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Transnational Mobility of School Teachers in Italy

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Transnational Mobility of School Teachers in Italy

Agnese Desideri

Abstract. This article describes a striking paradox: On the one hand, European institutions recognize the importance of teacher transnational mobility for improving education and training systems and teachers' skills. On the other hand, there are administrative obstacles to the transnational mobility of school teachers in Europe and in Italy. A documentary research has been carried out on this topic. Three main themes will be discussed. Firstly the legislative apparatus regulating transnational mobility and also the recruitment of teachers in Italy will be illustrated. Secondly, statistical evidence on recognition and non-recognition of teaching qualifications in Europe and in Italy will be outlined. Thirdly, data on teachers' mobility in Europe and in Italy will be highlighted throughout the presentation of European teacher's mobility rates. The paper is based on theories that consider mobility as a unique opportunity to reflect on one's own teaching practices and to adapt to a new socio-cultural context and educational system. The article aims to be a useful contribution for scholars, policy makers, and practitioners.

Key-words: school teachers, Italy, transnational mobility, recognition of qualifications

Introduction

The aim of this article is to present data and a review of the literature on the subject of the transnational mobility of school teachers in Italy. It is an overview of what is known about the mobility opportunities for school teachers in Italy, both for outgoing and incoming teachers.

The text will refer to European mobility programs as well as to autonomous mobility undertaken by individuals. Recently, pedagogical and sociological literature has focused more on the transnational mobility of students and university teachers (Amadasi, 2019; Anderson et al., 2019; Larsen, 2020; Terhart, 2022) than on the mobility of primary and secondary school teachers. Therefore, research on this topic, not only on teachers who participate in European mobility programs but also on teachers who move to Italy, is still underrepresented in Italy. The European Council Resolution (2022/C-167/02) on European cooperation in education and training towards the ‘European Education Area and beyond’ (2021-2030) identifies “lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all”, including teachers and teacher trainers (and not just students), as its second strategic priority. Its third strategic priority is ‘Enhancing competences and motivation in the teaching profession’.

In 2008, the European Parliament adopted a recommendation on *transnational mobility* in education and training to improve the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in Europe. Transnational European mobility enables teachers to improve their skills in order to offer students a high quality pedagogical and didactic proposal (European Parliament, 2008).

The recent debate on the role of education as a driver of *economic development* has also prompted a re-evaluation of the quality of the educational process (Hanushek & Woessman, 2008).

The issue is also relevant because, according to the European database of regulated professions, secondary school teachers have been the third most mobile group of professionals in Europe in 2024, after doctors and nurses (European Commission, 2024).¹

In many European countries, including Italy, teaching is a “regulated profession”. In order to work as a teacher candidates have to ask public administrations to recognize their experience and qualifications as equivalent (Department of European Affairs, Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers 2024; Terhart, 2022).

As highlighted by the European Court of Auditors, the recognition of professional qualifications in the EU is an essential mechanism to facilitate the free mobility of professionals in the European area. However, recogni-

¹ European Database of regulated professions. (2024). Retrieved at: <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regprof/statistics/establishment/ranking> October 2024.

tion is used sparsely and often inconsistently by public administrations (European Court of Auditors, 2024).²

This paper outlines European and national legislation on teacher mobility, training and recruitment pathways in Italy, and the number of foreign diplomas recognized in Italy, the rate of teacher mobility in Italy and Europe.

Hence, research questions are:

1. Why is transnational mobility important from a sociological, pedagogical and economic point of view?
2. a. What are the legal frameworks in Europe and Italy for recognizing professional qualifications for teaching?
b. And what is the statistical evidence of recognition of teaching professional titles in Italy?
3. a. What is the legal framework regulating teachers training and recruitment systems in Italy?
b. Who can become a tenured teacher in Italy, and when?
4. What is the statistical evidence of teacher mobility (of participants in European mobility programs) in Italy and in Europe?

As mentioned above, the paper highlights a striking paradox: the recognition by the European institutions of the value of teacher mobility for improving education and training systems and teacher competences, and on the other hand the numerous administrative constraints that hinder the transnational mobility of school teachers in Europe and Italy.

