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Remain or return home: The migration intentions of first-generation migrants in Italy

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Abstract

Investigating future migration intentions as a proxy of future migration behaviours is useful to capture a more complete understanding of the entire migration process. This also allows a fuller consideration of the policy implications of these intentions for the origin and destination countries. The aim of this paper is to analyse the individual factors associated with the return migration intentions of first-generation migrants living in Italy, a new immigration country, whose migrants' return intentions have been little explored so far. We use data from the survey on the "Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens" carried out by ISTAT in 2011–2012, and we apply a binary logistic regression model. The results show both the complexity and the interconnection of the factors associated with return migration intentions and that migration projects, histories, and goals count more than legal status for return intentions. Moreover, results prove that return migration intentions are influenced by conflicting processes, whose outcomes are not always easy to schematize: integration is a factor that tends to strengthen the ties with the country of residence, whereas transnationalism reinforces those with the country of origin. These factors should be considered by policymakers, especially when immigration assumes a crucial role in the receiving countries' labour market structure and population dynamics, such as in the case of Italy. Different migratory backgrounds, profiles, histories, and projects will require in-depth examination by scientists and policymakers, because the long-term ability and willingness of a host country to attract and retain migrants should be adapted accordingly.

KEYWORDS

binary logistic regression model, data, first-generation migrants, ISTAT, Italy, return migration intentions, survey

1 | INTRODUCTION

Migration is one of the most controversial and divisive issues in the political scene, and it is also a complex phenomenon resulting from various and concurrent factors, which may be individual, contextual, institutional, and political (De Haas, 2010). Many theories have been proposed to explain the factors determining international migration (Massey et al., 1993), whereas a new interest is emerging as far as the definition of the migration decision-making process (Carling, 2014; Carling & Schewel, 2018).

This paper presents several reasons of interest. First of all, migration is not a unique, irreversible, and unrepeatable action (Crescenzi, Holman, & Orru, 2017), it can be circular, followed by the return to the country of origin or by re-emigration to another country. In all these cases, the migrants' future decisions affect the receiving and sending countries' situation. Nevertheless, policies rarely take into account the migration behaviours of those who have already migrated. By contrast, in our view, investigating future migration intentions as a proxy of future migration behaviours is useful to have a complete and realistic picture of the entire migration process and to capture the policy implications that these intentions may have for the origin and destination countries (Carling, 2004a, 2004b; Williams, Jephcote, Janta, & Li, 2018).

Second, our focus is on Italy, where immigration represents a stable component and a pervasive feature of society, despite its relatively recent transition to a country of immigration (Bonifazi, Frank, Strozza, & Vitiello, 2009). Migrants have responded to the domestic demand for labour in the industry, care, and services sectors; in addition, they have contributed to slowing down population ageing and the decline in fertility. The demographic importance of immigration has already been relevant and will be even more so in the near future. In this context, it is very important to collect information about the factors associated with future migration intentions. If migrants prefer permanent settlement to onward, circular, or return migration, it will have consequences not only on the migrants' status and rights in the host country but also more broadly on the policies affecting the whole society (Demeny, 2016). In other words, future migration intentions should be considered in migration and integration policies. These considerations become particularly interesting in the context of the 2008 economic crisis, where migrants have seen a worsening of the labour market conditions and a general increase of their segregation in terms of low-skilled and low-paid jobs (Venturini & Villosio, 2017).

Finally, new methodological approaches are investigating the migration decision-making process, analysing the role of aspirations and the interplay between the latter and the ability to realise them. According to this approach, intentions are considered the second step in the process that transforms the aspiration to migrate in actual migration or, conversely, into immobility (Carling, 2014; Carling & Schewel, 2018). In this respect, our analysis can contribute to collect evidence of this process in the context of an important Southern European country of immigration.

Based on these considerations, this paper will analyse the individual factors[1] associated with the return migration intentions of first-generation migrants living in Italy. Data will be used from the survey on "Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens" collected by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2011–2012.

The paper is structured as follows: in Section 2, we present the theoretical background and previous findings on return migration intentions, and in Section 3, we describe data, measures, and method. In Section 4, we present and discuss the results; finally, we set out our conclusions in Section 5.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS FINDINGS

Future migration behaviours have always captured the interest of researchers and scientists. In their seminal work on Mexican migrants settled in the Unites States, Massey and colleagues (1990) analysed the social process of migration, including return, finding that the most important factors shaping return migration were property ownership in the country of origin, age, marital status, duration of residence, and wages. Given the free movement within the European Union (EU), and the resurgent interest in "guest-worker" policies, return, circular, and onward migration have recently received attention by both researchers and policymakers (Castles, 2006; Koch, 2014; Vertovec, 2008; Wright, Groutsis, & van den Broek, 2017). However, the topic of return migration presents specific problems, first of all, because of the scarcity of sufficient and reliable data; second, because of selection issues. In fact, the study of return migration, for instance, through a cross-sectional survey conducted in the country of destination implies that you are dealing with migrants who are still in the country of destination, whereas those who have already left are not accounted for.

