

This document is a pre-print version of a chapter that will appear in an open-access edited volume in 2020. It was written in the framework of the ERC project MiTSoPro (funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 680014).

The complete reference is:

Caldarini, C. (2020) « Diaspora Policies and Social Protection in Italy” in Lafleur, J.-M., & Vintila, C.-D. (Eds.). (2020). *Migration and social protection in Europe and beyond: comparing consular services and diaspora policies* (Volume 2). Dordrecht: Springer IMISCOE Research Series.

Chapter 16

Diaspora Policies and Social Protection in Italy

Carlo Caldarini

Abstract According to some estimates, about 60 million people of Italian origin live outside of Italy today. To manage and, at first, encourage emigration, Italy has historically built a composite diaspora infrastructure which is discussed in the first part of this chapter. Doing so, we demonstrate that instruments to consult and represent politically citizens abroad are core features of Italy's diaspora engagement policies.

In the second part of this chapter, we examine the social protection dimension of diaspora more closely and highlight the central role played by the *Patronati* (welfare advice agencies). We show that *Patronati* are to this day a unique institution at international level, by which Italians abroad can be helped, free of charge, to gain access to social protection in Italy and abroad.

Introduction

The Italian diaspora is a large-scale historical phenomenon that has involved millions of people for about a century and a half. Except for the fascist era, the Italian authorities have always demonstrated an interest in the phenomenon of emigration for its people, and have even tried to regulate and support it. For example, the Government has, at given times, subsidized travel expenses, ensured repatriation, banned emigration to certain countries during pestilences, and subsidized the cost of of Italian charities, schools and hospitals abroad (Foerster, 1919; Murat, Pistoiesi and Rinaldi, 2008).

Italy was also the first country in the world to promote a bilateral agreement, in the early 1900s, aimed at guaranteeing acceptable living and working standards for their emigrants working abroad

C. Caldarini
e-mail:

I wish to thank Mara Caldarini for her constructive linguistic advice. Responsibility for any inaccuracies remains mine.

(Caldarini, 2014).¹ But what precisely is the situation today? In this chapter, we will present the main features of current Italian diaspora policies, especially in the area of social protection. After briefly presenting some basic figures of the Italian history of emigration, the first section describes the institutional framework by which Italian authorities interact today with their nationals abroad, as well as the main policies of engagement with nationals abroad in areas that are not directly related to social protection (e.g. education, electoral rights...).

The second section provides descriptive information about the policies and services offered by Italian authorities to respond to social protection needs of nationals abroad across five specific policy areas: unemployment, health care, pensions, family and economic hardship. For each of these areas, the chapter highlights the role of the main institutional actors in charge of specific social protection areas.

A special category of social actors occupies an important place in this context: the so-called “Patronati” institutes. As will become apparent in this chapter, Patronati have become since World War II a central institution in the field of social protection and migration policies, at home and abroad. This is a category of social actors deeply linked to the history of the Italian diaspora, as well as that of Italian trade unionism, and which is unparalleled in any other country in the world (Caldarini, 2010).

16.1 Diaspora Characteristics and Home Country Engagement

16.1.1 The Italian Diaspora and its Relations with the Homeland

Historically, three major waves of Italian migration can be identified. The first massive wave began in 1861 with the Unification of Italy and ended in the 1920s with the rise of the Italian Fascism. A second wave began after the end of the Second World War and ended approximately in the 70s. It marks, *inter alia*, the beginning of a transition from a country of emigration to one of immigration.² A third wave, still ongoing, started in 2007, when the emigration flow returned to growth in an extraordinary way, particularly among young people. In addition to international migration, Italy has also experienced large-scale internal migration between regions, with significant cultural, economic, social and political impacts on the country (Ascoli, 1979; Pugliese, 2006).

