

## Returns

### *Dossier Africa e Mediterraneo 86/2017*

The debate on asylum and migration is bringing to light the theme of return; not that of an old migrant returning to his country of origin after a lifetime of work, but that of the younger generations who still find themselves in the midst of an existential and professional journey. There are more and more questions on the phenomenon of asylum seekers forced to deal with this step due to their asylum request being denied or their integration into society failing, as well as on the cases in which migrants return home deliberately out of choice with an enterprise project possibly favored by national and international policies.

While on the one hand, the economic crisis in Europe has made life particularly difficult for migrants in terms of job placement, on the other hand, the intensification of xenophobic movements created in the host territories makes for a more hostile and difficult climate. At the same time, the development of some African economies increasingly requires specialized labor, as well as the strengthening of new commercial channels with the economic operators of the North.

The phenomenon of "return" appears however difficult to capture and estimate using official statistics and can be better focused upon using the concept of "circular migration".

According to the 2016 report by UNECE (*United Nations Economic Commission for Europe*), circular migration can be seen as a particular return migration, but return migration is not necessarily circular.

The *Global Forum on Migration and Development* (GFMD) sees the promotion of circular migration as one of the key ways to increase the contribution of international migrants to the global development. Circular migration is often seen as a win-win-win proposition, because its beneficiaries are both the countries of origin and destination as well as the migrants themselves.

The closure of European borders led to immigration being conceived as a phenomenon originating solely from less developed areas of the world and as an extreme choice, realized exclusively through irregular channels. As a result of this, it does not provide the possibility to return.

The "Fortress Europe" is so coveted, closed and inaccessible that, once a person is able to enter it, perhaps thanks to the investment of a family, leaving it to return home becomes a dramatic option. Every migrant knows that returning home after a short time without having been "successful" in his personal migration story, qualifies him as a failure, a loser.

In that case, what impact have the so-called "assisted voluntary returns" had?

The IOM (*International Organization of Migration*) program, has been assisting 1,4 million migrants since 1979; 40,000 per year over the past five years (source: <http://www.iom.int/assisted-voluntary-return-and-reintegration>).

Voluntary returns are favored by European governments, and aimed at those whose asylum application has been rejected. Therefore, one may firstly reflect on the ambiguity of the term "voluntary", asking whether the return of those who have made great sacrifices to leave their home country can be truly voluntary. These assisted returns also appear to be extremely difficult because, despite the programs provided to

assist with various services such as the organization and travel expenses, a counseling and guidance service, as well as the provision of an allowance, they have shown to be limited in their effectiveness and to have unsatisfactory results.

In fact, for those who we choose to define as forced migrants, to return means to re-enter countries such as some in sub-Saharan Africa, where areas of weak governance have seen an increase in criminalization over the past few years, even despite the absence of open conflicts. Corruption of political (and also local) power leads to an erosion of local residual spaces of sovereignty and legality in favor of a vacuum where anything is possible.

So, how could we make the return into the community of origin something of value for young Africans, despite the extreme risk and human and economic cost of leaving, and without labeling it as the mark of someone who has failed to live up to the enormous expectations of their family back home?

Several projects and experiences suggest that the “return” can be positively considered if the migrant acquires an expertise that allows him to contribute actively and proactively to the development of his area of origin. Calling into question both the host countries and the migrants, in this case the return must be sustainable; something which can be obtained by activating micro-credit courses or professional qualification.

As noted by Sinatti and Horst (2015, p. 144), the return emerges as a key point in most recent documents on development, in both the European Union (EU) as well as in the individual Member States, and represents a new chapter in the debate on the migration-development relationship. Many African countries too, such as Senegal, Cape Verde and Ghana, promote return migration, or at least that of highly skilled migrants.

So there are cases of voluntary and thought-through returns, which are the result of a deliberate choice and not necessarily always interpreted as final. These can be translated into an opportunity for the migrant, for the country of origin, and for the country of immigration. For example, projects such as *Rideo (Returnees Diasporas Integrated Development Organization)* in Ghana are very interesting as they offer a comprehensive approach to migration, supporting it through legal channels and facilitating voluntary repatriation and the economic and social reintegration.

However, despite the general consensus among specialists about the benefits that the countries of origin and destination may receive from migrants returning, by circular migration and by the consequent "circulation of competences", it is still a challenge for governments, institutions, and international organizations to take full advantage of this potential (cf. Hooper and Sumption 2016).

Within this framework the issue 86 of *Africa e Mediterraneo* intends to reflect on the topic of the return of migrants to their countries of origin: discussing firstly in particular the limits, the difficulties but also the possibilities of development that this return may bring both for the individual and the community to which it belongs and secondly more generally the circularity of migration processes as a development and redemption opportunity.

We welcome contributions dealing with the following subjects from different disciplinary approaches:

- Qualitative and quantitative incidence of returns
- Motivations that lead a migrant to return home
- Sustainability of the return: methods of economic and social reintegration into their home countries
- Active involvement of the countries concerned and actual success of the assisted return policies
- Trade and economic networks activated thanks to circular migration
- Which countries are more involved, and why

**Deadline for submission:**

The proposals (max. 400 words) must be submitted no later than **April 5th 2017** to the following email addresses [s.federici@africaemediterraneo.it](mailto:s.federici@africaemediterraneo.it); [m.scrivo@africaemediterraneo.it](mailto:m.scrivo@africaemediterraneo.it).

The editorial committee will examine the proposals. If the proposal is accepted, the complete article with the related abstract (abstract max. 100 words, preferably in English) and a short biography of the author must be submitted by **June 5th 2017**.

*Africa e Mediterraneo* is a peer reviewed journal.

The articles and the proposals can be submitted in the following languages: Italian, English and French.

**Bibliography**

G. Sinatti, *Return migration as a win-win-win scenario? Visions of return among Senegalese migrants, the state of origin and receiving countries*, «Ethnic and Racial Studies», n. 38(2), 2014, pp. 275–91

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Lisa Akesson and Maria Eriksson Baaz (eds.), *Africa's return migrants: the new developers?*, Uppsala-Londra 2015

K. Hooper and M. Sumption, *Reaching a “Fair Deal” on Talent: Emigration, Circulation, and Human Capital in Countries of Origin*, Washington DC 2016

UNECE, *Defining and Measuring Circular Migration*, 2016