We set out to analyse intentions, which can differ from aspirations and from actual behaviours. In the framework of the aspiration/ability model, recently revisited by Carling and Schewel (2018), intention is an intermediate step in the migration decision-making process. In fact, according to this approach, migration is the result of the interplay between the aspiration to migrate and the ability to do it. Although aspiration represents "a wish, desire or preference to migrate" (Carling & Schewel, 2018, p. 948), "intentions and plans reflect both the desire and realism of migration" (Carling, 2014, p. 5), even if "a substantial number of people do not realize their intention to move and many move unexpectedly" (Lu, 1999, p. 467). For instance, Hazen and Alberts (2006) in their study about international students in the Unites States found that family decisions and career advancements lead students with a temporary status to become permanent immigrants, regardless of their initial intentions to return to their country of origin. Nevertheless, several studies have demonstrated that intentions can be assumed as an essential premise of actual behaviours, because they are a proximate determinant of future actions (e.g., Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2016; De Jong, 2000; Van Dalen & Henkens, 2008; Williams, Jephcote, Janta, & Li, 2018).

A vast corpus of international literature has disentangled the main factors associated with return intentions. Many of these studies have based their analysis on the so-called "integration-transnationalism nexus"; whereas other have focused their attention on some socio-economic factors in the country of residence or in the country of origin.

The study conducted by De Haas and Fokkema (2011) on four immigrant communities (Egyptian, Ghanaian, Moroccan, and Senegalese) living in Spain and Italy, using data collected in 1997 by the "Push and Pull Factors of International Migration" research project, shows that the relationship between integration and transnationalism versus return intentions is not clear-cut (hypotheses are tested simultaneously with a single dataset for Italy and Spain). In particular, sociocultural integration in the country of residence has a strongly negative effect on return intentions, whereas structural and economic integration in the country of residence has no significant effect.

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[1]We will distinguish between demographic, human capital, immigration, integration, and transnationalism factors.

Conversely, economic ties with the country of origin, such as investments, have a positive effect on return intentions, whereas remittances have a negative effect; by contrast, social ties with the country of origin have no significant effect. Finally, as far as migrants' background characteristics are concerned, they found that higher education and having emigrated to improve personal working and living conditions have a positive effect on the intention to return, thus demonstrating that the success of the migration experience plays a pivotal role in the migrants' intention to go back to the country of origin.

Similar results have been found by de Haas and colleagues (2015) in their study on Moroccan migrants in Europe, who concluded that structural integration in the country of destination and transnationalism (ties with the country of origin) are not conflicting processes; by contrast, they can coexist, and both can be a condition for returning. Moreover, in her work on the determinants of return intentions among Turkish second-generation immigrants residing in different European cities, using data from the "Integration of the European Second Generation" (TIES) project, Fokkema (2011) found that integration and transnationalism are not mutually exclusive in shaping return intentions. In particular, sociocultural integration (feelings of being Turkish, Turkish language skills, and religious practices) and transnational ties with the country of origin (remittances, investments, return visits, watching TV stations of the country of origin) positively influence the intention to migrate to the parents' country, whereas economic integration has no significant effect. However, a higher likelihood of intending to return exists among self-employed male migrants, compared with the unemployed, and those experiencing income difficulties.

In their work about 10 immigrant groups in Norway, Carling and Pettersen (2014, p. 27) argued that "integration and transnationalism interact in shaping return migration intention": migrants who are both less integrated and more transnational are more likely to intend to return. In particular, they found a higher likelihood of intending to return among women, the young, the elderly, and those whose duration of residence and education were either very low or very high. Moreover, religion, family reasons for migration, and specific countries of origin (because of different migration histories, countries' characteristics, and factors not controlled by their model) have a positive effect on return intentions, whereas economic resources have no effect.

The work of Anniste and Tammaru (2014) has also contributed to the debate on integration and return intentions. Based on a representative sample of migrants from Estonia to Finland, distinguishing between ethnic Estonians and ethnic Russians, the study highlights that sociocultural integration (i.e., speaking Finnish fluently and meeting Finnish friends daily) and structural integration (i.e., having Finnish citizenship or home ownership in the country of residence) are negatively associated with the intention to return. On this regard, it is worth to highlight that besides to what found by Massey and colleagues (1990), the home ownership in the country of origin cannot be necessarily associated with return intentions. As elucidated by Erdal (2012) in a qualitative study on Pakistani migrants in Norway, migrants may decide to build a house in the country of origin despite not intending to return, for both practical and symbolic reasons. As far as the practical reasons, they may choose to build houses for improving accommodation for their relatives there, for holiday purposes, for spending a part of the year in the home country, and for making a safe investment of the money gained in the new

country of residence. Among the symbolic reasons, there are issues of identity, sense of belonging, social relations, and transnationalism: although they may have not actual plans of returning, owning a house in the country of origin may help them to feed their sense of home and to sustain their "ethos of return" (Carling, 2004a, 2004b).

The importance of the context cannot be overlooked when analysing the trade-off between social integration and transnationalism and the relationship with migrants' return intentions. As well known, contextual and institutional factors in the country of residence can shape migrants' social integration and, therefore, affect their return intentions (Ruist, 2016; Piché, 2004; Yang, 1994). In other words, a favourable and inclusive social setting in the country of destination has a positive effect on migrants' well-being in the country of residence and a negative effect on migrants' intentions to return to the home country. For instance, the aforementioned work of Alberts and Hazen (2005) on the factors pushing students to remain in the United States or to return home after obtaining their degree, highlights that although professional factors encourage students to remain, social and personal factors push them back to their countries of origin. In a similar vein, in a qualitative study on Bangladeshi migrants in Italy who are onward-migrating to London, Della Puppa and King (2018) have recently found that most Bangladeshis move to London to escape factory work in Italy, to invest in the English-language education of their children and to join the largest Bangladeshi community outside of their country of origin. In London, they feel more "at home" than in Italy, although they meet difficulties of other kind: the inability to find a job that it is not a low-paid casual occupation in London's service economy, the high cost of housing and the difficulty of making social contacts beyond their ethnic community.