Overall, it is difficult to say how many Italians have left their country permanently, but different estimates have been made by scholars and public institutions. In the 1970s, Russel King estimated that about 25 million Italians were residing outside of Italy at the time (King, 1978). Donna Gabaccia, for her part, estimates that since 1800 over 27 million have left Italy, and more than half have returned home. However, she also argues that rather than forming a “nation without borders”, Italy actually counts “many diasporas” as migrants have in fact maintained strong ties with their families and regional cultures (Gabaccia, 2000). In 2000, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, estimated for its part that between 60 and 70 million people of Italian origin were residing abroad at the time (Caritas, 2001). Lastly, the most recent official data of the Register of Italians Residing Abroad (AIRE) shows that the number of nationals residing abroad who are officially registered with Italian authorities has increased by 65% in the last 12 years, moving from 3,106,251 in 2006 to 5,114,469 in 2018 (Fondazione Migrantes, 2018).

¹ “Convenzione fra l'Italia e la Francia 15 aprile 1904 per la reciproca concessione di guarentigie ed agevolzze ai rispettivi operai”.

² In 1973, for the first time in Italy the migration balance became positive: 101 entries for 100 expatriates (IOM, 2011).

16.1.2 Diaspora Infrastructure and Key Engagement Policies

Over the years, Italy has built a composite diaspora infrastructure to deal with its population abroad. This infrastructure entails that a number of services are provided to citizens abroad but also that an advance form of consultation exists between the diaspora and the homeland. The main pillars of this infrastructure that we discuss below are the following: 1) a network of consular, cultural and educational institutions abroad, 2) a system of local consultation bodies, 3) a network of regional emigration councils, 4) a specific parliamentary representation of Italians abroad, 5) a specific Governmental authority for Italians abroad and 5) a unique transnational network of welfare advice centres, called *Patronati*. In this section, we will discuss each of them along with the core missions they conduct.

First, given the importance of the diaspora, over the decades Italy has developed abroad an important network of consular offices, cultural institutes and Italian schools.

The general task of the consular offices is to protect the interests of Italians abroad and to provide them with services and assistance, for example, in cases of death, accident, serious illness, arrest or detention, natural disasters, riots, armed conflict, etc. They provide exceptional assistance and subsidies in case of “documented indigence” in the form of a “food package”, a one-off cash aid or repatriation. More classically, they issue emergency travel documents, notification abroad of judicial documents, driving licenses, vehicle registrations, and provide information on home and host social protection. Consulates also ensure the operation of the Register of Italians Residing Abroad (AIRE), a key instrument created in the 1980’s that allows administrative contacts between Italians abroad and their homeland.

Consular repatriation only concerns Italian citizens who are experiencing issues that cannot be resolved locally, in the host country. It is provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the expense of the Treasury Department, in collaboration with the competent local authorities (prefectures, social services, etc.), only in case of “proven financial hardship”. In all other instances, repatriation can occur subject to the grant of a loan that must be repaid. The consulates also provide advice and support in case of repatriation of Italian citizens deceased abroad. They provide the authorization to the Italian municipality for the burial of the body or cremated remains, and the issue of the mortuary passport. In case of certifiable state of indigence, the consulate or embassy may aid the family of the deceased by reimbursing the cost of any properly documented funeral expenses paid locally.

In addition to the actual consulates, mobile consular services are offered and a network of honorary consulates have been established in most countries. An honorary consular office mainly deals with orientating citizens and forwarding their requests to the general one.

In liaison with the consulate network, 83 Italian Cultural Institutes (ICI) promote the diffusion of Italian culture and language throughout major cities around the world. It is their mission to organize cultural and artistic events, to manage libraries and to establish contacts between Italian and foreign cultures.

Looking at schools in particular, the network of Italian schools abroad includes: 8 State schools (Addis Ababa, Asmara, Athens, Barcelona, Istanbul, Madrid, Paris and Zurich), 43 State-authorized schools across the world, 7 Italian sections in European schools, 77 Italian sections in foreign, bilingual or international schools, and more than 200 courses in Italian language and culture and lectureships at foreign universities (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 2017).

