a national population, it would be the fifth country in the EU in terms of demographic size).

4. A second important general truth that is well-known, but often neglected, is that large-scale immigration in Europe is still **essentially a Western European phenomenon**. As a matter of fact, out of these 53 million immigrants, over 48 are concentrated in EU-15 countries.

On the other hand, Eastern Europe, that is a critically important hotbed of contemporary anxiety about migration, is almost immigrant-free.

This is a puzzling and crucial paradox, one that it is practically very important to understand better. In a recent report, Eurobarometer went as far as identifying - I quote - a “significant negative correlation between the presence of immigrants in a country and the propensity to see immigration as a problem”.

I am not sure that one can technically speak of a negative correlation, but certainly the coincidence is puzzling and would deserve more scholarly, as well as political attention.

5. Another important feature of immigration in Europe that this report contributes to remind to us, is that it is nowadays **largely an intra-European phenomenon**, and by the way this re-europeanisation of immigration to Europe was probably the single most important historical change in the European context over the last couple of decades.

So, while over half of the total immigrant population comes from another European country (EU and non-EU together), only 19% originate from Africa and Middle East.

Here too, statistical reality and perceived reality diverge dramatically. The tip of the iceberg arrives from Middle East and Africa, and the public tends to overestimate greatly not just immigration in general, but particularly this component, that is of course often also much more identifiable in colour terms.

6. Moving on now from the overall demographic outlook to aspects more directly connected with integration, and in particular labour market integration, another basic and momentous truth that the report conveys, is that immigration - in Europe just like probably

anywhere else – is a **hierarchical phenomenon**. More precisely, what I mean here is that different immigrant groups have different integration outcomes.

In particular, the report explores the EU/non-EU cleavage, and it confirms that finding a job is easier for EU nationals, and this gap persists even when the comparison is made among people with the same individual characteristics in terms of age, gender and level of education.

Clearly there is something more to it than just individual features, however important they certainly are. It can be the more favourable institutional setting they face, or it can be more hidden ethnic preferences. But this is obviously something that the Report cannot say.

7. I keep surfing across the Report, mining general findings that I find particularly important for the public debate and for policy-making. **Finding a job becomes easier with time**. This is also not a surprise, there is plenty of evidence backing it over time. But checking, contextualising and specifying is obviously important. Also because it reminds us that the single most important ingredient of integration is time, and therefore short-term, circular migration is not necessarily a win-win solution both for employers, migrants and receiving societies.

What the Report also importantly tells us, in this respect, is that migration seniority increases employment chances, but it does not necessarily reduce the wage gap nor it improves the occupational status.

On the contrary, from this point of view, things seem to be getting worse. As the Report states in one of its most worrying passages:

“The disproportionate concentration of immigrants at the bottom of the occupational status distribution has significantly increased in 2016 relative to 1995 in all countries.” (p. 50)

8. And this leads me to what I think will be my final point. As several sections of this Report concur to demonstrate, over the last twenty years, and particularly since the Great Recession, European societies have become **more hierarchical along ethnic lines**, not less.

But this is not generating social conflict and political mobilisation against this growing inequality. But - and this is a really painful paradox – the political mobilisation is rather against immigrants themselves.

If our focus is on long-term integration, as in this conference, while immigration keeps growing, integration worsens, at least in a systemic sense, in terms of inequality and relative positioning. Mixing sociological and economic language one could perhaps summarise this trend by saying that we have indeed integration (for instance in terms of formal legal rights) but no assimilation.

9. I haven't spoken so far about Italy. I would like to conclude with just a couple of words on this. As a matter of fact, the Report reminds us a few interesting, in some respects embarrassing, facts about the Italian specificity in the European context, and particularly among the six EU Member States that are compared in the second part of the Report.

- Italy stands out as the country where immigrants are **least educated** (by the way we are holding the record also when considering natives only).

- Italy is also the country with the **most feminised immigrant population**, which is a clear reflection of the prevalence of employment opportunities in care sector.
- It is the country where the **native-immigrant gap in employment probability is smallest**, but on the backdrop of a generally low employment probability for everybody.
- And it is also the country where the **convergence in employment probability over time is particularly strong and rapid** (p. 46).

Making sense of these and other, sometimes puzzling specificities, is not easy and I am certainly not trying now. But I point this out as an important (and largely neglected) topic for future discussions.

It's a crucial topic, because it's about the submerged bulk of the iceberg. Even if the political debate steers away from it, it will remain there and it will keep playing a crucial role in shaping the future of Italy for quite some time.