As far as the studies more oriented towards specific socio-economic factors in the country of residence or in the country of origin, using data from the New Immigrant Survey Pilot conducted between 1996 and 1997, Massey and Akresh (2006) found that the intention to return and the intention to naturalise depend on the degree of satisfaction expressed by migrants. Migrants with a high degree of satisfaction in the Unites States are significantly more likely to intend to naturalise and, therefore, less likely to intend to return. In her analysis of the intention to return among highly skilled Taiwan-born household heads in the Unites States, Model (2016) found that economic downturns increase the likelihood of intending to return to the home country. Moreover, a temporary visa and a single trip to Taiwan are positively associated with the intention to return. Conversely, marital status, the presence of a child in the household, education, and fluency in English are not significant. In their study on Turkish skilled migrants, Güngör and Tansel (2014) showed that not only economic but also noneconomic factors, such as family support in the decision to emigrate, social life assessment, standard of living assessment, and difficulties with life abroad are important factors for migration intentions. In addition, they found that the cost of return rises as the time spent abroad increases. Finally, in their work on labour migrants working in China's Pearl River Delta, Piotrowski and Tong (2013) highlighted that children left behind in the country of origin increase the likelihood of intending to return, compared with having no children or having children in the country of residence, while living with friends or family or in one's own house decrease the likelihood of intending to return.

To the best of our knowledge, besides the already considered paper that simultaneously analyse the situation in Italy and Spain (De Haas & Fokkema, 2011), very few studies have investigated return migration intentions in Italy (Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2016; Barbiano di Belgiojoso & Ortensi, 2013; Boccagni, 2011; Paparusso & Ambrosetti, 2017; Premazzi, Ambrosetti, Fokkema, & Cela, 2013). These works have only focused their attention on specific groups of migrants, have used local surveys or have not been able to gather the effects of the recent economic crisis on migrants' return intentions. In particular, Boccagni (2011) highlighted that although many Ecuadorian migrants intend to return home, this strategy is pursued only in case of a failure in the accomplishment of their migration projects overseas or of an urgent family and affective issue in the country of origin. As far as the Lombardy region for the years 2010–2012, Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Ortensi (2013) found that age, long-term unemployment, children left behind, not having a valid permit of residence, and being employed in sector considered male ethnic niches, such as construction industry, agriculture, factory work, and transportation, increase the likelihood of intending to return. In their qualitative study, which links return intentions and Arab spring, Premazzi and colleagues (2013) showed that the changes occurred in Egypt after the Arab spring has strengthened first and second-generation migrants' transnational ties with the country of origin, but not their return intentions. Paparusso and Ambrosetti (2017) in their study on Moroccan migrants, using data from the "Statistics on Income and Living Conditions of Families with Migrants" carried out by ISTAT in 2009, found that Moroccans' intentions to return is not very clear-cut. However, socio-economic and work conditions in Italy are the most important factors associated with the intention to return or to re-emigrate to another country of this immigrant group. Finally, in her study on both the factors associated with uncertainty about plans and the relationship between the desired length of stay and attachments to the origin and destination countries, Barbiano di Belgiojoso (2016) found that there is a strong positive relationship between psychological attachment and the subjective dimension of the migration experience and the desired length of stay, which determine the intention to remain or to return. The lack of any attachment is associated with a shorter desired length of stay.

The factors found by the previous findings sketched out above will be verified in Italy, a country that has witnessed a strong increase in the foreign resident population over the years, passing from around 649 thousand individuals in 1992 to more than 5 million individuals in 2017 (ISTAT), representing around 8.3% of the total population. This number rises to almost 6 million (around 10% of the total population) if we consider non-resident regular and irregular migrants (ISMU, 2017). Given the ongoing process of population decline and the increase in social expenditure required by the ageing population for a range of age-related services, the growing support given by immigrants to Italian economic and demographic structures acquires greater scientific relevance, especially under the effect of the economic recession's consequences.

Bearing in mind the above, our research questions are as follows: (a) Are the results on future migrations intentions found by previous studies verifiable in Italy, a southern European country new to immigration, which has been hardly hit by the recent economic crisis and which has to deal with a structural process of population ageing?

(b) Which policy conclusions, in terms of encouraging the return of immigrants or fostering their permanent settlement, can be draw from our study, given this particular economic and demographic context?

3 | DATA, MEASURES, AND METHOD

3.1 | Data

The data stem from the survey on "Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens" (Condizione e Integrazione Sociale dei Cittadini Stranieri) carried out by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) in 2011–2012. The survey collected information on a total sample of 25,326 individuals, including first- and second-generation immigrants. However, the dataset is reduced to 15,936 individuals who are foreign citizens, that is, foreign-born with the citizenship of a foreign country, with a regular status, aged 14 years and over. These are important aspects to take into account because the migrants' status could affect their future migration intentions: for instance, first-generation migrants can be less attached to the new country of residence and more prone to eventually returning to their country of origin compared with second-generation migrants.

The survey deals with the following topics: employment; languages; civic and political participation; family reunion; long-term residence and citizenship; health; education, discrimination; social networks; and ties with the country of origin.