Methodology

The methodology consists of documentary *desk* research, which is based on four main types of documents and texts that have been collected and analyzed, namely:

1. Laws regulating the recognition of teaching qualifications in Europe and in Italy, especially the European Directive 2005/36/EC established by the European Commission as well as the Italian transposition of the latter (cf. Legislative Decree n. 206/2007).
2. Gray literature, e.g. reports published by *international organizations* OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), European Court of Auditors, Eurydice (Education information network); information and data retrieved on the following websites: ENIC (European Network of Information Centers).

The reports published by *national organizations* such as, ISTAT (National Institute of Statistics), CIMEA (Academic Mobility Equivalences Information

² European Court of Auditors. (2024). Retrieved at: <https://www.eca.europa.eu/it/publications?ref=SR-2024-10> September 2024.

Centre), the Department for European Affairs afferent to the Presidency of the Council of Italian Ministers.

3. Scientific literature (monographs, anthologies and articles in scientific journals) related to the topic of the paper.

A majority of articles appeared in the subject category of Education and Educational Research, including Teaching and Teacher Education, Education Policy & Politics, Sociology of Education.

4. Available open data such as data collected by: ISTAT (among them the database dedicated to the Permanent Population Census with an in-depth look at foreigners, database 2021), OECD data, European Database of Regulated Professions.

Documentary research was carried out from August 2024 to October 2024 using two different databases: Google scholar and Scopus. The following keywords were used: “transnational mobility school teachers in Europe”, “transnational mobility school teachers in Italy”, “migrant teachers” and “international teachers”.

Theoretical framework

Although there is widespread agreement on the contribution of ‘migrant teachers’ in providing students with the behaviors, norms and values that will enable them to live in a diverse society. However, this issue is rarely addressed by policy makers (Gutman et al., 2023).

Ferlazzo’s study (2018) argued that encounters between teachers and students in the educational arena have a positive effect on the majority group’s perception of the minority group (to which the teacher belongs). Moreover, other findings suggest that:

«[Even if] the conditions on which it depends that all students feel comfortable (or that this is not at the expense of the majority pupils) still need to be clarified. (Strasser & Steber, 2010, p. 117 in Akbaba, 2017, author’s translation) [...]. Finding suggest that teachers with a migrant background have a more realistic performance assessment of the performance of pupils whose family backgrounds and experiences of difference they can partly understand themselves (Akbaba, 2017, p.117 author’s translation).

Moreover, Davids (2018) observed that students who are not exposed to such diversity in their education will find it difficult in the future to meet the challenges of global citizenship and to acquire the verbal skills required today in most corporations.

Soong (2018) explores the role of *transnational teachers* in democratic education by examining their role in the relationship between education and

access to sociocultural opportunities. Her study refers to Australian teachers. As shown by Collins and Reid (2011) Australia is a traditional host country for education professionals that are hired to fill gaps in the Australian teacher labor market.

Soong observed that «transnational teachers are powerful agents of cultural and social change, effecting transformation as border crossers.» (Soong, 2018, p.410). There are three kinds of potential transformations that transnational teachers can play, critical to the education for democracy: 1. Generating diversity as a powerful asset for learning; 2. Cultivating transnational civic engagement; 3. Advancing transnational aspirations of both teachers and students.

In a similar vein, another significant contribution is evident in the work of Levitt and Schiller (2004). Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1980), the authors examine the role of actors operating in transnational contexts. As they show, Bourdieu's theory is particularly interesting because:

«“Ways of belonging” refers to practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group [...]. Individuals within transnational social fields combine ways of being and ways of belonging differently in specific contexts. One person might have many social contacts with people in their country of origin but not identify at all as belonging to their homeland. They are engaged in transnational ways of being but not belonging.» (Levitt & Schiller, 2004, pp.1010-1011).

Hence, transnational mobility offers teachers a unique opportunity to adjust to a new socio-cultural context (including a different education system) and reflect and eventually modify their own teaching practices. This implies openness to new ways of thinking and practicing the teaching profession not necessarily related to their country of origin.

Thus, Bourdieu's theory gives insights that differ from previous research into the democratic education practices of transnational teachers (Terhart, 2022).

As Walsh et al. (2011) point out, research on this topic remains limited, as transnational teachers' linguistic, cultural and social diversities are often viewed as deficits rather than benefits for education in the host country.

Henceforth, the focus shall be on the difficulties encountered by migrating teachers in host countries.

