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CITE THIS WORK

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The issue of the mobility of young Italian graduates abroad has gained increasing attention, particularly in light of the relatively low share of tertiary-educated youth compared to other European countries and the growing negative migration balance between those leaving Italy and those returning.
Previous country-specific surveys on the migration patterns of young graduates have identified the disparity in entry-level wages between Italy and other European countries as the primary driver of the decision to seek employment abroad.
To broaden this perspective, we designed an ad hoc survey aimed at capturing the full range of motivations that lead young graduates—especially in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines—to pursue work opportunities abroad. In particular, the survey focuses on the job characteristics they seek, those satisfied by their current occupation abroad, and the factors that may influence their decision to return to Italy.
The responses of the participants provide useful insights into how to strengthen relationships between universities and firms during tertiary education, which currently remain limited. They also offer a structured assessment of workplace characteristics that firms can draw upon to facilitate the entry of younger generations into the labor market, improve onboarding processes and workplace climate, and support more effective professional development paths for graduates.

Survey on young Veneto graduates emigrating abroad

Authors: Anna Maria Moressa, Serena Fumagalli, Giovanni Foresti

Abstract

The issue of the mobility of young Italian graduates abroad has become of particular interest in the light of the scarcity of young people with tertiary education qualifications compared to European competitors and the growing negative migration balances recorded in Italy, between young people who move their residence abroad and those who return. Previous country-specific surveys investigating the migration characteristics of young individuals with tertiary education qualifications identified the disparity in entry-level wages between Italy and other European countries as the primary factor influencing their decision to seek employment abroad. In order to expand this perspective, we designed an ad hoc survey capable of bringing together all the motivations that drive young graduates, especially in the Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM) disciplines, to seek work abroad, focusing on the characteristics sought in the job, those satisfied by the current occupation found abroad and the factors that could influence the decision to return to Italy. The answers of the young people interviewed provide some hints for improving the opportunities for relations between companies and universities throughout their tertiary education, which are still limited, and give a value scale of the characteristics of the workplace that entrepreneurs can draw inspiration from in order to facilitate the entry of the younger generations in their companies, with a view to improving onboarding processes and workplace climate and identifying personal paths for the professional development of graduates.

KEYWORDS: graduates, working abroad, career development, wage differentials, professional skills, STEM, innovation capacity

JEL Code: J24; J61

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Introduction

The issue of the migration of young Italian graduates who find employment abroad and do not return to Italy is of strategic importance for the country in terms of the growth and innovation potential of the economic fabric, in a context in which, compared to its European competitors, Italy has both a lower number of young graduates and a lower capacity to attract foreigners to Italy to complete their studies.

Over the last two decades, the employment rate of young people up to 34 years of age in Italy has decreased significantly[1] from 54% in 2004 to 40.6% in 2015 to 45% in 2022. According to ISTAT, there were 7.6 million employed people under the age of 35 in 2004 and they became 5.3 million at the end of 2023, both because of the demographic effects of an ageing population and because there has been an increase in the migration of young people abroad, especially of the most educated. The observation that real wages in Italy have decreased slightly over the last twenty years (-0.4%) in contrast to what has happened in other competitor countries (Germany +13.8% and+ 19.4% France)[2] could lead one to conclude at first instance that the

[1] Fubini F., 2023, Corriere della Sera on Istat Annual Report 2023.

[2] Intesa Sanpaolo-Prometeia Report, Industry Sector Analysis, 2024.

assessment of a wage advantage abroad could have a decisive influence on the choice of young Italians to migrate. In fact, the differences between wages with the same qualifications are considerably reduced if wages are adjusted for the cost of living in the destination countries: the average wages of young people in Italy, calculated at purchasing power parity, are slightly lower than the European average, even if the situation worsens when only the class of young university graduates is considered (-10% compared to the European average)[3] . A further notable aspect of the current migration of young people is that the largest flows of deregistration and registrations from the Italian registry office to a foreign country come from dynamic northern regions such as Lombardy, Veneto and Trentino-Alto Adige, where there is no shortage of job opportunities[4] . The sum of the balances of graduates leaving Italy between 2011 and 2021 exceeds102,000 units, but according to some studies (Latmiral L., Paolazzi L., Rosa B. 2023)[5] , which have cross-referenced the migration statistics of nine European countries reported in the Eurostat database with Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (Istat) migration data, the flows would be underestimated by at least 3 times.

To counterbalance this outgoing mobility, Italian universities should enhance their effort to attract foreign students: on this front, however, not only does the comparison with other European Union countries see Italy at the lowest level of the ranking (2.9% the incidence of international university students on the total university students[6]), but it has also lost 10 positions between 2013 and 2020. This is an aspect that can also have important repercussions at the employment level because studying in a foreign country, besides being an unquestionable life and training experience, represents a priority gateway to finding a job in the country itself.

Official statistics confirm, then, that abroad there are more professional opportunities that go beyond the pay aspect and relate to the content of the job: in Italy there is a sort of vertical mismatch of over-education, i.e. of workers who have a higher level of education than that required to perform the assigned task. For the occupations offered to university graduates in 2023, this phenomenon affects around 2 million people (34% of the total), with a greater incidence for those under 50 years of age, who are over-educated compared to the occupation they hold. What has been observed may reflect either a poor match between the education system and the labor market, or a high supply of graduates compared to qualified professional opportunities, or candidates with tertiary qualifications but lacking practical experience that prevents their access to suitable roles. Among the youngest (25-34 years), foreigners (52.0% compared to 36.9% of Italians) and women (39.8% compared to 34.5% of men) are more frequently overeducated. Overeducation peaks at 45.7% among socio-economic-legal graduates, drops to 27.6% for graduates in STEM disciplines and to 18.2% among those with a tertiary degree in agriculture, veterinary medicine, pharmacy .[7]

The intensity of the overeducation figure with respect to the jobs of STEM employees is surprising, if one considers on the one hand the historical shortage in the share of science graduates in Italy and on the other hand the mismatch of companies in covering new hires in technology

[3] Eurostat 2018, Survey on income structure by age and education https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/earn_ses18_23__custom_12517097/default/table?lang=en.

[4] Istat, 2023, Demo-Demography in Figures, Transfers of Resident Population Internal and International Migrations (https://demo.istat.it/tavole/?t=apr4) .

[5] Latmiral L., Paolazzi L., Rosa B. (2023) Lies, Damned Lies, and Statistics: a survey to understand the real dimensions of the diaspora of young Italians, Fondazione Nord Est.

[6] OECD, 2020, Percentage of international students in tertiary education out of total students in tertiary education by country. This indicator shows the number of international university students enrolled as a proportion of total university students enrolled in the destination (host) country. International students are those who received their previous education in another country and are not resident in their current country of study. When information on international students is not available, foreign students (i.e. students who are not citizens of the country in which they are studying) can be used as a proxy.

[7] Istat, 2024, Annual Report.

and digital fields. In the period 2017-22, the share of science graduates in Italy, although improving, was 16.7 per thousand inhabitants aged 20-29, lower than the European average (equal to 21 graduates per thousand inhabitants observed in the EU27)[8] . At the same time, in 2023 Italian companies wishing to employ STEM graduates encountered difficulties in finding them in 60% of the cases, for a total of 142,000 positions .[9]

Aim of the research

In this paper, in order to fully understand and collect in greater depth the motivations that lead young Italian graduates to seek employment abroad, we present the results of a preliminary survey conducted ad hoc between January and June 2023 on a group of Veneto graduates who were already abroad for work at the time of the survey, in order to find out what were the determining factors of their choice to emigrate, what were the characteristics of their current employment and the profile of the foreign companies where they found work, and what factors could convince them to return to Italy. The way in which the on-line answers to the questionnaires were collected was through a spontaneous method of propagation, which originated from the network of acquaintances of the entrepreneurs belonging to the Intesa Sanpaolo Veneto Territory Council and former students of the professors of the Department of Engineering in Padua, who in turn extended the survey to their Italian acquaintances who had expatriated for work reasons: the sample obtained therefore presents a high concentration of answers from graduates in STEM subjects mostly from Veneto. This aspect contributes to the originality of the evidence emerging from the survey, since in the analysis of the literature there are no specific surveys on Italian graduates in STEM disciplines; hence the importance of understanding the specific motivations of these young individuals who are in high demand by Italian manufacturing firms but for whom it remains particularly challenging to identify suitable candidates. The questionnaire devoted some specific questions to the characteristics most valued by graduates in foreign companies, especially for their professional growth, with the aim of understanding what local industrialists can focus on to attract and retain young talent in their companies. The questionnaire also investigated whether those same characteristics were sought among local companies prior to expatriation, drawing indications of a lack of knowledge on the part of young people about job opportunities in their region.