It is important to highlight that our sample does not include irregular migrants, who according to the available estimates (ISMU, 2017) counted 491,000 individuals in 2017, representing more than 8% of the total immigrant population. It is well acknowledged (e.g., Connor, 2010; Ortensi, 2015) that irregular migrants face more integration problems compared with migrants holding a regular status. The former generally experience high levels of unemployment, insecure living conditions, and fragile social networks. In addition, their status leads to the perpetuation of their irregularity and could deter the intention to return, because of the fear of being identified, expelled, and not being able to eventually come back to the country of residence (Borodak & Tichit, 2014; Wihtol de Wenden, 1999).

3.2 | Dependent variable

As far as migration intentions are concerned, the respondents were asked the following question: At the moment, do you think you will remain in Italy? The options were: 1 = Yes, I think I will remain in Italy; 2 = No, I think I will return to my country of origin or to my country of citizenship; 3 = No, I think I will go to live in another country. 69.6% of our respondents intend to remain in Italy, 27.6% intend to return to their country of origin, and only 2.5% intend to go to live to another country. For the purpose of our analysis, those who intend to go to live in another country have been omitted.

3.3 | Independent variables

Based on the theoretical background and previous findings, we have selected the following variables (see Table 1). As demographic variables, we selected (1) age (expressed in years), (2) gender (females [reference]

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics of the independent variables, N = 15,936, Italy, around 2011–2012

Independent variables	% or mean and (SD)	Independent variables	% or mean and (SD)
Demographic variables		Integration variables	
Age (years)	38.1	Legal status	
	(12.7)	Residence permit for long-term residents	7.7
Gender (females)	56.2	Residence permit for work reasons	29.5
Marital status		Residence permit for family reasons	19.5
Single	32.8	Other	7.8
Legally married	48.5	EU citizen status	35.5
Other	18.7	Household structure	
Citizenship of origin		Couple living together in Italy	10.1
Other EU and other developed countries	6.9	Couple not living together	1.8
Romania	23.3	Household with children with all members living together in Italy	50.5
Poland	3.5	Household with children not living together	22.0
Other Eastern European countries (non-EU)	5.5	One-person household	14.5
Albania	13.5	Household with one Italian parent	1.1
Ukraine	5.4	Feeling in Italy	
Moldavia	2.5	Very good	35.5
Morocco	9.3	Good	48.4
Other North African countries	4.4	From not good to very bad	16.1
Sub-Saharan African countries	5.3	Perceived health	
China	3.5	Very good	35.8
Philippines	2.7	Good	47.5
Other Asian countries	7.9	From not good to very bad	16.7
Central Latin American countries	6.6	Transnationalism variables	
Human capital variables		Frequency of the return visits	
Occupational condition		Various times during the year	11.3
Dependent worker	56.2	Every year	39.8
Independent worker	7.4	Every 2–3 years	26.0
Unemployed (looking for a job)	8.8	Less frequently	11.5
Inactive	26.5	Never	11.4
Educational attainment		Proud of being a foreigner	
Primary education or lower	15.8	Not or not very proud	9.0
Lower secondary school	48.3	Sufficiently proud	35.5
Upper secondary school or higher	35.9	Very proud	54.6
Immigration variables		Watching news of the country of origin (yes)	46.1
Period of arrival in Italy			
After 2008	7.0		
From 2006 to 2008	21.6		
From 2003 to 2005	20.6		
Before 2003	50.8		
Age at arrival			
0–13	9.0		
14–24	33.5		
25–34	32.4		
35–44	16.1		
45+	8.9		

Source: Authors' elaboration of the survey on the "Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens", ISTAT

and males), (3) marital status (single, legally married [reference], and other), and (4) citizenship of origin. For the latter, we created 14 dummy variables for each citizenship or group of citizenships: other EU and other developed countries (reference), Romania, Poland, other Eastern European countries (non-EU), Albania, Ukraine, Moldavia, Morocco, other North African countries, sub-Saharan African countries, China,

the Philippines, other Asian countries, and Central Latin American countries. As human capital variables, we selected (5) occupational condition (dependent worker [reference], independent worker, unemployed [looking for a job], and inactive), (6) educational attainment (primary education or lower [reference], lower secondary education, and upper secondary or higher). As immigration variables, we selected (7) period of arrival in Italy (before 2003 [reference], from 2003 to 2005, from 2006 to 2008, and after 2008),[2] (8) age at arrival (0–13, 14–24, 25–34, 35–44, and 45+ [reference]). As integration variables, we chose (9) legal status (residence permit for long-term residents, residence permit for work reasons, residence permit for family reasons, other, EU citizen status [reference]), (10) household structure (couple living together in Italy, couple not living together,[3] household with children with all members living together in Italy [reference], household with children not living together, one-person household, and household with one Italian parent), (11) feeling in Italy (very good, good, and from not good to very bad [reference]), (12) perceived health (very good and good from not good to very bad [reference]). As transnationalism variables, we selected (13) frequency of return visits (various times during the year, every year, every 2–3 years, less frequently, and never [reference]), (14) proud of being a foreigner (not or not very proud [reference], sufficiently proud, and very proud), and (15) watching news of the country of origin (yes and no [reference]).

3.4 | Method

In order to examine how the individual factors shape migration intentions, we performed a binary logistic regression model (Kleinbaum & Klein, 2010). The reference group for the dependent variable is 1 = Yes, I think I will remain in Italy.