Bense's review (2016) points out that *migrant teachers* are typically only granted temporary working visas and are therefore unable to enjoy the security of tenure or permanent positions. They are also more likely to be employed in the private teaching sector, where their working conditions are often less favorable. In addition, many migrant teachers do a considerable

amount of unpaid and voluntary work in schools in the hope of securing a teaching position.

More recent studies confirm that sometimes to be migrant teachers is a source of distress, feelings of alienation and isolation (Gindi & Ron, 2023; Goltsev et al.; 2023 Manik, 2023).

A significant challenge that educators may face in host countries pertains to the recognition of prior professional qualifications and experience (Rosen & Lengyel, 2023).

In numerous countries, including Australia, bureaucracy is characterized by protracted and costly procedures (Collins & Reid, 2012). A similar phenomenon has been observed in Canada. Teachers in Canada have expressed feelings of exhaustion, disheartenment, anger, and at times, a sense of powerlessness, stemming from the rigidity of administrative procedures (Walsh et al., 2011).

As mentioned before, school teachers applying to teach in a European country are often required to pass a mandatory aptitude test and an adaptation period before being appointed to a position. Several studies have documented migrant teachers' difficult experiences with the mandatory requalification process undertaken in European countries, which often involves additional course work and/or teaching practice (Knobloch, 2023; Terhart, 2022).

A substantial number of studies have concluded that the implementation of a preparatory program is instrumental in facilitating the integration of teachers into their respective schools (Manik, 2023; Shajimon et al., 2019).

These preparatory programs are considered a mechanism for:

«The integration of migrant teachers, as this is critical to their sense of belonging in host schools. Socializing teachers into the profession in both countries is valuable in ensuring that they understand the nature of their work and the culture in host schools.» (Manik, 2023, para 181).

The following paragraph will illustrate how the transnational mobility of teachers is also promoted by international and European institutions. This is not only to integrate the recent debate on the role of education as a driver of economic development, but also to improve didactic proposals on content and on best practices.

The international and legal framework that “facilitates” teacher mobility in Europe

In April 2002 the OECD Education Committee launched the following project 'Activity Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers'. This was a collaborative project to assist governments design and imple-

ment teacher policies to improve teaching and learning in schools. It was concluded in June 2005 with the publication of the final synthesis report. In 2012, policy recommendations for the development of teacher mobility were as follows:

«Ensure mutual recognition of teaching qualifications and the portability of entitlements to leave and retirement benefits in countries with different educational jurisdictions, e.g. federal systems.» (OECD, 2012a).

The OECD policy recommendations also highlighted the relevant issue that school systems often respond to teacher shortages in the short term in ways that raise concerns about the quality of teaching and learning:

«[School systems] ensure that classrooms have teachers by some combination of: lowering qualification requirements for entry to the profession, assigning teachers to teach in subject areas in which they are not fully qualified, increasing the number of classes that teachers are allocated, increasing class sizes. [...] Policies aimed at attracting and retaining effective teachers need to recruit *competent people* into the profession, and provide support and incentives for professional development and on-going high performance.» (OECD, 2012b).

The 2005/36/EC Directive³ ratified by the European Commission establishes guidelines for the recognition of professional qualifications within the European Union. The Italian transposition of the EU directive is the legislative Decree n. 206/2007.⁴

As mentioned above, in Europe, the profession of primary and secondary school teachers requires possession of a specific educational or professional qualification. Anyone wishing to practice “regulated” profession in a country other than the one in which they obtained their qualification or diploma must apply to public authorities for recognition of their experience and qualifications. The Italian public authorities are the Ministry of Education and Merit, *Ministero dell’Istruzione e del Merito* (MIM)⁵ and also Universities (CIMEA, 2024).⁶

³ European Commission. (2005). Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications. Retrieved at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2005/36/oj> 10 October 2024.

⁴ Legislative Decree 9 novembre 2007, n. 206 Attuazione della direttiva 2005/36/CE relativa al riconoscimento delle qualifiche professionali, nonché della direttiva 2006/100/CE che adegua determinate direttive sulla libera circolazione delle persone a seguito dell’adesione di Bulgaria e Romania. Retrieved at: <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:-decreto.legislativo:2007-11-24;206!vig=> 26 October 2024.

⁵ Foreign diplomas must be recognized as equivalent (to the Italian diplomas) by the Italian Ministry of Education and Merit (MIM), in accordance with Italian legislation (art. 1 28-quinquies of law no. 15/2022, which amended alinea 3 of article 38 of legislative decree no. 165 of 30 March 2001).