Despite the fact that Italian migration has started to increase again in recent years, the number of consulates and cultural institutes decreased respectively by 24% and 10% between 2009 and 2016. Because of budgetary restrictions, all in all, 25 consulates, 9 cultural institutes and 187 educational institutions have been closed, most of them in Europe. To partially compensate this decline, honorary consulates have increased over the same period by 5% (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 2011 and 2017).

Second, Italy created in the 1980’s a widespread system of consultation and representation of

Italians abroad, organized over two geographical levels. At local level, the laws 205 of 1985 and 172 of 1990 created the Committees of Italians abroad (COMITES). Each local COMITES is elected directly by Italians abroad and cooperates with its consular authority in the protection of the interests of nationals residing in the district covered by the COMITES. Its task is to identify the social, cultural and civil needs of the community and to promote initiatives in matters pertaining to social and cultural life. It expresses a mandatory opinion on State funding granted to the media and to institutions and associations, concerning local activities in favour of nationals abroad. Depending on the number of residents, it can be made up of 12 or 18 members. More than a hundred COMITES have been established all over the world but primarily in Europe and the Americas (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 2017). The interest of Italians abroad for COMITES is however limited as demonstrated by the fact that less than 5% of the eligible voting population participated in the last election of 2015.

The General Council of Italians Abroad (CGIE) —established by Law 368 of 1989— performs, at a global level, the same function that the COMITES perform locally. It advises Government and Regions on matters of major interest for Italians abroad: living conditions, education and social services, financial support for associations, information for Italians abroad, consular activities, etc. As formal consultative bodies representing Italians abroad, the opinions and recommendations that the CGIE addresses to Italian institutions (mainly Government and Parliament) may also concern social protection issues (in particular pensions and social assistance for the most deprived). Since 1998, the CGIE's opinion has been mandatory for each act of Government and Regions concerning Italians abroad (Law 198 of 1998). The CGIE Plenary Assembly is made up of 65 members residing abroad, elected by the COMITES network, and 29 members appointed by the Government, following recommendations from the parties represented in Parliament, the trade unions and the most representative institutions for emigration. The Minister for Foreign Affairs chairs the CGIE Assembly. In spite of this elaborate structure, the opinions of the CGIE rarely have a real impact on political decisions. For instance, since 1992, a number of recommendations have been made by the CGIE in favor of a “social allowance for poor elderly people living abroad”, but the Government has never taken these into consideration (See Narducci, 2014).

Third, even though immigration and emigration policies are essentially the responsibility of the central government, regional institutions promote and finance initiatives, aimed above all at preserving and strengthening social and cultural relations between emigrant citizens and their region of origin. To this end, during the process of decentralization and regionalization of the Italian State that took place from the 1970's through the 1990's, the 21 regions created their own Regional Emigration Councils (“Consulte regionali dell'emigrazione”). All the Emigration Councils are established by regional laws and only have an advisory function. Their mission is to formulate opinions, proposals and recommendations to the regional Government, regarding cultural and exchange activities, social conditions, information and studies, right to study, dissemination and preservation of regional cultural and artistic heritage. They are composed of local elected officials at regional, provincial or municipal level, experts, representatives of economic organizations, trade unions and migrant associations.

Fourth, a central and more recent feature of the Italian system of representation of its diaspora derives from Law 459 of 2001 that made possible the right to vote and to stand as candidate of Italian citizens residing abroad, without having to return to Italy to vote. According to this legislation, all Italian citizens of legal majority (18 years) registered with the Register of Italians Abroad (AIRE) can vote by post (absentee ballot) and stand as a candidate.³ This right was first used in the 2006 general elections and allowed Italian voters residing abroad to elect six senators and twelve deputies to the national

³ Italian citizens residing abroad can also return to Italy to vote. No provisions are made for refunding the travel expenses of those who have opted to vote in Italy.

parliament, in representation of a special extra-territorial electoral constituency called “Circoscrizione Estero” (Foreign Constituency), divided into four continental districts (see table 1). Through the same system, since 2001 it is also possible for Italian citizens to vote in referendums.