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Descriptive results

In Table 1, the main characteristics of the sample are considered. The mean age of our respondents is 38.1 years, females represent 56.2% of the sample, and 50.5% are households with children with all members living together in Italy. Romania is the country of origin, which accounts for 23.3% of our respondents; 56.6% of the migrants are dependent workers, and 48.3% have lower secondary school education; 50.8% of the migrants arrived in Italy before 2003 and 33.5% between 14 and 24 years of age. As far as legal status is concerned, 35.5% of respondents have EU citizen status, and 29.5% hold a residence permit for work reasons. Finally, 48.4% of the migrants feel good in Italy, 47.5% report a good perceived state of health and, finally, 54.6% are very proud of being a foreigner.

In order to start to get an idea of how the individual factors we have selected will shape migration intentions, Figure 1 shows how the intention to return or to remain changes according to some factors. The proportion of respondents who intend to return is higher

among those who arrived in Italy more recently and lower among those who arrived earlier, whereas the proportion of respondents who intend to return is lower among those who entered the country at younger ages and higher among those who entered the country at older ages. The proportion of those who intend to return is higher among those who have a residence permit for work reasons and EU citizen status and lower among those who have a permit for long-term residents and for family reasons. In the first two groups, a short-term migration project could be more represented; moreover, the free circulation within the EU allows EU citizens to plan more flexible migration projects (Della Puppa & Sredanovic, 2017; Finotelli, La Barbera, & Echeverría, 2017). On the contrary, long-term residents and family migrants confirm the importance of a stable and safe residence status in the host country for permanent settlement intentions, as also found by previous studies (Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2016; Barbiano di Belgiojoso & Ortensi, 2013; Paparusso & Ambrosetti, 2017; Şenyürekli & Menjívar, 2012). These are interesting differences, which however will be only partially confirmed by the regression analysis of the next section. Finally, as far as citizenship of origin is concerned, migrants with Ukrainian and Philippine citizenship show the highest proportions of intentions to return, whereas those from Albania show the highest proportion of intention to remain. As other citizenships of origin, Romania and China show proportions of intention to return and proportions of intention to remain that are more aligned with the respondents' mean values. Regression results will make more precise also these differences.

4.2 | Regression results

To simultaneously test the effects of several individual factors on first-generation migrants' return intentions, a binary logistic regression analysis has been performed, where the reference group for the dependent variable is 1 = Yes, I think I will remain in Italy. The findings are presented in Table 2.

Bearing in mind that our results can be biased, because those who have already returned to their country of origin are excluded from the sample (Cassarino, 2004; De Haas, Fokkema, & Fassi Fihri, 2015), age has a slightly negative effect on return migration intentions. Males are more likely to intend to return compared with females. This result corroborates previous studies (e.g., Barbiano di Belgiojoso & Ortensi, 2013; Fokkema, 2011; Paparusso & Ambrosetti, 2017), and it can be explained by the fact that, for males, migration may imply a loss of status, privileges, and public recognition (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005), which can only be re-established by returning to their home country. By contrast, for females, migration can mean gaining independence from their country of origin, which may be lost when returning home (Paparusso & Ambrosetti, 2017). Migrants with other statuses are more likely to intend to return compared with legally married migrants. The international literature has put strong emphasis on the effect of marital status on return intentions, distinguishing between migrants with a partner in the country of residence and migrants with a partner in the country of origin (e.g., Jensen & Pedersen, 2008; Piotrowski & Tong, 2013). Migrants with a partner in the country of residence tend to have more permanent migration projects and, therefore, show less

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[2]We also considered the variable *geographical area of residence* (north-west, north-east, centre, and south), but it was not statistically significant.

[3]We have no information on where these household members are living.
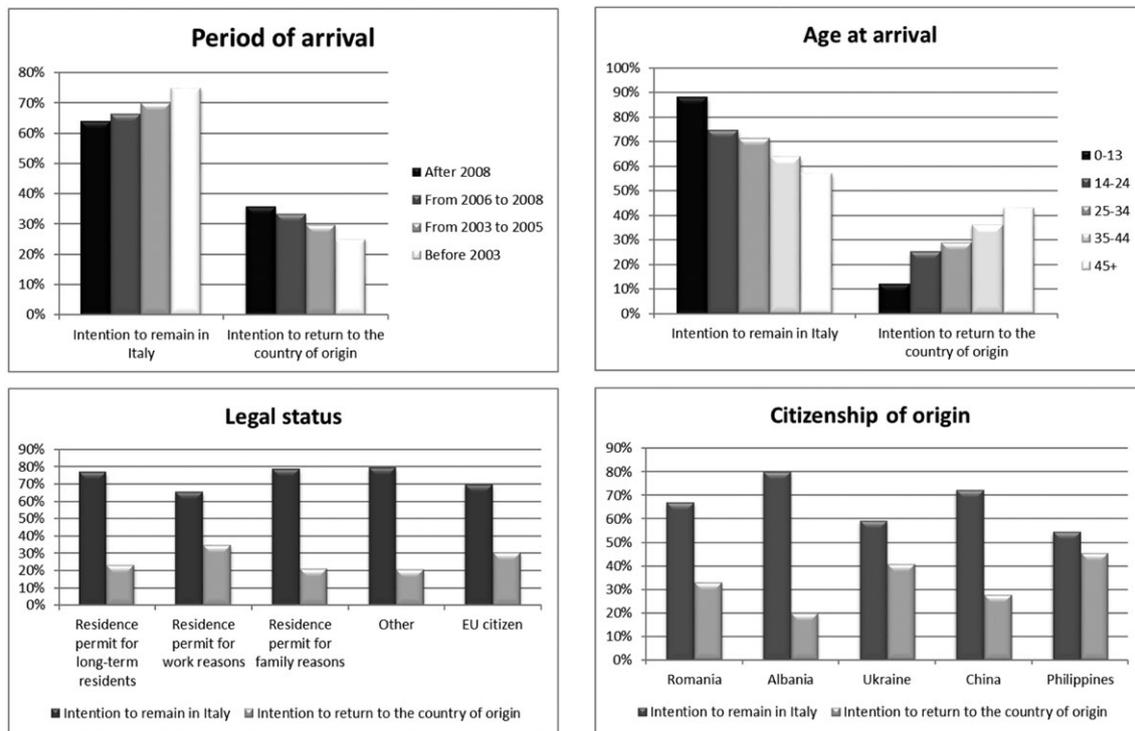
Source: Authors' elaboration of the survey on the "Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens", ISTAT