⁶ CIMEA. (2024). Pagina Procedure per il riconoscimento dei titoli, Retrieved at: <https://>

In 2022, 5.868 applications to recognize professional qualifications were submitted to the Italian Public Administration. Of these, almost half (46.9 %) were successful, leading to 2.755 new “qualifications” and 4.1% were negative decisions. A significant proportion of the applications submitted, around 49 % (2.873 cases) were classified as “neutral decisions”. Neutral decisions concern applications that are still under consideration or in the process of being finalized (in this particular case, the administration may impose “compensatory measures” such as an adaptation period of up to three years or an aptitude test if there are significant differences between the different educational pathways), as well as decisions against which an appeal has been lodged (Department of European Affairs, Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers, 2024).

The majority of applications (over 59.3%) come from Romania and the most requested profession was by far secondary school teacher. In fact, fifty-four per cent of applications were for secondary school teaching. It can therefore be observed that “neutral decisions” are more likely to affect the teaching profession than other professions. To be eligible for substitution in public schools and the national competition, teachers must be considered *qualified teachers*.

This administrative procedure of recognition can last from at least four months (for the comparative evaluation between the foreign and Italian educational and professional pathways) to several years if “compensatory measures” are required.⁷

It is also possible to apply for equivalence of the degree at Italian universities, which will compare the curriculum obtained abroad with the Italian one. There are three possible outcomes: 1. the whole course may be accredited, 2. certain examinations may be required, or 3. accreditation may be refused altogether.

Even in this case, it may take several months or years to obtain equivalence. It depends on the recognition process (cf. Art. 2 Law 148/2002⁸ and Art. 1 paragraph 28-quinquies Law 15/2022⁹).

Thus, the opportunities to work as a teacher with a foreign qualification are also limited by the specific structure of the Italian teacher training and recruitment system, which will be described in the next paragraph.

www.cimea.it/pagina-procedure-riconoscimento-titoli, 9 October 2024.

⁷ Il fatto quotidiano. (2024). Il Miur ‘soccombente’ sul riconoscimento dei titoli esteri: un paradosso pagato da tutti noi. Retrieved at: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2024/03/04/il-miur-soccombente-sul-riconoscimento-dei-titoli-esteri-un-paradosso-pagato-da-tutti-noi/7460679/> March 2024.

⁸ Law 148/2002 Retrieved at: <https://www.normattiva.it/uri-res/N2Ls?urn:nir:stato:legge:2002-07-11;148> 9 October 2024.

⁹ CIMEA, Pagina procedure riconoscimento dei titoli. Retrieved at: <https://www.cimea.it/pagina-procedure-riconoscimento-titoli>. 9 October 2024.

The Italian teacher training and recruitment system

In Italy, recruitment criteria have varied greatly in the last few years and significant changes are still under way (Cammelli et al. 2011).

To work as *primary school teacher* candidates need to obtain a five-years university diploma called ‘Scienze della formazione primaria’ (training of teachers for primary education). This curriculum is considered *qualifying*, meaning that upon its completion, individuals can work as teachers or substitute teachers in public schools and enter in the national competition in order to become a civil servant.

Over the last twenty years, there have been many changes in the qualification criteria for primary school teachers. Until 2000, it was sufficient to have completed a diploma of secondary education.¹⁰

However, those wishing to become *secondary school teachers* must have completed a five-year university degree and subject-specific exams as part of their master’s program.

To be considered as a “qualified secondary education teacher” candidates need to attend practical training in a specialized teacher-training seminar. This training was introduced on 4 August 2023¹¹ and became active, in most universities, only from July 2024. This university degree provides a further paid course of 60 ECTS¹² that enables secondary school teachers to participate in the national competition. All candidates, both those with a primary teachers’ five-years university degree as well as those with a master’s degree and also the *qualifying course* to teach in secondary degree, are placed in a list of qualified teachers.

«Tenured positions were allocated to those who ranked highly [in that list]. To be hired as temporary teachers, graduates had to be enrolled and high-ranking in a general list, as well as in a list managed at school level (“*graduatoria provinciale*” and “*graduatoria della scuola*”) that attach substantial weight to seniority acquired through temporary contracts.»(OECD, 2003, pp. 72–75 in Cammelli et al. 2011, p. 490).