The main results of surveys in Italy on young people expatriating for work

From the analysis of the literature on the surveys published so far on the mobility of graduates at the Italian level, reference should first be made to the ISTAT survey of 2011, subsequently replicated five years later in 2015, in which it was possible to define both internal migration, mainly in the South-North direction, and migration abroad[10] . This first survey, which involved a theoretical sample of 73.825 graduates (carried out using a CAWI-CATI methodology from which answers were obtained for 70.2% of those contacted), contained a set of questions on the aspects that influenced mobility from Italy to abroad (possibility of finding qualified work, opportunities for better paid work, greater opportunities for study and scientific training, avant-garde country in the sector of interest) or on the reasons that might have influenced the choice to leave Italy in the following 12 months (more opportunities for scientific training, previous study and work experiences, more job opportunities, more qualified job opportunities, higher paid job opportunities, avant-garde country in the sector of interest, bilateral agreements between Italy and the country of interest, family reasons). An analysis of the survey's micro-data on graduates working abroad based on the region of the university where they graduated, shows that in 2015 it was already clear that graduates from Veneto had higher expectations of opportunities to find a more qualified job abroad (60.5%) than both graduates from Lombardy (51.5%) and the Italian average (58.5%). The higher salary is a decisive factor for 58.5% of Veneto graduates, more so even than Italian STEM graduates, while when it comes to the quality of study and scientific training the values drop considerably (37.5%), as if to confirm

[8] Eurostat, 2022

[9] ANPAL-EXCELSIOR, 2023, National Bulletin.

[10] Istat, 2016, 2015 Graduate Survey.

the quality and excellence recognised in regional universities. Finally, in fifth place of the reasons that strongly influenced the move abroad for a job, there are personal and family reasons for less than a fifth of expatriates (18.0% vs. 13.9% of the national average).

The Istat survey, which nonetheless reports a static snapshot as of 2015, provides an initial indication of the perception of Italian graduates working abroad, but does not say anything more about the characteristics of the job and company abroad in which young graduates are employed, nor does it mention the possible motivations for returning.

A second important survey on Italian graduates is the one administered annually by the AlmaLaurea Inter-University Consortium on the Occupational Condition of Graduates[11] , which reached its25th edition in 2023: it involved approximately 670 thousand first- and second-level graduates (two-year and single-cycle master's degrees), from 78 universities out of the 80 members of the Consortium[12] , which make up 90% of all graduates from Italian non-telematic universities. The picture returned by the survey is very rich in information on the evolution of graduates' employment according to degree level, disciplinary group, gender, geographical breakdown of residence, characteristics of the household, and work experience during their education. The surveys follow respondents at 1 year, 3 years and 5 years after graduation. The Consortium makes the results available by university and develops statistical analyses on microdata that investigate all possible correlations between the variables that characterise the graduate's training pathway and his or her subsequent employment, in terms of employment rate, salary, satisfaction with the job done and, last but not least, international mobility[13] . The questionnaire administered by AlmaLaurea is not public, but from what can be deduced from their latest report of 2024 (which refers to 2018 graduates employed 5 years after obtaining their degree), the assessment of satisfaction for work done abroad is higher than for work done in Italy, because there are more opportunities for contacts abroad (8,6 for those working abroad compared to 5.4 for those working in Italy on a scale of 1-10), but also better earning and career prospects (for both aspects, 7.9 compared to 7.2 for those working in Italy), greater flexibility in working hours (7.7 compared to 7.1), the prestige one receives from work (8.0 compared to 7.6), the acquisition of professionalism (8.4 compared to 8.0) and free time (7.1 compared to 6.7). Then there are some statistics on the reasons for moving abroad: 32.0% of second level graduates five years after graduating stated that they had left our country having received an interesting job offer from a company based abroad, to which is added a further 27.4% who moved abroad due to a lack of suitable job opportunities in Italy. 14.1% stated that they had had a study experience abroad (e.g. Erasmus or similar, thesis preparation, post-graduate training) and had stayed there or returned for work reasons. 13.8% moved for personal or family reasons, while 8.8% moved for lack of research funds in Italy. Finally, 3.2% did so at the request of the company they were working for in Italy. AlmaLaurea also proposes a questionnaire to undergraduates from which obtains their job expectations and willingness to move abroad for work reasons. The data published by university make it possible to compare the expectations of undergraduates by degree subject group (e.g. STEM vs. non-STEM) and the resulting employment results after 1,3 and 5 years, also comparing them with the national average. However, the questions concerning motivations for moving abroad are rather limited. [14]

[11] AlmaLaurea,2023, XXV Survey on the Condition of Graduates, Summary of the Report.

[12] There is an under-representation of universities in the North-West, especially in Lombardy, due to the fact that the universities belonging to the AlmaLaurea Consortium do not include Bocconi University, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and Politecnico di Milano.

[13] AlmaLaurea, 2024, Report on the profile and employment status of graduates, Focus on international mobility.

[14] AlmaLaurea, 2016; Assessing selection patterns and wage differentials of high-skilled migrants. Evidence from AlmaLaurea dataset on Italian graduates working abroad, G. Antonelli, S. Binassi, G. Guidetti, G. Pedrini, Working Paper no. 76 ISSN 2239-9453.

Analysing the data published by AlmaLaurea by university, it is also possible to assess some characteristics of graduates in STEM disciplines by accessing the results of the annual survey on the profile of graduates. The incidences of all university graduates who have already had experience abroad during their studies were observed: this is a small percentage at Italian level and amounts to around 9%, largely explained by the Erasmus programme (6.9%). The same percentages for STEM graduates[15] are slightly lower, perhaps due to the problem for young Italians of finding the exact correspondence between the courses offered by Italian faculties and those offered by other European universities. From the survey on the employment profile of graduates 1, 3 and 5 years after graduation, we obtain the percentages of those who have found employment abroad, from which it can be seen that the percentage of those working abroad grows as the years after graduation increase and fluctuates between 3.8% and 5.6% after 5 years. The trend is particularly evident for STEM graduates, for whom it ranges from 5.3% to a maximum of 8.8%, while for the other subject groups of Economics, Law and Social Sciences and Art, Literature and Education, the shares of graduates working abroad are slightly lower and more stable over time.

If international experiences can influence job search choices, upon graduation young Italians, although willing to move to other European countries (49.2%), would prefer to find employment close to home (in the province of residence 64.3% and in the province of studies 67.6%) or in the region (59.6%).

Another interesting aspect emerges from the statements made by young graduates in STEM disciplines who have had work experience during their university education: more than half have worked (56.2%), but of these less than one in four (23.6%) have had jobs consistent with the disciplines studied. This evidence stimulates an important reflection on the need to create new internship arrangements and greater interaction between university students and the industrial and economic world of the area in which the university centres are located.

Upon graduation, young Italian STEM graduates put in first place, among the aspects they consider most important in the search for a job, the acquisition of professionalism (for 78.2%), followed by career prospects (73.4%) and the more tangible aspects of earnings and job stability (both of which are relevant for about 70% of young respondents). It is interesting to note that for more than half of the young STEM graduates, the workplace climate and the relationship with colleagues in the workplace are considered more important than flexible working hours, rated as very important by just over one-third, or the geographic location of the workplace. These aspects highlight the pressing need for graduates to acquire meaningful professional experience that aligns with the content and consistency of their academic training.