Table 1 Composition of the Foreign Constituency

Continental districts	Italians resident abroad	Voting-eligible population	Deputies	Senators
Europe	2 685 815	2 261 416	5	2
South America	1 559 068	1 343 929	4	2
North and Central America	451 062	389 060	2	1
Africa, Asia, Oceania and Antarctica	277 997	236 449	1	1
Total	4 973 942	4 230 854	12	6

Source: Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica, 28 Dicembre 2017; Ministero dell’Interno.

Given the size of the diaspora (officially more than 4,2 million voters residing abroad) and the importance of the parliamentary seats at stake, virtually all Italian political parties have an organized presence abroad, which reproduces the same structure of the political parties in Italy (clubs, committees, federations, associations, etc.). In addition to the political parties officially existing in Italy, there are also specific political parties for Italians abroad, mainly in South America. Concerning the electoral behavior of Italians abroad, Battiston and Luconi (2018) note that there is a strong divergence of interests, and therefore of political orientation, between the various migratory generations and consequently between countries of historical immigration (such as Latin America) and those in which there was a renewal of the Italian presence (Europe, USA).

In the 2006 elections, turnout reached 39% but the initial enthusiasm is slowly fading as turnout dropped to 29% in the last general elections of 2018.

Fifth, over the years, different minister-level type of institutions dedicated to the diaspora have been created and have later disappeared. Between 1991 and 2006, a specific Ministry (or Department) has been the competent Governmental authority for Italians abroad: Ministry for Italians Abroad and Immigration (1991-1992), Ministry for Italians in the World (1994-1995), Department for Italians in the world at the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (1995-2001), Ministry for Italians in the World (2001-2006). This competence is currently conferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation which means that there is no longer a specific ministry dedicated to this issue. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation includes eight directorates-general, one of which, the Directorate General for Italian Citizens Abroad and Migration Policies (DGIEPM), coordinates the policies relating to the rights of Italians abroad: protection and assistance; social, linguistic and educational promotion; relations with the COMITES and CGIE; funding to associations and committees; electoral services; social protection and tax advice; legislative proposals concerning Italians abroad. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is, inter alia, president of the CGIE (General Council of Italians Abroad).

The sixth, and most innovative Italian diaspora institution compared to other EU Member States are the Italian Welfare Advice Centers known as *Patronati* in Italian. They were created after the Second World War, to facilitate access to individual rights in the field of social protection. Although

the first Patronati dates back to the mid-nineteenth century as an unofficial organization, mainly to provide relief for Italian migrants who disembarked from ships in Argentina and Brazil (Murat, Pistoiesi and Rinaldi, 2008), the Patronati, as we know them today, were born in 1945, on the initiative of the General Confederation of Italian Labor (CGIL) first, and then of the Christian Association of Italian Workers (ACLI). They are, today still, special non-profit institutes linked to trade unions or corporative associations, providing services in the field of social protection, migration and immigration, widespread across Italy, and abroad, especially in the main destination countries of the Italian diaspora. As they are funded by a slight percentage of the compulsory social security contributions (0.193% from 2015), they are considered as “private bodies of public interest”. Their services are free for all the beneficiaries and no affiliation is in fact required to access them.