FIGURE 1 Contingency tables of migration intentions, N = 15,936, Italy, around 2011–2012

intention to return to the home country compared with migrants without such a status. To further understand this aspect, we have included the household structure variable, whose results are discussed in the paragraph concerning the factors linked to integration.

As far as the citizenship of origin is concerned, migrants coming from the Philippines, China, Central Latin America, sub-Saharan countries, and other Asian countries, together with migrants from Ukraine, Poland, and Romania, are more likely to intend to return, compared with other EU and other developed countries. Therefore, migrants from more recent EU member states and migrants from Ukraine, who are mostly economic migrants, are more likely to intend to return, compared with other EU and other developed countries. For instance, migrants with Ukraine and Philippine citizenship are middle-aged women, generally forerunners, with a residence permit for work reasons, employed in the care sector in Italy and with "transnational families" in the country of origin or in other countries of residence (Barbiano di Belgiojoso & Ortensi, 2018; Conti, Bonifazi, & Strozza, 2016). Unlike to women migrants with other citizenships of origin, who generally enter the country to rejoin their partners, with a residence permit for family reasons, and express low return intentions, they entered the country through the labour market channel, consider their experience in Italy limited to the achievement of economic goals and, therefore, present higher temporary settlement intentions (Barbiano di Belgiojoso & Terzera, 2018). This result seems to suggest that EU citizen status does not play a distinguishing role in the likelihood of intending to return; on the contrary, different migration histories, projects, and patterns—as revealed by the gradient resulting from the results for Philippines, China, and Central Latin America—

appear to be more significant for future migration intentions, as also found by Carling and Petterson (2004).

As regards the human capital variables, the occupational condition, with independent, unemployed, and inactive migrants being less likely to intend to return compared with dependent worker migrants, can be interpreted in the light of a "failure-success" perspective (e.g., Cassarino, 2004; De Haas, Fokkema, & Fassi Fihri, 2015). Within this perspective, return can be considered a sign of a completed mission abroad, as goals and targets have been achieved and a lengthier stay in the country of residence is no longer necessary (Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969). Educational attainment does not play a key role in the likelihood of intending to return, because migrants with a lower secondary school education are only slightly more likely to intend to return compared with migrants with a primary education, whereas migrants with upper secondary or higher education are not statistically significant.

As far as the immigration variables and, in particular, the period of arrival in Italy are concerned, we can notice that the more recent the period of arrival in Italy, the higher the likelihood of intending to return. This result suggests that the more time spent in the country of destination decreases the willingness to return, providing evidence of the role played by the process of integration in the hosting society that may deter migrants' intentions to go back to the home country (Anniste & Tammaru, 2014; De Haas & Fokkema, 2011). Moreover, this result strengthens the concept of the "myth of return" (Anwar, 1979; Gmelch, 1980; Carling, 2015), according to which return can be postponed for an indefinite period, and for many migrants "it remains just a projection into the future in an almost mythical form" (Boccagni, 2011, p. 471). In some cases, the return could never happen or only

TABLE 2 Individual factors shaping return migration intentions, N = 15,936, Italy, around 2011–2012

	Odds ratios
Demographic variables	
Age	0.987**
Males (ref. females)	1.125***
Marital status (ref. married)	
Single	0.993
Other status	1.210***
Citizenship of origin (ref. other EU and other developed countries)	
Romania	1.600***
Poland	1.615***
Other Eastern European countries (non-EU)	1.277
Albania	0.938
Ukraine	2.248***
Moldavia	1.110
Morocco	1.134
Other North African countries	1.326
Sub-Saharan African countries	1.985***
China	2.069***
Philippines	3.800***
Other Asian countries	1.841***
Central Latin American countries	2.024***
Human capital variables	
Occupational condition (ref. dependent)	
Independent worker	0.692***
Unemployed (looking for a job)	0.760***
Inactive	0.756***
Educational attainment (ref. primary education or lower)	
Lower secondary education school	1.119**
Upper secondary or higher	1.019
Immigration variables	
Period of arrival in Italy (ref. before 2003)	
From 2003 to 2005	1.137**
From 2006 to 2008	1.262**
After 2008	1.516***
Age at arrival (ref. 45+)	
0–13	0.322***
14–24	0.456***
25–34	0.528***
35–44	0.657***
Integration variables	
Legal status (ref. EU citizen status)	
Residence permit for long-term residents	0.893
Residence permit for work reasons	1.108
Residence permit for family reasons	0.826
Other	0.736**
Household structure (ref. household with children with all members living together in Italy)	
Couple living together in Italy	1.122
Couple not living together	2.185***
Household with children not living together	1.849***
One-person household	1.667***
Household with one Italian parent	0.582*
Feeling in Italy (ref. from not good to very bad)	

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	Odds ratios
Very good	0.259***
Good	0.553***
Perceived health (ref. from not good to very bad)	
Very good	0.696***
Good	0.870**
Transnationalism variables	
Frequency of return visits (ref. never)	
Various times during the year	2.336***
Every year	1.832***
Every 2–3 years	1.282**
Less frequently	0.911
Proud of being a foreigner (ref. not or not very proud)	
Sufficiently proud	1.656***
Very proud	2.934***
Watching news of the country of origin (ref. no)	1.105**

Source: Authors' elaboration of the survey on the "Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens", ISTAT

$*p < 0.10$; $**p < 0.05$; $***p < 0.01$.

be a short-term experience, in the form of a holiday in the homeland, as the results for the frequency of return visits will elucidate.