It is evident that the AlmaLaurea databases provide a rich set of information on the characteristics of young Italian graduates, including specific data ranging from the region of residence, the location where their degree was obtained and ther9i employment status both within Italy and internationally. However, it appears that the motivations driving mobility outside one's region of residence and possible return, could be studied in greater depth.

Another survey on Italians who emigrated abroad was conducted in 2020 by the University of Pisa on about 700 Italians living abroad[16] , according to which at the roots of the flight of talent there would be poor economic gratification (59% of the sample), job insecurity (47%), the reduced possibility of advancement and career progression (46%), the lack of recognition of skills (44%) and disorganisation (39%). The top five strengths of the working environment abroad

[15] In the AlmaLaurea survey, the disciplinary area of STEM graduates includes the disciplinary groups of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Computer and ICT Technologies, Industrial and Information Engineering, and Science according to the classification of degree classes adopted by the MUR as of 2020.

[16] S.Gianfaldoni, 2020, Italians emigrated abroad, Pisa University Press.

would be financial reward (74%), followed by the possibility of advancement and career progression (67%), recognition of skills (61%), stimulating working environment (54%) and efficiency (42%).

A recent survey conducted between December 2023 and February 2024 by the Italian Youth Agency and Eures among young people aged between 15 and 35 delves into their expectations and plans[17] : the representative sample consisted of around 1,700 respondents divided between university graduates and diploma holders, the majority of whom were employed in the 25-35 age group. The questions range from young people's relationship with work, to factors that should be targeted to improve employment conditions for young people, to those considered most important in choosing a first job and the type of structure in which young people would prefer to be employed. In particular, on the issue of the 'brain drain', i.e. the choice of many qualified young people to leave Italy, the results show that it is not due to the search for greater personal and professional benefits (4.6%), but rather to the low attractiveness and lack of prospects in Italy (35.5%), the lack of attention paid by Italian institutions to the future of young people (34.3%), and the reduced appreciation of these by Italian companies (25.6%). It is mainly young people from the North (37.4%) and the Centre (39.2%) who explain the 'brain drain' because of Italy's lack of attractiveness and lack of prospects, while young people from the South emphasise more the reference to the lack of attention paid by institutions (38.2%). According to the female sample, the responsibility for the phenomenon is to be attributed to the reduced valorisation of young people by Italian companies (27.6%), to a greater extent than their male peers (23.1%) who, on the other hand, see the 'brain drain' more as a search for the valorisation of a young person's skills (7.1% compared to 2.4% among girls).

On the contrary, the ChEuropa survey, in collaboration with Tortuga and Controesodo, involved about 400 Italians who returned to Italy between 2016 and 2023 and wanted to share their return experience. Forty-four per cent of them were young people aged between 26 and 34 and about half of them had a master's or master's degree. According to the sample, when returning to Italy, research at university and careers as employees in the private sector are less attractive than abroad. In contrast, the public sector, self-employment and entrepreneurship gain in importance. The incentives for the return of 'brains' that existed before 2015 aimed to close the attractiveness gap in the world of research. The 2015 reform (Legislative Decree 147/2015 "repatriate workers"[18]) introduced tax breaks to incentivise the return of professionals and skilled workers to Italy, with the effect of a higher incidence of the return of the number o f professionals, self-employed workers and entrepreneurs, who weigh around 92% of the total number of repatriates, compared to 8% of the university teachers and researchers[19] . Within the sample, two-thirds of those who returned in 2016-23 and are benefiting from incentives stated that without them they would not have returned or would have delayed their return. This percentage rises to three quarters among private sector employees and falls to less than half among public sector employees. The survey also proposes a wide range of factors for choosing a job, and the results provide different priorities depending on the size of the company: in large companies, people mainly look for salary remuneration, agile working, bonuses and incentive systems, corporate welfare, quality of workspaces, enhancement of skills and career paths; in medium-sized companies, interpersonal relations in the workplace; in small companies, greater involvement in the company vision, holidays, leave and better working hours. Also interesting is the section on proposals to reform incentives for the return of brains.

[17] Agenzia Italiana Gioventù-Eures, 2024, Giovani 2024: il bilancio di una generazione.

[18] Impatriate workers in the decree refer to workers who hold a university degree and have been continuously employed, self-employed or engaged in a business activity outside Italy for the last 24 months or more, or who have been continuously engaged in a study activity outside Italy for the last 24 months or more obtaining a university degree or a *postgraduate* specialisation.

[19] Moving 2 Italy, Brain Return Observatory: updated statistics, 2024.

Finally, at a territorial level, we mention the two surveys (2020 and 2021) carried out by the regional Observatory 'Veneti nel mondo', entrusted to Veneto Lavoro to analyse and monitor migration dynamics with the aim of outlining a cognitive framework useful to understand, with specific regard to the regional context, the salient features of the phenomena under way. The researchers (Bertazzon, Bellan, Nadalin, 2020)[20] highlighted the impossibility of referring to a nominative register of emigrants abroad from which to obtain a representative sample of subjects to be interviewed and opted for a 'snowball sampling', starting from an initial group filtered by control questions and then spontaneously enlarged by the interviewees themselves to people in their same migratory condition. The initial sample selected concerned people of Veneto origin, resident or domiciled abroad (excluding students), over 18 years old, with a migration duration of less than 10 years, starting from various associations of Veneto citizens who had emigrated abroad, from Alumni associations of Padua and Ca'Foscari, cultural institutes, associations of expatriate pensioners and Italian Chambers of Commerce. The various communication tools used on the web made it possible to obtain a final sample of 460 eligible respondents, diversified in terms of emigration destinations and social and professional characteristics (the final sample also included students, as well as entrepreneurs and pensioners). Most of the sample is made up of young people (32% between 18-29 years old and 53% between 30-39 years old) with tertiary education (bachelor's degree 15%, master's degree/old degree 43%, master's degree 25%). The possible motivations for migration are contained in a very schematic question (job opportunities, lifestyle choices, education and training, family reasons and personal ties and other), while the factors that greatly influenced the choice to migrate are more articulated (possibility of personal and professional fulfilment 63%, economic and social context 41%, innovative environment 36%, training opportunities 34%, recognition of rights 26%, cultural offerings 16%, institutional support 18%, cost of living 10%, ease of relationships/social ties 10%) and on the choice of the current destination (concrete and adequate job opportunities 26%, most relevant item). Also interesting are the evaluations on the activity carried out abroad, which, for 52%, aligns with their academic qualification, for 58% adequately values their qualification and for 76% receives adequate remuneration for the work performed. In the comparison between working abroad and not in Veneto, the first three aspects highlighted by more than 85% of the sample were innovation and internationalisation, career opportunities, and the enhancement of merit. Looking ahead, then, 72% declare they would like to stay abroad where they see their future, and only the offer of opportunities for growth and fulfilment in a changed economic and productive context compared to the current one could encourage a possible return home and to Veneto.

The analysis of the existing literature on the surveys conducted on young Italian expatriates and on those still in Italy thus provides an initial picture of young people's expectations on the world of work: despite the numerous studies conducted so far, it seems to us that there is a lack of an approach to the precise target of graduates in scientific subjects, a profiling of the characteristics of the companies where young people have found work abroad, and an analysis of the factors of attractiveness that distinguish them from Italian or Veneto SMEs. We therefore wanted to address the issue by giving a direct voice to young people who are abroad, with a particular focus on those who hold degrees in STEM disciplines, trying to touch on all the motivations that led them to leave and, at the same time, also those that could make them return to Italy. This paper presents the main results of a pilot survey in the Triveneto region on graduates working abroad. The objectives of the study, although qualitative in nature, make it possible to draw a profile of these young people, of the motivations behind their decision to emigrate, of the differences they found in terms of the type of companies, the professional and technological content of their work, the work-life balance and the context of the destination country and quality of life. The findings offer some interesting insights for both the business sector, by highlighting strategies for attracting and integrating younger generations into the

[20] Bertazzon L., Bellan R., Nadalin F., 2020, Le recenti emigrazioni dei veneti all'estero: percorsi, perceptions e prospettive, Evidenze da un'analisi esplorativa sul campo, Osservatorio Veneti Nel Mondo.

workforce, and for the academic sphere, which is called upon to align educational pathways more closely with the evolving needs of the local economic and productive system.