The Patronati are a key actor in Italy for all persons (independent of nationality) in accessing social protection but have also hundreds of offices in at least 40 countries to serve the needs of Italians abroad. They provide services to national and non-national citizens having a link with Italian social security, mainly in matters of pensions (i.e. former immigrant workers in Italy who have returned to their home country). Blurring further the distinction between public and private, in certain countries, the Patronati also provide some consular services: applying for an Italian tax code, passport and ID card, Italian citizenship applications, civil-status records, AIRE Registration... In the countries where the Patronati are present, their services are free of charge. They help to request a home or host country benefit; and also to request a benefit from another country, if one has lived and worked in several countries (provided of course that the Patronato has an office in this other country). The Patronati operate, in Italy and abroad, under the authority of the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies. To be more precise, each Patronato operates under a “double authority”: on the one hand the Ministry of Labour, the national authority competent by law, on the other the social body from which each Patronato (and its employees) depends. Each Patronato is therefore linked to a collective/corporate social body and is consequently an expression of the political and ideological orientation of the association to which it belongs (workers associations, most of the time). Currently 25 Patronato institutes are recognized by the laws in force in Italy, and half of these also work abroad.

As will be demonstrated below, no other country in the world has such an original organizational and institutional model that performs very advanced types of services for citizens abroad (Caldarini, 2010). For their services abroad, the Italian Patronati receive from the social security fund about 40 million euros a year (this figure has been declining for some years).⁴ More than half are allocated to the four main Patronati, related to the three major union confederations (CGIL, CISL and UIL) and to the Christian workers' association. It is to be noted that, in practice, this money also serves to finance other trade unions activities (De Saintignon et al., 2005). Thanks to this system, about 600,000 citizens abroad can be helped free of charge (according to official data from the AIRE population register, this is almost one in eight Italians abroad). At the same time, this system gives the Patronati strength and power greater than any other Italian association or organization abroad (Senato della Repubblica, 2016). To give an example, the Patronati manage every year, on behalf of the Italian social security institution INPS, about 200,000 tax returns, and almost 400,000 certificates of living status of Italian pensioners abroad (see below).

⁴ In 2015, the percentage of mandatory social contributions allocated to the Patronati was reduced from 0.226% to 0.193%.

16.2 Diaspora Policies and Social Protection in Italy

The Italian social protection system is sometimes considered one of the most fragmented among EU and OECD countries. The incidence of undeclared work, the lack of universal policies against poverty, the weak labor protection for some forms of contracts and the proportionally low social spending, mainly concentrated on pensions and older people, are historically some of the root causes of social inequality and poverty in Italy (Saraceno, 2014; Zoli, 2004).

Social protection policies for the diaspora should also be seen in this context. In the infrastructure described in the previous section, the Patronati are the main actors operating abroad in the field of social protection. Indeed, the consultative bodies (CGIE, regional councils or parliamentary representation of Italians abroad) do not play an effective role in terms of social protection for nationals residing abroad. The consulates, on the other hand, have only a generic function “to provide for the protection of Italian workers, particularly in terms of living conditions, work and social security”. Their role is thus to ensure the link between citizens abroad and Italian social institutions and give information to citizens. However, they have no specific task of assisting nationals residing abroad to access the home or host benefits and their mission of information consists mostly in providing information on pension payments abroad or on pensioners’ income declaration, but not (or rarely) on unemployment or other social protection benefits. Overall, it is a standard procedure that the consulates redirect the citizens towards the Patronati, in the countries where these are present.

16.2.1 Unemployment

Beyond the EU framework (see European Commission, 2017), Italian public institutions have no specific policies, programmes or services responding to the needs of unemployed nationals residing abroad. Even the consulates don’t have a specific role in the field of unemployment. The only organisations financed by public money, providing information and concrete services to access home and host country-based unemployment benefits for Italian workers abroad, are the Patronati. One of their functions is in fact to submit administrative documents (or other forms of administrative support) to public institutions in charge of unemployment. In practice, however, citizens abroad experience that the level of service provided by Patronati in the area of unemployment is much more limited than that provided in the area of pension. The reason for this is that only some of the services offered by the Patronati - such as pensions - are taken into account into the calculation of the annual grant they receive from the Italian government, while others - such as unemployment benefits – are not compensated at all. More concretely, if a Patronato leads to success your request for an “incapacity pension”, a score of 6 will go into the calculation of the total annual funding that the Italian State will pay to this Patronato. A retirement pension accounts 5 points. A residence permit or family reunion accounts only 0.35 points. Other benefits, such as unemployment benefits and many others, are worth zero points. In total, the Patronati need to treat 95 different types of social benefits and only 37 of these lead to a score between 6 and 0.35. All the others are worth zero points and therefore do not contribute to the calculation of the annual funding.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning the existence of a special unemployment benefits scheme for workers repatriated to Italy after a period of work abroad (EU and non-EU States). It concerns those who have involuntarily lost their job for dismissal or non-renewal of a seasonal employment contract by the employer abroad.⁵ The maximum duration of this special benefit is 180 days, and the amount is about 30% of the conventional salary, according to tables established by annual ministerial decrees. In