Similarly, migrants who entered Italy at a younger age are less likely to intend to return, compared with those who arrived at an older age. Migrants who arrive at a young age socialise in the country of residence and are more likely to be incorporated into and to intend to remain in the host society compared with migrants who migrated at an older age, who show more attachment to the country of origin and thus are more likely to intend to return (e.g., Rumbaut, 2004).

Coming to the factors linked to integration, contrarily to what depicted at descriptive level, legal status does not have a significant impact on return migration intentions, as also elucidated by other recent studies (Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2016; González-Ferrer, 2018). In this regard, it is important to highlight that we are dealing with regular migrants who generally face few residence challenges and have no particular problems in remaining in Italy. The consequence is that legal status becomes less important than other variables in determining return migration intentions.

As far as household structure is concerned, although households with one Italian parent are less likely to intend to return, couples not living together, households with children not living together, and one-person households are more likely to intend to return compared with households with children with all members living together in Italy. It means that a lack of family unity in Italy positively affects the likelihood of intending to return, for instance, to rejoin a partner or children left behind in the country of origin (Dustmann, 2003; Piotrowski & Tong, 2013).

How migrants feel in Italy, which can be interpreted as a measure of subjective integration similar to self-reported life satisfaction (OECD/EU, 2015), has a negative effect on the likelihood of intending to return to the home country. This means that the better migrants feel in Italy, the lower the likelihood is that they intend to return. This result finds evidence in Massey and Akresh (2006), according to whom more satisfied migrants are more likely to intend to remain in the host

country compared with less satisfied migrants. This is also in line with those studies (Anniste & Tammaru, 2014; De Haas & Fokkema, 2011) arguing that a positive process of integration—which strengthens the relationship with the country of residence (Guiraudon, 2014; Schneider & Maurice, 2010)—helps to decrease migrants' intentions to return. Finally, a worse perceived state of health has a positive effect on the likelihood of intending to return to the home country. This result may be related to age and economic factors linked to health and to the support and the care of relatives in the home country (Arenas, Goldman, Pebley, & Teruel, 2015; Barbiano di Belgiojoso & Ortensi, 2013; Giner-Monfort, Hall, & Betty, 2016). Moreover, it can hinder the migrant selection process, which singles out younger and healthier individuals for emigration (Loi, 2016). This selection results in the so-called "immigrant health paradox" (Jass & Massey, 2004). A similar, but opposite process of selection occurs in the destination country: migrants who have contracted a chronic disease in the destination country may decide to return to the country of origin (Giraudo, Bena, & Costa, 2017).

As far as the transnational variables are concerned, the higher the frequency of return visits the higher the likelihood of intending to return to the home country. According to previous research (e.g., De Haas & Fokkema, 2011; Fokkema, 2011; Model, 2016), migrants are likely to return home if they maintain strong ties with their former place of settlement and make frequent return visits, the latter being viewed as a form of "symbolic transnationalism" (Barber, 2017). Indeed, return visits can prepare the migrants' return to the home country, but they also suggest forms of pendulum migration, consisting of spending parts of the year in the country of origin and parts of the year in the country of destination (De Haas & Fokkema, 2010; Şenyürekli & Menjívar, 2012). In this regard, we have to be aware that return visits, which have been intensified through the advancement of technologies and affordability of travels' costs, can be part of the mobile and transnational life of migrants, despite of their intentions to return. In particular, return

visits help maintain kinship and friendship relations, strength the sense of ethno-national belonging, spread knowledge, and practices among non-migrants in the country of origin about the migration experience and the diaspora, and facilitate capital investments and bring remittances (Janta, Cohen, & Williams, 2015; King & Lulle, 2015; Wagner, 2015). In other words, they contribute to "maintain the myth of return as a vague future possibility" (Carling et al., 2015, p. 27) and to feed it. Indeed, it is also useful to highlight that return can be a choice not necessarily permanent and definitive; instead, it should be interpreted as part of the migration cycle, useful "to cultivate an individual relationship with the country of origin" (Jain, 2013, p. 910). Finally, migrants who are prouder of being a foreigner and who watch the news of the country of origin are more likely to intend to return, as previous studies have also shown (Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2016; Fokkema, 2011). To conclude, feelings, ideas, and information that are nurtured during the migration experience, even at a distance, and that link the country of origin and the country of residence, contribute to increasing migrants' attachment to the home country and, therefore, their intentions to return (Levitt, 2001; Portes, 1999; Sinatti, 2010).

5 | CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper has been to describe one aspect of the migration decision-making process, focusing our analysis on the return migration intentions. The study has confirmed the importance of specific contextual factors, and the complexity of the two-steps approach in defining the migration decision-making process. The intention to return is the result of the interplay of many individual factors, whose action is deeply influenced by the context.