Veneto graduates working abroad: motivations for emigration, barriers encountered and key factors for encouraging return: the results of an ad hoc survey on young graduates from the Veneto region

To delve into the motivations that prompt young Veneto graduates to seek work abroad despite the strong demand in the regional economy, an ad hoc survey on Veneto graduates living abroad was launched between January and June 2023, also in order to understand the obstacles and factors that could most influence their decision to return to Italy. It is interesting to point out that this survey, which has qualitative objectives, stems from the desire of both a group of entrepreneurs representing the economic fabric of Veneto and of professors from the University of Padua[21] to listen to the views of young people. The survey was administered online according to a spontaneous method of dissemination initiated by the network of acquaintances of the entrepreneurs and former students of the professors in Padua, who in turn were invited to extend the survey to their Italian acquaintances who were expatriates for work reasons. The sample is part of the 'snowball sampling' strand, since no archives of e-mail addresses of young Italians working abroad are available, and so we proceeded from a restricted group of 'seeds', which introduce a selection bias (young people mostly from Padua and mostly from Engineering) because they may share common characteristics and opinions on the most relevant motivations in choosing to go and work abroad. In fact, due to the way the survey was propagated, the sample collected (139 graduates and students completing their year of study abroad in England[22]) is strongly concentrated in young people under 35 (86% of the sample); STEM subjects prevail among expatriates (76.4%) and there is a high proportion of graduates in engineering (51.4%), while for students completing their tertiary education abroad, non-STEM subjects prevail (55.2%), with a concentration in political and social sciences degrees (25.4%).

As far as origin is concerned, before their expatriation 55.6% of the sample resided mainly in the three regions of Veneto (28%), Lombardy (18%) and Lazio (9%). If we consider only the answers of workers abroad, the sample is more concentrated in Veneto (43%) and Lombardy (15%). Workers originating from Veneto completed 80% of their studies at the university of Padua with a STEM address. The result is an profile of young expatriates with some distortions of representativeness, but which lends itself well to being put in relation with what was declared to AlmaLaurea by new graduates in the STEM disciplines of Padua[23] in order to detect their points of contact and verify how their expectations in the workplace have changed over time.

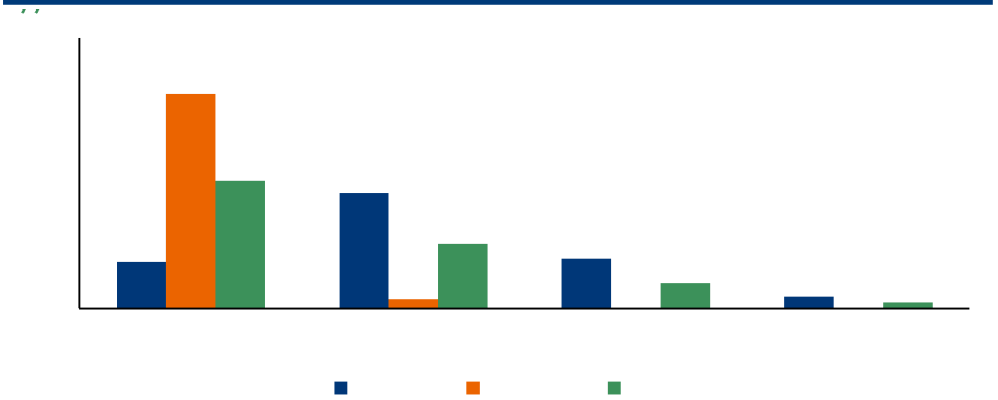
In the sample analysed, the youngest age group prevails (between 18-24 years) for students completing their tertiary education abroad (88.9% of the total of 67 student respondents), while more than half of the workers are in the 25-34 age group (51.4% of the total of 72 graduate respondents) (Fig. 1).

[21] Prof. Fabrizio Dughiero, director of the Department of Industrial Engineering at the University of Padua, chairs Intesa Sanpaolo's Veneto Territory Council, which is made up of 9 members including entrepreneurs and category representatives, to whom thanks are due for their stimulating activity and critical reading of the phenomenon of the dispersion of graduates and the difficulty of retaining them in companies in the area. The Veneto Territory Council plays a role of liaison with the reference territory and has advisory tasks mainly vis-à-vis the two Regional Directorates covering the territory of the Region. In particular, it has the task of putting forward proposals aimed at strengthening the bank's relations with the various territorial realities and consolidating its market positioning, pointing out issues of interest.

[22] Our thanks go to the United Italian Societies association, which promoted the survey among its members in England.

[23] AlmaLaurea (2024).

Fig. 1 - Distribution of respondents by sample age and occupation (% values)



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

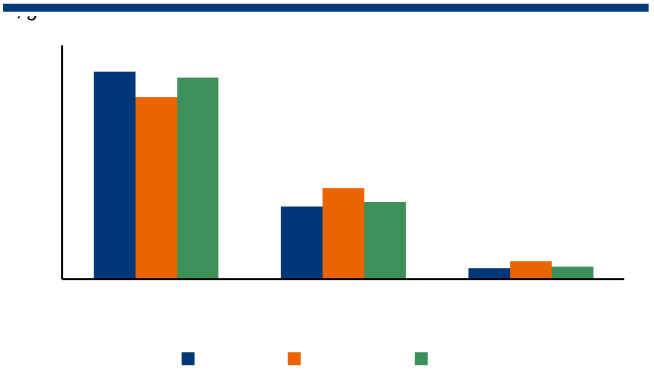
As for the distribution by gender of workers with degrees, the male component prevails (66.7% men vs. 33.3% women), while the ratio is reversed in the case of female students, who outnumber their male colleagues (53.7% vs. 46.3%, Fig. 3). A possible explanation is linked to the issue of the diffusion of STEM degrees among women, which has been on the rise over the last ten years: in the sample there is, in fact, a greater presence of female workers with STEM degrees in the younger age brackets (12.5% aged 18-24 and 37% aged 25-34) and even more so among female students. On the other hand, the lower female representation during On the other hand, the lower female representation during the working phase abroad may indicate that women have equal opportunities with their male peers in accessing tertiary education abroad, but that then in the later phase there subsequent factors, presumably related to parental responsibilities and family formation, that contribute to their higher likelihood of returning to Italy.

Furthermore, as regards the distribution of expatriates according to their degree grade, the majority (69.1%) declare a high degree grade (above 106 out of 110, Fig. 12). More specifically, 80% of respondents with a bachelor's degree, and 68% of those with a two-year master's degree, or single-cycle master's degree or doctorate, and of STEM graduates have a High grade. According to AlmaLaurea's analysis of graduates in Italy in 2022, the average graduation grade is 104 and goes from an average of 101 in first-level (three-year) degrees to an average of 108.1 in two-year master's degrees: in first-level degrees, there is some heterogeneity by subject group, with graduation grades ranging from 97.8 in economics and 98.0 in industrial and information engineering to 105.1 in the medical-health group and 105.3 in the humanities-literary group[24] . Therefore, it can be concluded that the classification by degree grade adopted in the Veneto sample does indeed have a signalling value with respect to the averages observed in the reference universe and that the majority of expatriates with three-year degrees and STEM degrees are bright students with scores well above the average.

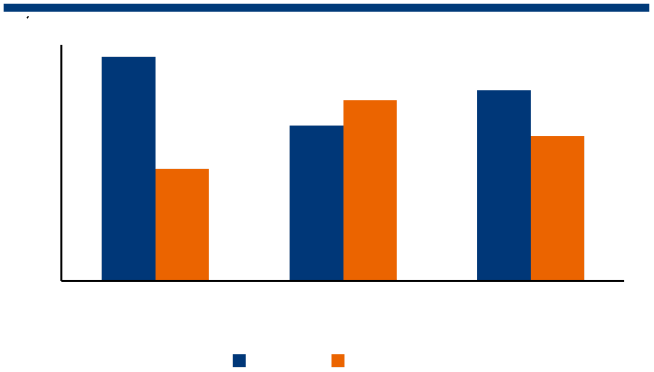
Fig. 2 - Distribution according to degree grade and gender (% values net of degrees not yet obtained)

Fig. 3 - Gender distribution according to employment status (% values)

[24] AlmaLaurea (2023) .