⁵ www.inps.it/nuovoportaleinps/default.aspx?itemdir=50191

addition to being little known, even among insiders, this special unemployment benefit is rarely applied because, to access it, one must return in Italy within 6 months of their dismissal, a period during which one would, more likely, continue to look for work in their host country.

16.2.2 Health Care

The Italian National Health Service (SSN) is residence-based and reserved for those registered with the Local Health Authorities (*Aziende sanitarie locali*). Outside the legal and political framework of the EU (see European Commission, 2017), Italy has no specific policies to support its citizens abroad in the field of health care. Similarly, national and regional authorities have no specific activities or services to help people living abroad to address health risks or to access disability benefits, no public training, information or awareness campaigns, and consulates and any other diaspora infrastructures have no specific skills in helping nationals abroad in this field.

Only in some exceptional cases, national authorities have the task of intervening to help nationals abroad. Two possibilities exist. First, citizens registered with the National Health System, who for work and study related reasons are living in countries outside the EU where there are no bilateral agreements on health care, can take advantage of the home country health coverage in indirect form, by advancing the expenses and submitting a request for reimbursement to the Italian diplomatic representation.⁶ Second, as mentioned above, in case of health-related economic hardship, Italians abroad in a state of “documented indigence” can address their consulate to benefit from a “consular repatriation” at the expense of the Treasury Department. This concerns only Italian citizens who are experiencing issues that cannot be resolved locally, in the host country.

Countries with the greatest presence of Italians citizens also host the Patronati, which are specifically funded to help citizens abroad to access the Italian and host country social benefits, and therefore the task of the consulates is mainly limited to the redirection of people to the Patronati.

With regards to the provision of information in the area of healthcare, it should also be noted that on the website of the Ministry of Health an interactive guide (“*Se parto per...*”) gives some information on the right to health assistance during a stay or residence in any country in the world, in particular: “how to obtain health care in another country”, “how to request any reimbursement” and “who to contact”.⁷

Lastly, regarding medical care abroad, a peculiarity of the Italian diaspora is the existence of 22 hospitals and 20 treatment centers with Italian assistance in the world. These institutions are mostly private structures, founded by associations, religious bodies and NGOs, and —while they may sometimes receive financial support— they do not directly depend on Italian institutions. Their creation is often related to the history of emigration (e.g. in Latin America), colonial history, religious congregations or university cooperation and therefore were not always founded with the objective of responding to the needs of Italians abroad

16.2.3 Pensions

As explained earlier, the Italian authorities entrust the Patronati with the task of helping Italian pensioners abroad to access their right to a pension whether it concerns a pension paid by Italy or one paid by the country of residence. The Patronati have direct access to the main databases of the Italian

⁶ DECRETO DEL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA 31 luglio 1980, n. 618.

⁷ www.salute.gov.it/portale/temi/p2_4.jsp?lingua=italiano&area=Assistenza%20sanitaria.

social security system and can therefore carry out numerous tasks for citizens abroad in this area: establish life certificates, transmit tax returns, verify and challenge payments, check social insurance contributions, apply for pensions under international agreements, calculate the contribution periods in different countries (i.e. aggregation), export of social security benefits, claim for survivors' pensions, redress decisions taken by the pension institutions, etc. Also, it is important to note that the Patronati's support materializes via delegation of the interested party which means that they can carry out in his name all the practices, including legal disputes if necessary.