¹⁰ Departmental decree to get access to the last national competition called out on 06.12.2023. Retrieved at: [https://www.mim.gov.it/documents/20182/7414469/m_pi.AOODPIT.REGISTRO+DECRETI+DIPARTIMENTALI\(R\).0002576.06-12-2023+\(1\).pdf/db2872c0-55e5-8195-1515-9064c74f5af5?version=1.0&t=1702290108465](https://www.mim.gov.it/documents/20182/7414469/m_pi.AOODPIT.REGISTRO+DECRETI+DIPARTIMENTALI(R).0002576.06-12-2023+(1).pdf/db2872c0-55e5-8195-1515-9064c74f5af5?version=1.0&t=1702290108465).

¹¹ It was introduced on 4 August 2023 published on 25 September in the Official Gazette no. 224 (DPCM/224/2024).

¹² The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. Is a tool of the European Higher Education Area for making studies and courses more transparent. Retrieved at: [https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system#:~:text=The%20European%20Credit%20Transfer%20and%20Accumulation%20System%20\(ECTS\)%20is%20a,studies%20and%20courses%20more%20transparent.](https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/inclusive-and-connected-higher-education/european-credit-transfer-and-accumulation-system#:~:text=The%20European%20Credit%20Transfer%20and%20Accumulation%20System%20(ECTS)%20is%20a,studies%20and%20courses%20more%20transparent.) October 2024.

It is therefore evident that the process of becoming a teacher in Italy is a lengthy and circuitous one. It implies a considerable investment in time and money since both the five years university cursus and, only for secondary school teachers the “qualifying course”, are paid for. This means that in Italy entry into the teaching profession is dependent on economic means. This is clearly shown in the study by Cammelli et al. (2011) using AlmaLaurea data from 2009 (Consorzio Interuniversitario AlmaLaurea, 2009):

«The analysis of graduates’ social and economic background shows that the probability of continuing one’s studies [to become a teacher] beyond compulsory school largely depends on family background. This confirms the literature that underscores that education does not always favor social mobility, especially in Italy. Even though young people from socially and culturally advantaged families are overrepresented among university graduates, today, 72% are the first in their family to obtain a degree. [...]. If these graduates tend to come from less educated families, 21% have at least one university-trained parent, against 26% for non-teachers. Amongst pre and primary school teachers, only 12% have a university-educated parent [...]. Indeed, those who follow degree courses that are more oriented towards teaching (letters, sciences, languages) come from the most advantaged families.» (Cammelli et al. 2011, p.493).

The Italian training and recruiting system are not only expensive but also exasperating. Long waiting times and an absence of transparent pathways to tenure have been identified as contributing factors to adverse selection. Many graduates on fixed-term contracts who have better employment opportunities choose to pursue alternative career paths. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent among mathematics graduates, who are readily attracted to opportunities in the financial sector. Consequently, the majority of mathematics teachers in Italian schools possess a degree in science or biology (European Commission, 2023).

Moreover, all the mentioned aspects prevent disadvantaged families from entering the profession. Therefore, the Italian training and recruitment system is far from being *democratic*. As a result, this system reproduces “class relations” and has some similarities with what Bourdieu and Passeron (1970) described in France in the 1960s.¹³

The concept of “social reproduction” within the Italian teaching system is evident in the unequal access to certain curricula on the basis of students’ backgrounds, as well as in the unequal opportunities to pursue a teaching career depending on the type of teaching.

¹³ Further studies have shown that in France destinations studies remain relatively stable in the 1980s and 1990s (Duru-Bellat et al., 2008; Reimer & Pollak, 2010; Triventi et al., 2017).

A long way through precariousness for Italian teachers as well as for foreign teachers

Teachers in Italy have to wait an average of ten years for a permanent post (Barbieri et al., 2008).