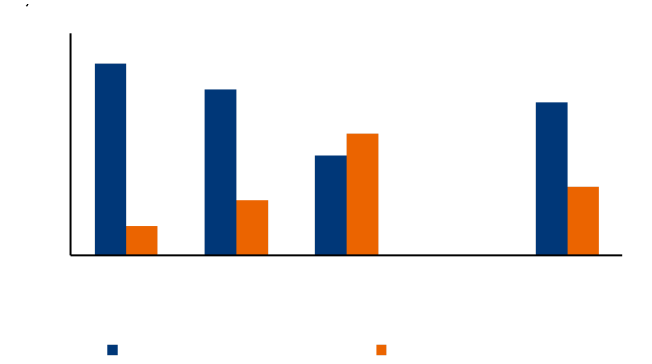
Note: High = 106 and above; Medium = between 91 and 105; Low = less than 90. Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

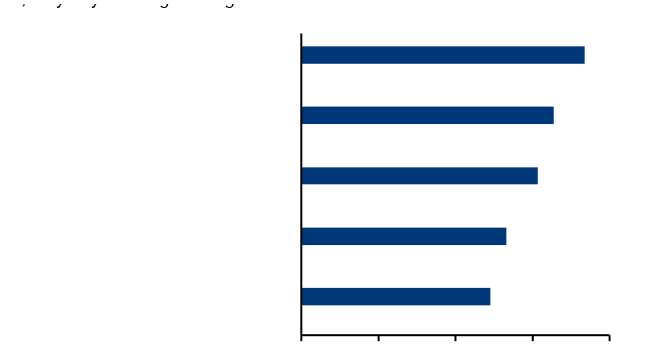
There is also a greater propensity in younger age brackets to have had study abroad experiences prior to their current expatriation: this is highest (87%) among 18-24 year olds and lowest (45%) among adults over 35 (Fig. 4). Among the most popular experiences are Masters (36.7%) and Erasmus (32.7%) (Fig. 5). Two important considerations can be drawn from this evidence: on the one hand, a growing mobility outside Italy for study purposes can be observed in the new generations; on the other, study experiences, especially Masters or Erasmus, make the choice of working abroad more likely (both by creating job opportunities in the country where one has studied, and by making it easier for those who already have life experience in another country to decide to emigrate). There is therefore a need for Italian universities, especially those in the STEM discipline groups, in order to increase their attractiveness to international students, to increase the offer of Erasmus, Masters and two-year Masters degrees in English.

Fig. 4 - Study abroad experiences before working abroad, by age group (% total workers)



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

Fig. 5 - Previous study abroad pathways (% values on workers with previous study abroad; multiple answers possible)

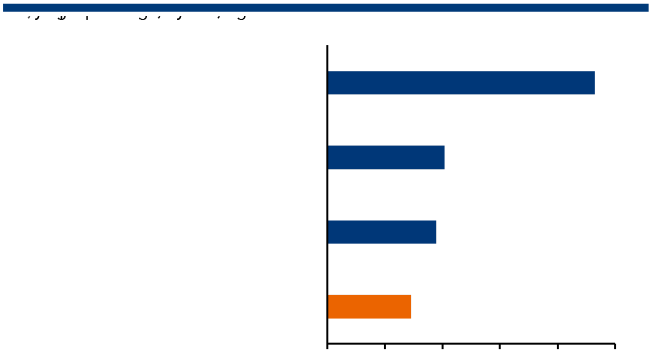


Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

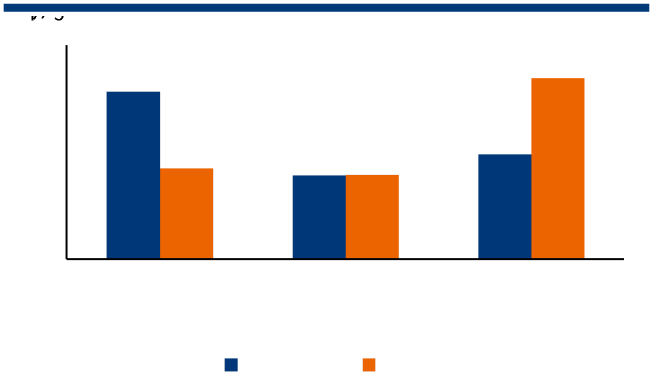
Graduates from Veneto who are abroad then confirmed the attitude observed in the recent graduates of the AlmaLaurea survey: a high proportion were not thinking of an international career (46.4%), all things being equal 1 in 5 would have preferred to stay in Italy and only almost 1 in 7 aspired to work abroad (Fig. 6). Another piece of data reinforces the representation of the distance between university studies and work experience in Italy: half of the STEM graduates who migrated to work abroad had not had any work experience in Italy and a quarter had had negative experiences (Fig. 7).

Fig. 6 - International career expectations after graduation (% values, net respondents not applicable)

Fig. 7 - Previous work experience in Italy by field of study (STEM vs. non-STEM; % values; worker respondents)



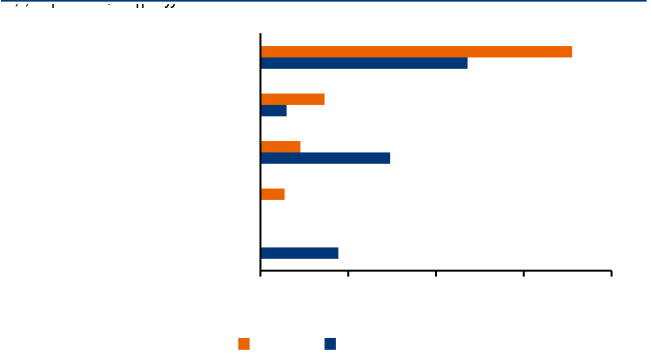
Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

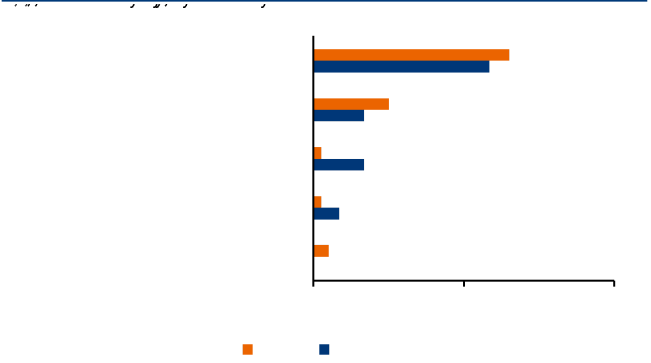
The majority of STEM graduates (76.4% of the sample of workers) are employed abroad on a permanent basis (Fig. 8) and are so satisfied that, when asked if they intended to change jobs in the next 12 months, they answered 'no' in most cases (65%); of the remainder, a quarter expressed the intention to change jobs but remaining in the same country and city, implicitly revealing satisfaction also with the quality of life and context of the foreign country in which they find themselves (Fig. 9).