In this framework, we have verified if previous research findings apply also to Italy, a new immigration country, whose migrants' return intentions have been little explored so far. We believe that the knowledge of migrants' future decisions, through the study of their intentions, acquires particular relevance because of the process of population ageing, in a country, whose total population will decline from 59.5 million in 2015 to 50.8 million in 2050, and the working age population will diminish from 35.2 million in 2015 to 23.5 million in 2050, according to the 2017 Revision of World Population Estimates and Projections produced by the United Nations (UN) without migration (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017). In a perspective of management of international migration and of its consequences for receiving countries, to have a set of information about the factors associated with the return intentions of regular migrants appears useful to policymakers. Indeed, they can employ it in both the direction of fostering the return of migrants to their country of origin or of promoting their permanent settlement and integration.

We have focused our attention on first-generation migrants: born abroad, holding a foreign citizenship, and having a regular status in Italy. These conditions are important when interpreting our research findings, because the histories, experiences, projects, and feelings of belonging and identification of these migrants with the hosting society affect their intentions and motivations to return in a different way

compared with second-generation or naturalised migrants (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 2004). In order to understand how individual factors shape return migration intentions, we have performed a binary logistic regression, using data from the survey on "Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens" carried out by ISTAT in 2011–2012.

The analysis shows interesting results that, on the one hand, confirm previous findings, thus allowing us to answer to our first research question about the applicability of them to the Italian context, and, on the other hand, provide a new contribution to the scholarly debate over staying or returning. The latter offers helpful tools to policy makers who may wish to retain their migrants, thus fostering their integration process, or to enable their return home. In particular, the results have shown that marital status is an important predictor of return migration intentions, with married migrants being less likely to return. Migrants coming from the Philippines, China, Central Latin America, sub-Saharan countries, and other Asian countries, together with migrants from Ukraine, Poland, and Romania are more likely to intend to return compared with other EU and other developed countries, albeit with different probabilities. This means that return migration intentions are related to migration patterns, histories, and motivations, which change according to the migrants' citizenships of origin, regardless of whether they are part of the EU. These results weaken the centrality attributed to EU citizen status in the definition of future migration behaviours (Domingo i Valls & Sabater Coll, 2013; González-Ferrer & Stanek, 2016; Ramos, 2017). We believe that this is an important policy consideration that should be taken into account when evaluating the long-term impact of migration and integration policies, especially among first-generation migrants. In other words, receiving countries' policy interventions should be adapted to migrants' communities of origin, in order to take into account their specific migration histories and projects (Sandu, Toth, & Tudor, 2018).

As far as occupational conditions are concerned, dependent workers are more likely to intend to return. The likelihood of intending to return appears to be linked to the accomplishment of the migration goals. For instance, dependent workers may intend to return because they are expected to have achieved their migration goals, and a longer stay in Italy is not necessary, whereas independent workers may intend to remain in order to continue to gain the results of the economic investment made in Italy. Finally, unemployed and inactive workers may intend to remain because they have not (yet) realised their migration projects, also because of the effect of the economic crisis, which has hit migrants more than natives (Venturini & Villosio, 2017). From a theoretical point of view, this result challenges the traditional "failure-success" dichotomy, which has deeply characterised empirical studies on return migration (Bonifazi & Heins, 1996).

Interesting and coherent findings emerge from the period of arrival in Italy and age at arrival, according to which the likelihood of intending to return decreases the longer the migration experience and the lower the age at migration. This proves that the processes of socialisation and integration in the country of residence can orient migrants' decisions on whether to remain or to return.

Also of relevance are the results for the integration variables, according to which more family unity, which allows for more

permanent residence in Italy, a better feeling in Italy, and better perceived health have a positive effect on the likelihood of intending to remain. However, both the immigration and integration variables may be particularly hindered by the selection process, which excludes those who have already left Italy. Finally, transnationalism is confirmed as an important factor in shaping migrants' return intentions, even with simple variables such as those used in our analysis. In particular, a higher frequency of return visits and the maintenance of ties with the country of origin strongly increase migrants' intentions to return. This result proves that return migration intentions are influenced by different processes: integration is a factor that tends to strengthen the ties with the country of residence, whereas transnationalism reinforces those with the country of origin. Therefore, it is a complex picture, in which individual choices are influenced by conflicting processes, whose outcomes are not always easy to schematize (Fokkema, 2011; Haas et al., 2015).

To conclude, the data from the survey on "Social Condition and Integration of Foreign Citizens in Italy" confirm both the complexity and interconnection of the factors associated with return migration intentions, which can be considered a good proxy for actual future migration behaviours. These factors should be considered by policymakers, especially when immigration assumes a crucial role in the receiving countries' labour market structure and population dynamics, such as in the case of Italy. Different migratory backgrounds, profiles, histories, and projects will require in-depth examination by scientists and policymakers, because the long-term ability and willingness of a host country to attract and retain migrants should be adapted accordingly. This will be crucial for Europe's social cohesion and economic competitiveness, considered the consequences of the process of population ageing and the economic uncertainty that many European countries are currently facing.

However, our research findings suggest that macro-level factors at origin and destination, such as economic, institutional, and cultural factors, need future exploration, in order to fully understand the mechanism at work in the decision-making process of staying or returning home. This will help to test, among other things, the extent to which European countries are so attractive for migrants, and countries of origin are becoming less appealing for a return (Ambrosini, 2017).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors confirm that the manuscript is original. No part of the manuscript has been published before, nor is any part of it under consideration for publication at another journal. There are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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