The OECD report (2018) on ‘Teachers and teaching conditions’ (TALIS survey on 2018) highlights that Italy has one of the highest proportions of teachers employed on fixed-term contracts (25.3%, rank 4/50). In addition:

«The Italian education system is faced with a shortage of qualified teachers, fueling a steady increase in the number of temporary contracts. In recent years, only half of the vacant posts available at the start of each school year could be filled with permanent appointments. This is due to a lack of candidates with the required qualifications in some subjects. [“Shortages are most acute in STEM subjects and foreign languages and learning support and are concentrated in the north of the country. Conversely, eligible teachers waiting to be recruited tend to be qualified in humanities subjects and reside in the south of the country” (Gavosto, 2022)]. In the school year 2021/2022, out 125 000 available posts, only 73 000 could be filled with teachers on a permanent contract. In the same year, the number of substitute teachers on temporary contracts reached 225 000, or almost a quarter of the total, up from 135 000 in the school year 2017/2018. Most temporary teachers have no automatic right to fill the same post the following school year. Consequently, the turnover rate is high, which negatively impacts teaching continuity.» (European Commission, 2023).¹⁴

The Italian case is now structural and “endemic”: the turnover of teachers follows one another for years, months, if not, in the worst cases, weeks, affecting the students’ learning results and, ultimately, their right to education itself (Magni, 2024).

In addition to this, a high proportion of teachers in Italy are approaching retirement age, which threatens to exacerbate existing shortages. In 2022, more than a third of school teachers were aged 55 or older and therefore likely to retire within the next 10 years. More than half of all teachers were over 50, while only 6.5% were under 35.

«The different age structure within each level of education leads to a different level of shortage, which cannot be compensated across levels, as the transition from one level of education to another requires the acquisition of a specific qualification.» (European Commission, 2023, p.3)

¹⁴ European Commission. (2023). Education and Training Monitor 2023, Retrieved at: <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2023/en/country-reports/italy.html> 29 October 2024.

The OECD's policy recommendations (OECD, 2012b) are therefore extremely valuable when considering the Italian case. Education policies need to attract and retain effective teachers and attract competent people into the profession.

Improving the process of recognition of teaching qualifications acquired abroad could be one way of addressing the difficulties described above. This could lower the average age. It could fill "empty" teaching posts and address the large number of retirements in the coming years.

As literature review shows, another positive effect is that teachers with foreign-acquired qualifications could not only improve language learning (especially in the teaching of foreign languages) but also provide a multicultural perspective useful for teaching students with a migratory background. In fact, in Italy, 35% of teachers work in schools where at least 10% of the students have a migrant background (OECD average 17%) (OECD, 2018). Moreover, some findings suggest that these competent and competitive teachers could train equally competitive students to cope with an increasingly international and globalized labor market (Akbaba, 2017; Davids, 2018; Soong, 2018).

Knowledge of a foreign language, in addition to Italian, can improve a candidate's position on the list of qualified teachers and in national competitions (MIM decree n.62, 10 mars 2022).¹⁵For this reason, teachers who are proficient in more languages should be valuable candidates for the Italian education system.

Teachers holding foreign diplomas are required to provide an Italian language certificate to enter the teaching profession.¹⁶ Once the language skills of these teachers have been verified, their contribution to the transfer of knowledge should prove beneficial to both students and colleagues.

However, as previously outlined, the administrative recognition procedures are lengthy, often spanning multiple months or even years.

There are some cases where the procedures for recognition of diplomas have been speeded up. Following Recommendation 2022/554, the European Commission, in collaboration with the Ukrainian authorities, has made available to member States tools to help Ukrainian citizens get their qualification recognized, as soon as possible (ENIC-NARIC, 2023).¹⁷

¹⁵ MIM decree 10 March 2022, n. 62, on "Requirements for the evaluation and recognition of the validity of certificates of language-communication skills in foreign languages of school staff".

¹⁶ Language level C1 (European Framework for Language Certification) is required for teaching in the pre-primary school and for teaching technical and scientific subjects, while language level C2 is required for teaching in primary schools and for the humanities (Retrieved at MIM, <https://www.mim.gov.it/titoli-esteri> October 2024).

¹⁷ Department for European Affairs. Retrieved at: <https://www.affarieuropei.gov.it/en/activity/recognition-of-professional-qualifications/cittadini-ucraini/October 2024>.

In addition to Ukrainian citizens who benefit from the rights reserved for refugee citizens, two other countries stand out in the positive recognition process in Italy. These are Romania with 3.482 successful cases (59.3%) and Spain with 971 successful cases (16.5%). This does not necessarily imply that the applicant's nationality is the same as the country from which the request originates. Many professionals who have applied to the Italian authorities for recognition of their Italian-acquired title are not Romanian or Spanish nationals (Department of European Affairs, Italian Presidency of Council of Ministries, 2024).