Fig. 8 - Employment status by course of study (% values; STEM vs. non-STEM)



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

Fig. 9 - Intention to change job in the next 12 months (% values net "don't know/not applicable"; STEM vs. non-STEM)

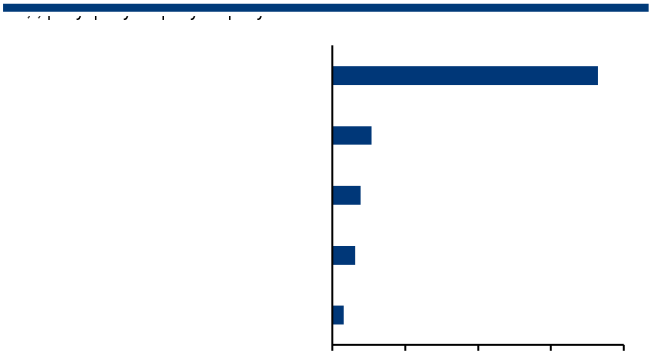


Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

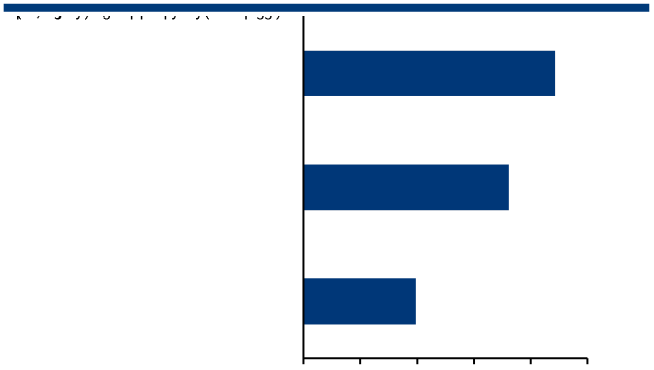
The size aspect of the companies in which expatriates found employment is undoubtedly a central issue: 72.7% are employed in companies with more than 1,000 employees and a further 7.6% in companies between 250 and 1,000 employees (Fig. 10). In Italy only 10.3% of active companies fall within these size categories. 44.3% of graduates work in multinationals based abroad but with production/commercial branches in Italy. It almost seems as that "Italian-ness" may be perceived as an asset in managing relationships with Italian operations (Fig. 11).

Fig. 10 - Company size abroad of current employment (% values of employees)

Fig. 11 - Level of internationalisation of companies abroad of current employment (% values of expatriate workers, net of 'not applicable')



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduate abroad survey

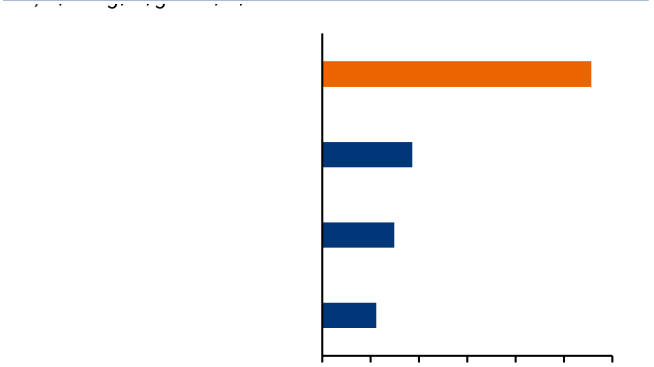


Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

Moreover, Veneto STEM graduates abroad hold highly qualified and professional roles in research and development activities (55.6%, Fig. 12), a factor that contributes to satisfactory working conditions.

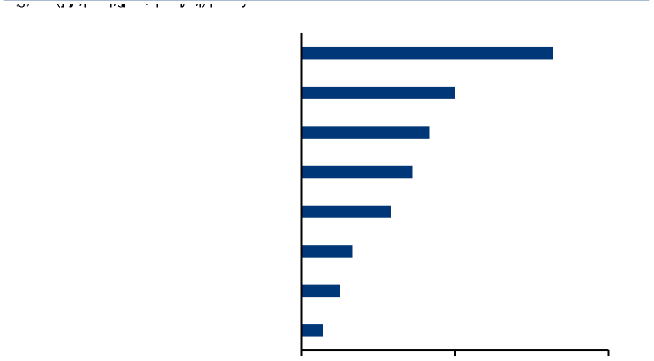
The search for a job outside Italian borders is supported by digital tools, especially dedicated portals and online platforms, but also social for 81.9% of the sample, although the percentage of graduates who took advantage of personal contacts and referrals remains high (50%); 36% applied directly on the company's website, and about one third took advantage of direct acquaintance with future employers during an internship. Job opportunities provided by the university-company network are used to a lesser extent (only 1 in 6 of the respondents), while personal contacts and referrals are important (Fig. 13).

Fig. 12 - Current job function performed abroad by STEM graduates (% of workers net "not applicable")



Note: prevailing function in orange. Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

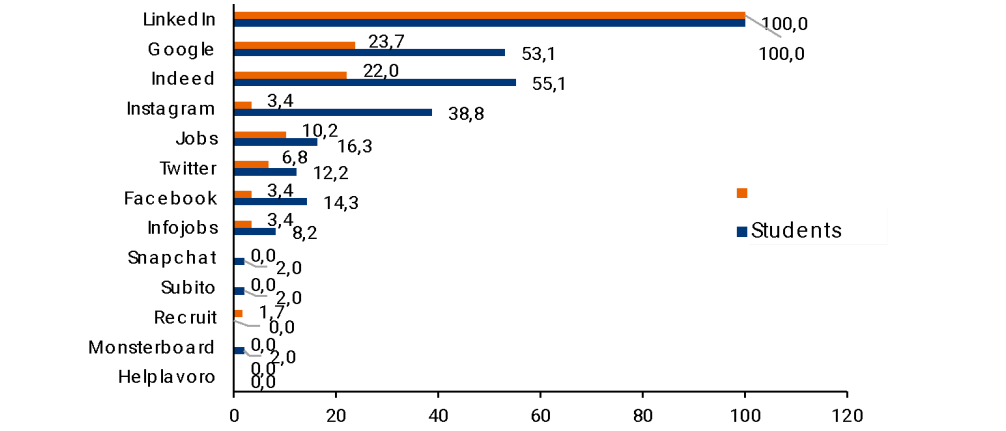
Fig. 13 - Distribution of job search channels used by workers living abroad (%; multiple answers possible)



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

As far as the type of platforms used is concerned, LinkedIn is the one most reported above all among workers; students who are abroad to complete their studies, and normally belong to a new generation, also use other platforms (Indeed, Google, Instagram) (Fig. 14). Once again, this represents a crucial insight for Italian and district companies: in order to effectively reach potential young candidates, it is essential to leverage their preferred information and communication channels. Consequently, companies must actively manage their corporate image on platforms such as LinkedIn and others. This strategy requires relatively modest financial investment but necessitates a fundamental shift in the approach towards engaging with younger talents.

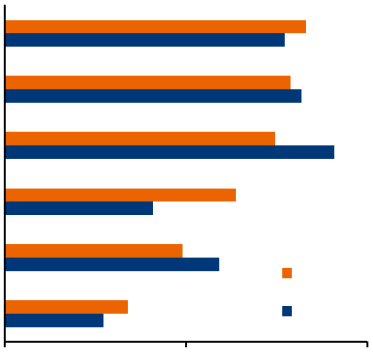
Fig. 14 - Distribution of platforms used to look for a job (% values of those who use platforms; multiple answers possible)



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

But what drives young talents to emigrate? The answers leave no doubt: graduates and young people studying abroad point to career opportunities, merit enhancement and higher remuneration. If we read the answers given by graduates working abroad according to the period of expatriation (between 2011 and 2015 the most historical emigrants and from 2016 onwards the most recent ones), we can see a greater importance attributed by those who have recently migrated to characteristics such as merit (83% vs. 77%), the possibility of advanced specialisations (63.8% vs. 41%) and continuous education (34% vs. 27%) (Fig. 15). On the other hand, regarding the group of the long-established emigrants, there is a notably higher prevalence of better salaries abroad (91% vs 74.5% among more recent emigrants) and a greater transparency in career progression (59% vs 48.9%), as to suggest that these factors, already significant at the time of expatriation, persist and gain importance over time. A comparison between what emerged from the survey and the main job expectations expressed by young STEM students in Padua in AlmaLaurea survey at the graduation time, shows that the main motivations for expatriation are the same.