According to the number of ministerial decrees issued last year,¹⁸ the most recognized titles are those from Ukraine, Romania and Spain. It would be interesting to investigate further why qualifications obtained in these countries are more widely recognized in Italy. According to the press releases, it can be assumed that the Council of State's 2022 decisions regarding appeals by citizens with Spanish and Romanian diplomas may have encouraged the MIM to recognize Romanian and Spanish diplomas more easily.¹⁹

In 2021, the total number of foreign nationals in Italy who have obtained a university degree was 537.829 (ISTAT, 2021).²⁰ That means that it is likely that there are other nationalities in possession of diplomas that are not recognized in Italy.

These data are partial since, as shown above, nationality does not necessarily coincide with the country in which the qualification was obtained. Unfortunately, it does not say in which country the diploma was obtained or whether the diploma was recognized or not.

However, having a foreign nationality tends to mean that the degree was obtained elsewhere and not necessarily in Italy. This means: If the qualification is not recognized, this group will not have access to their profession.

Teachers' mobility in Europe

Since the mid-1990s, mobility has been a key part of European cooperation in education and training, with more resources being allocated to it (Eurydice report, 2009, cap.3).

¹⁸ MIM. (2024.) Archive publication decrees recognition. Retrieved at <https://www.mim.gov.it/archivio-pubblicazione-decreti-riconoscimento> 23 October 2024.

¹⁹ FLCGIL. (2022). Judgment of the Council of State. Retrieved at: <https://m.flcgil.it/files/pdf/20230104/sentenza-consiglio-di-stato-22-del-29-dicembre-2022-titoli-abilitazione-esteri.pdf>, 7 October 2024.

²⁰ ISTAT. (2021). Permanent Population Census with an in-depth look at foreigners, database 2021, Retrieved at: https://esploradati.censimentopopolazione.istat.it/databrowser/#/it/censtest/categories/APPR/MIGR_BCK/MIGR_EDUC/IT1,DF_DCSS_MIGR_BACKG_TV_13_COM,1.0 10 October 2024.

The aim of the most recent European mobility program for students and staff (Erasmus+ 2021-2024 including the European Union Youth Strategy and the European Union Work Plan for Sport) is to promote *learning mobility* of individuals and groups. These programs also promote cooperation, quality, inclusion and equity, excellence, creativity and innovation at the level of organizations and policies in the field of education and training. European programs consider it important to increase the intensity and scale of mobility of school staff for several reasons:

«It is unique to exchange views about their experiences of national curricula, student assessment, use of pedagogical tools, autonomy, and working conditions with colleagues abroad (European Commission, 2012). Transnational mobility may also help teachers overcome skepticism towards other teaching methods or strategies, by providing them with a direct opportunity to observe the impact of these strategies on students. This experience may, in turn, motivate them to gain fresh skills and participate in continuing professional development (European Parliament, 2008) [...]. Students may also benefit from transnational teacher mobility, as teachers are motivated to improve their teaching style and impart a more European or international dimension to learning at school (Education Exchanges Support Foundation, 2017). Increased teacher's openness to Europe resulting from mobility can be of particular importance to students unable to travel abroad on their own (European Parliament, 2008).» (Eurydice Report, 2009, Chap 5, p. 127).

Comparing data from 2013 and 2018 TALIS survey, it is possible to notice that teacher mobility (both outgoing and incoming) has increased over the years in all European countries.

«In 2018, a minority of teachers within the EU (40.9 %) had been abroad at least once for professional purposes during their career, as a student, or both.» (Eurydice report, 2021, p. 14).

Instead, transnational mobility of in-service teachers is «below the EU level in Belgium (French and Flemish Communities), Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Malta, Slovakia, the United Kingdom (England) and Turkey» (Ivi, p.21).

In Italy, teachers who have been abroad “solely as students” were 14%, those who have been abroad as both “students and teachers” were 14.6%. In the end, those who have been abroad “solely as teachers” were 9.4%. Therefore, there is a big difference between those who participate in exchange programs as students and those who participate as professionals. As a result, Italy has one of the lowest rates of transnational career mobility for teachers, below EU levels.

In 2018, 13.3% of mobile teachers went abroad for professional purposes with the support of a mobility program, and 7.9% participated in national

or regional mobility programs (compared to the EU average of 22.5% and 15.0%).