Fig. 15 - Motivations for expatriation of workers according to the period they moved abroad: economic, career and development opportunities (by classes of stay abroad "from 2016 onwards" vs. "from 2011 to 2015"; % multiple answers possible)

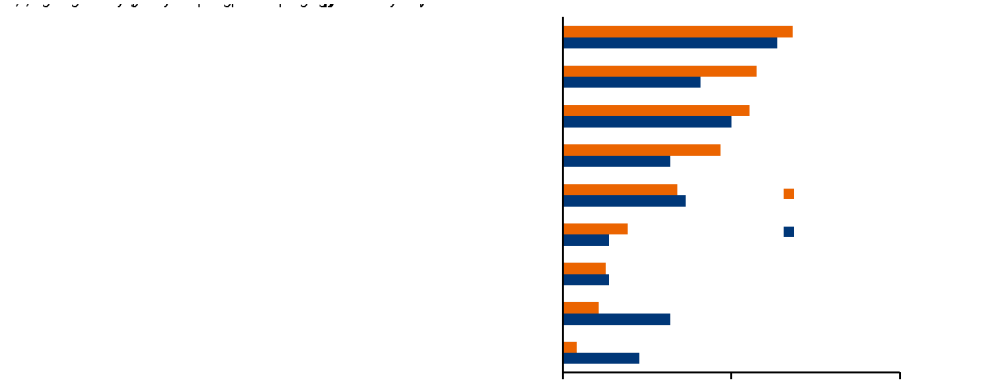


Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

Motivations concerning the characteristics of companies abroad and the country context were then collected: emigrants find that there is more innovation within foreign companies, (which invest more in technology) and that in general the country where they are located can be considered at the forefront of the sector of interest (Fig. 16). Among the respondents, 89% reside in European countries: although the limited sample size precludes analysis by individual country, 56% of those in in European countries report that their country is a leader in their sector of

interest, compared to 37.5% of respondents residing outside Europe. There is a perception that the potential for innovation and technological advancement of companies within the Italian territory is not sufficiently visible or well-known. Coupled with the fact that half of the graduates surveyed had no prior work experience in Italy, this underscores the importance of creating increased opportunities for interaction between young university students and local enterprises.

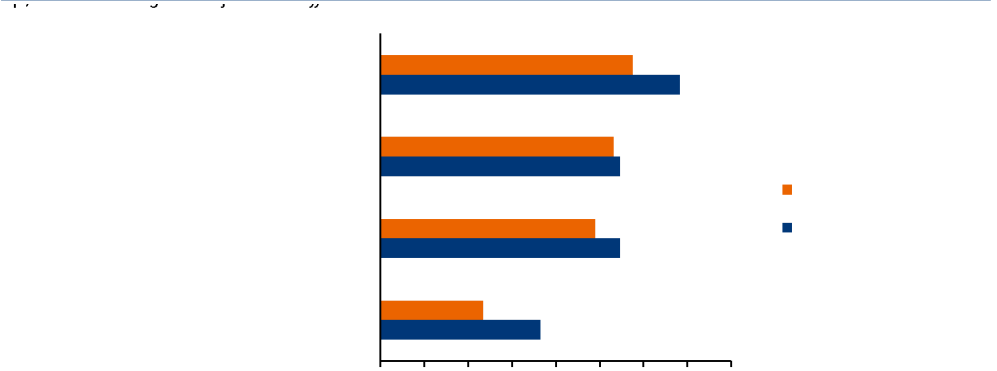
Fig. 16 - Workers' expatriation motivations according to the period of their move abroad: country/company context (by classes of stay abroad "from 2016 onwards" vs. "from 2011 to 2015"; % multiple answers possible)



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

This is followed by the factors, which are more considered by long-established emigrants, related to a better work-life balance, the appeal of an international work environment, and a broader availability of jobs aligned with their field of study (Fig. 17). For companies in the Veneto region, including those in the district, these are areas in which they could try to be more attractive by integrating international talents into their workforce, for example, adopting English as language of internal communication and facilitating rotational experiences across different plants and foreign branches, for those companies with subsidiaries abroad.

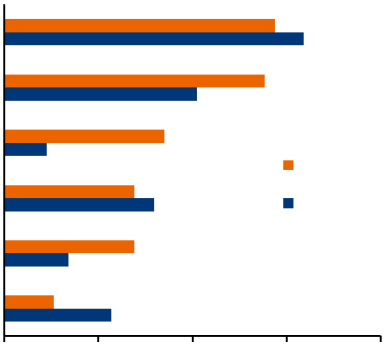
Fig. 17 - Motivations for workers' expatriation according to the period of their move abroad: job content and conditions (by classes of stay abroad "from 2016 onwards" vs. "from 2011 to 2015"; % multiple answers possible)



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

Finally, among the other motivations, the very high quality of life experienced abroad by Veneto graduates stands out, together with factors such as cultural curiosity and the prestige associated with gaining international experience and expanding one's global network of contacts(Fig. 18).

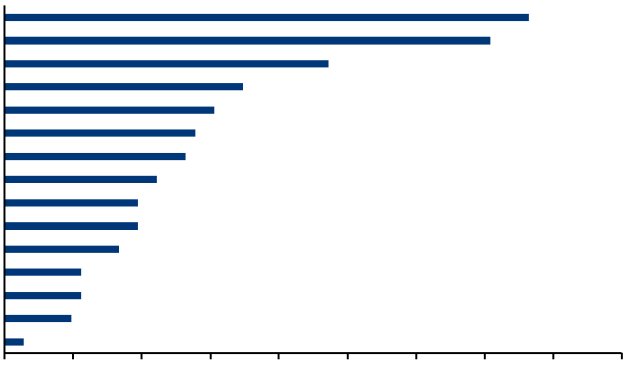
Fig. 18 - Motivations for expatriation of workers according to the period they moved abroad: other reasons (by classes of stay abroad "from 2016 onwards" vs. "from 2011 to 2015"; % multiple answers possible)



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

On the other hand, regarding the possible additional benefits considered most important in the current employment contracts, flexibility in working hours and the possibility of smart working are most frequently cited. Continuous education is then cited by young people as a distinctive element of foreign companies and also as a benefit and is sought after by almost half of the sample. Less attention emerges from the survey, on the other hand, for economic welfare (premiums, insurance, etc.), probably because the respondents are still too young and less interested in family-related issues (Fig. 19). In this regard, the anecdotal evidence from Italian experiences shows that when time flexibility and smart working are linked to a precise empowerment of even younger resources and the achievement of challenging objectives, then they also work as a lever for retaining and retaining talents.

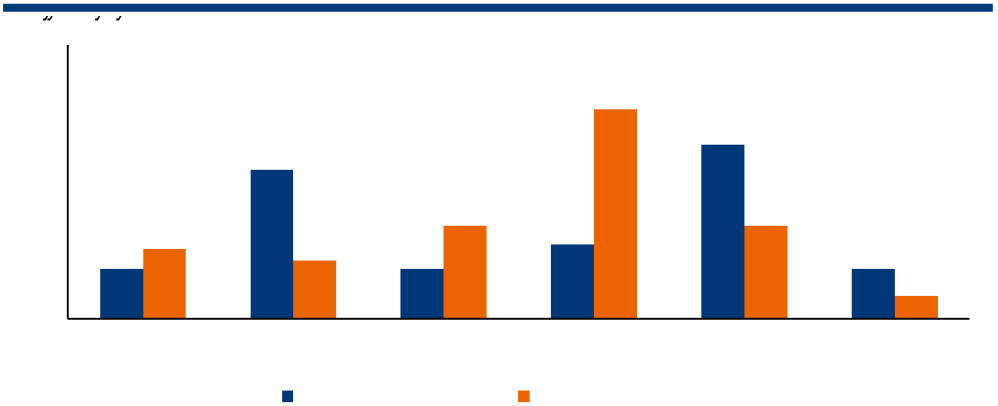
Fig. 19 - Benefits considered most relevant in the current employment contract (% values; multiple answers possible)



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

There is an effect, however, of attachment to one's past in the country of origin (which we identified in the questionnaire with the concept of 'nostalgia'), which tends to grow among those who have emigrated for a longer time: thus Italy is missed quite a lot by 38% of the most recent expatriates and is missed very much by 40% of the historical ones (Fig. 20). It could therefore be assumed that expatriation is not a definitive choice and that, over time, the intention to return may grow.