Thus, Eurydice report's authors (2021) conclude that:

«Reinforcing student teacher mobility is therefore important not only due to the added value this experience brings to young people but also because [as data shown] mobility as a student is associated with being mobile later as a teacher [...]. "The main obstacles to student teacher mobility include *financial and recognition issues*" (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019 and 2020). For practicing teachers, obstacles include family responsibilities and difficulties in organizing substitute teachers (European Commission, 2012). In addition, a lack of language skills is also a cross-cutting issue.» (Ivi, p. 134).

Discussion

The transnational mobility of teachers is an important phenomenon from a sociological, pedagogical and economic point of view for several reasons. From a sociological and pedagogical point of view, transnational mobility is an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices and also to adjust to a new socio-cultural context and educational system. All this enriches teachers and makes them more competent to work with multicultural groups of students. Migrant or international teachers could also provide students with the behaviors, norms and values that will enable them to live in a diverse society.

From an economic point of view, migrant teachers could also train competitive students to cope with an increasingly international and competitive labor market.

Transnational mobility is also important in order to meet the numerous and urgent needs for qualified staff in education in Italy and all over the world. In particular in Italy, it would be useful to have access to a qualified workforce (also qualified elsewhere at no cost to the nation) for substitution purposes, especially in some disciplinary areas (such as STEM or primary education). Results show that in Italy, as in some other countries, it is becoming increasingly urgent and necessary to ensure the mutual recognition of teaching qualifications. Non-recognition is described as one of the main difficulties migrant teachers face in host countries.

Looking at the teachers' mobility rates in Italy through European mobility programs and outside the programs, it emerges that Italy is, except in specific cases, a hostile country to non-national educational professionals.

Some suggestions for policy makers are the European Directive 2005/36/EC should be implemented in Italy in a more fluid and less rigid way. On the other hand, the participation of teachers working in Italy in European mo-

bility programs should also be encouraged. Lastly, as suggested by scientific literature, “preparatory programs” should be introduced as an instrument that facilitates the integration of teachers into their respective schools (Manik, 2023; Shajimon et al. 2019).

The current recruitment system favors “exceptions” (such as the treatment ensured to Ukrainian refugees or those who hold a Spanish and Romanian diplomas). As a result, access to the teaching profession in Italy is far from democratic and is also characterized by strong socio-economic and geographical inequalities. Thus, the Italian government seems to promote a homogeneous class of teachers in terms of socio-economic and geographical origins.

Teachers are required to obtain Italian diplomas; diplomas obtained at state, para-state, private, and telematic universities are preferred over diplomas obtained at state or private foreign universities. In the end, it can be said that a “reproduction of a teaching class with specific characteristics” is underway.

One of the limitations of this discussion is that the article does not provide exhaustive data on the number of foreign diplomas recognized and not recognized by the MIM and by universities for teaching purposes. This is because such data are not public.

Conclusions

In the end, the Italian national economy would benefit from a supplementary qualified labor force. Furthermore, there could be a clear benefit to be gained from the application of transnational pedagogical techniques in the Italian context. Staff who are able to demonstrate an aptitude for intercultural and linguistic adaptation and exchange would be of significant benefit to both colleagues and students alike.

Greater “internationalization” would not only benefit the country in combating the notorious “brain drain” phenomenon but could also prevent the illegal acquisition of national university degrees.

Moreover, a study published in 2017 by the Bertelsmann Stiftung predicts an enormous shortage of teachers all over the world in 2030, with demographic developments leading to a requirement for 28.100 additional classes and thus around 42.800 additional full-time teachers in 2030 (Voigt & Engel, 2023).

This huge increase in the number of professionals needed in the education sector will affect Italy and the whole world. A smoother and simpler recognition process could address the long-standing shortage of school teachers.

A few final reflections: what kind of teacher does the Italian government want to train today? A teacher who must have an Italian diploma and who

chases points by acquiring linguistic and computer skills in order to improve his or her ranking? Or a teacher who decides to work in Italy, while having to deal with all kinds of challenges encountered in a host country? As a result, which kind of students does the Italian government wish to train? Students capable of facing national and international competition or students struggling with precariousness without having the necessary tools to deal with it?

This article encourages scholars to explore these aspects further.

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