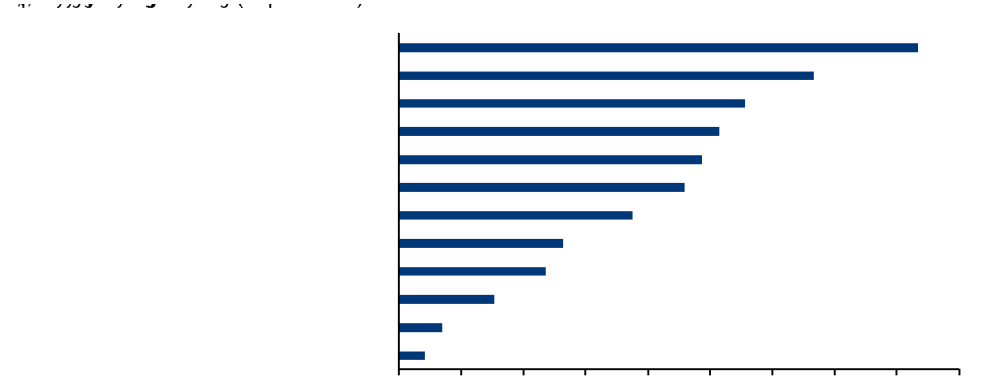
Fig. 20 - Nostalgia for Italy by period of beginning of residence abroad (% values)



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

But under what conditions would these young people be willing to return? Remuneration issues remain important and a priority, and this is an objective fact also measured by national estimates and surveys, according to which, with the same qualifications and years since graduation, the average remuneration is higher abroad than in Italy[25] . Secondly, the aspects of career building and reconnecting with the family, the latter being of greater importance for those who have been living abroad for longer, as well as the quality of life and relationships (Fig. 21), are judged to be important. For slightly less than half of the sample, tax benefits are indicated as decisive: the issue is very topical in the light of the new rules in force for the 'return of brains', which introduce more stringent requirements (at least 3 years of residence abroad before returning and at least 5 years of residence in Italy after the return) that aim to ensure that benefits are actually targeted at those who have spent a significant period abroad consolidating international skills and experience.

Fig. 21 - Decisive factors for returning to Italy (% values on total number of workers; multiple answers possible)

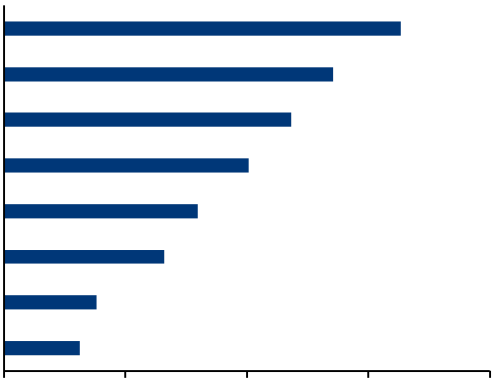


Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

As regards the obstacles currently preventing them from returning to Italy, more than half of the sample complained about the differential between the income received and the Italian salary, which would not guarantee maintaining their current lifestyle; this is followed by mistrust in the technological development of Italian companies, considered slower, and in general the fewer opportunities for young people, together with the difficulty of finding the same level of specialisation in Italy (Fig. 22).

Fig. 22 - Obstacles preventing return to Italy (% values on total workers; multiple answers possible)

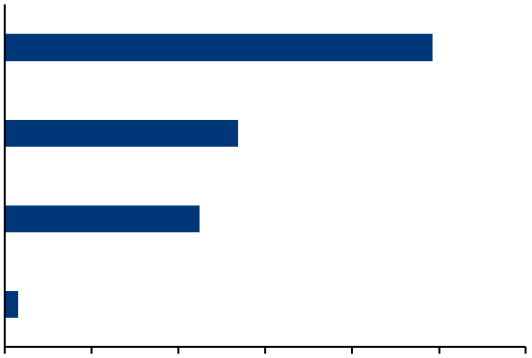
[25] AlmaLaurea (2022).



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

Finally, we wanted to investigate possible changes in working methods, caused by the massive introduction in Italian companies of forms of smart working during the pandemic crisis and then only partially revoked: three years after the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic, the numbers of workers adopting remote working are still high in Italy (3.6 million[26]), even if decreasing in 2022 compared to 2021 (-500 thousand units). However, for almost half of the sample surveyed, the opportunity to take advantage of smart working in Italian companies has changed their return prospects little, and only less than a quarter could work from Italy or return to Italy (Fig. 23).

Fig. 23 - How the job outlook has changed since Covid-19 and the introduction of smart working in Italy (% of total employees, net of "not applicable")



Source: Intesa Sanpaolo graduates abroad survey

Conclusions

In summary, the survey provides important insights for companies in the Veneto region, which are mostly located in peripheral areas far from the major Italian and international finance and innovation hubs capable of attracting not only large multinational groups and their investments in research (the famous Alpha cities[27]), but also the most qualified and talented young graduates in search of professionalism and a career to build. In this context, the provincial territories in the Veneto region that are home to various industrial districts represent 'competitive suburbs' that can be highly attractive to young people, thanks to their industrial specialisations, which are complementary to those of the large metropolitan centres, and which have been able to develop both technological and manufacturing skills.

[26] Politecnico di Milano (2022).
[27] Competitive peripheries - The development of territories in the knowledge economy - G. Buciuni, G. Corò-2023.

From the results of the 139 questionnaires filled in by young people mostly from the Veneto region, emerges a profile of those who have gone abroad for work: about 76% of them are graduates in STEM disciplines (among those already working abroad), with above-average graduation grades, who had had previous study experience abroad (especially Masters and Erasmus). An initial message is therefore being sent to Italian universities wishing to be more attractive to international students: the offer must include not only academic courses in the language but also an increase in the number of Erasmus and English-language Masters exchanges. The result of the survey on Veneto graduates working abroad reflects AlmaLaurea data at the time of graduation: almost half of graduates had not considered an international career and 1 in 5 expressed a preference to remain in Italy.

Another interesting finding is that half of the expatriates had not had any work experience in Italy before their departure, confirming the distance between university education and labor market entry in the country. Young people still know too little about the extraordinary opportunities offered by the many productive excellences present in the territory, including the Veneto region, which are attractive not only for the technological and digital transition levels achieved, but also for the new models introduced for the management of human capital in terms of welfare, inclusion and talent enhancement.

There is also a dimensional issue, because most of the young people have found work in very large companies abroad with more than 1,000 employees, but what makes the job more satisfying is the role they hold, which is considered highly qualified and professional in research and development activities. Additionally, among the motivations for expatriation, the recognition of merit and career advancement opportunities come before higher remuneration, the latter aspect growing in importance for those who have been living abroad for a longer period. The perception of the foreign companies in which they are currently employed is characterised by greater innovation, greater investment in technology in a country that is more advanced in its sector of interest. This assessment also derives in part from the interviewees' lack of direct knowledge of Italian companies in the area. For those who have been emigrating for more years, the work-life balance, the more international corporate environment and the tasks performed more in line with their study specialisation are more valuable. In general, expatriates report a very high quality of life and are driven by their interest in the language and different culture. As far as benefits are concerned, flexible working hours and smart working are considered the most relevant, along with continuing education.

Finally, the survey on Veneto graduates closes on the conditions that could make them return to Italy: in first place there is the issue of remuneration, but career prospects remain relevant, followed by being closer to the family, while for just under half of the sample tax benefits are considered decisive. The obstacles preventing them from returning are always linked to salary and lifestyle, as well as to the lack of confidence in Italy's economic and technological growth as a country and consequently to the fewer opportunities for qualified work for young people.

Among the main messages emerging from the voices of those interviewed, we feel it is essential to emphasise the urgency of building a channel of communication between businesses and universities, to promote a rapprochement with young people, already during their training, with internships, apprenticeships, projects in companies and with tasks close to and consistent with the studies and skills acquired. It is a matter of training qualified personnel, capable of supporting local industry and feeding that pool of human capital in the area that is also a decisive factor in the location choices of multinational companies, in a virtuous circle in which, over time, smaller companies participating in the supply chains of multinationals grow and the qualification of human capital increases, fuelling innovation and the attractiveness of the area.

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