In 2016, the Italian National Institute of Social Security INPS paid 373,265 pensions abroad. The total expenditure exceeds one billion euros (CSRIP, 2018). 16% of pensions paid abroad (i.e. almost 60,000) are the result of fully paid contributions in Italy: they are therefore pensioners who have chosen to leave Italy to reside in another country, in many cases due to the cost of living and tax benefits. 75% of the expenditure for pensions paid abroad is concentrated in the 10 countries in which the greatest flow of emigration of workers from Italy occurred in the last century (TABLE 2). Most of the activity (and the money flows) of the Patronati abroad is also concentrated in these 10 countries.

Table 2 Countries with the highest number of Italian pensions paid abroad in 2016

	Number of pensions	Total expenditure €
Canada	57 215	76 375 147
Australia	47 529	90 580 246
Germany	47 273	90 024 260
France	44 971	100 179 082
USA	39 036	97 734 086
Switzerland	30 649	81 574 387
Argentina	25 938	95 907 561
Belgium	14 714	33 769 715
UK	10 795	27 712 802
Brazil	8 030	39 816 869

Source: CSRIP, 2018

In order to pay pensions abroad, INPS uses the services of a bank, which gets awarded a three-year public contract. Among other things, the assigned bank has the task of annually verifying the pensioner's living status, address and residence. As from 2012, the bank designated is Citibank which, in turn, operates through a network of other local banks. Concerning life certificates, Citibank yearly mails to each Italian pensioner abroad a "Life Certificate Form", the pensioner then completes this form with a certified signature and sends it to the bank. The Life Certificate Form may be authenticated by an official from the Italian Consulate or Embassy, or alternatively by a municipal officer or a notary. As mentioned previously, pensions are the social protection area where the Patronati are most eager to intervene as they are best financially compensated for this sort of service. It must be remembered, however, that this was not their initial mission. Originally, the years 1940-1960, patronages served mainly to help active workers.

16.2.4 Family-Related Benefits

Among all social expenditure, that for family-related benefits is by far the least important in Italy's welfare budget (about 4% of social spending). Three different types of family benefits should be mentioned: 1) household Allowance (*Assegno per il Nucleo Familiare*), for families of employees and retired employees, who have an income lower than that established annually by law; 2) Local Authority Allowance (*Assegno dei comuni*) for low-income household with at least three minor children, granted exclusively through the Local Authorities; and 3) Family Allowance for Pensioners (*Assegni familiari ai pensionati*), for families of former self-employed workers (craftsmen, traders and farmers). While the first two benefits are subject to the residence principle and are not "exportable", the Family Allowance for Pensioners can be paid to pensioners resident abroad. In this case, Patronati are also given the task of helping Italians abroad to access this benefit.

16.2.5 Economic hardship

Whilst, until 2015, a nation-wide minimum income did not exist in Italy, the 2016 Stability Law established for the first time a special fund against poverty and social exclusion. This new scheme, called *Reddito di inclusione* (Inclusion Income), has been approved in March 2017, and is in effect only since December 2017 with a limited budget of EUR 1.5 billion. To access it, one must be resident in Italy for at least two years continuously. This Inclusion Income provision does not therefore apply to citizens residing abroad.

At the time of writing (January 2019), the Government and Parliament are approving the financial law for the next three years, which should establish two new forms of minimum income, called *Reddito di cittadinanza* (Citizenship Income) and *Pensione di cittadinanza* (Citizenship Pension). The details are not yet known, but they are said to involve about 5 million potential beneficiaries, with a total spending of around 6 billion euros a year. As was the case for the *Reddito di inclusione*, these two new forms of minimum income are also not expected to apply to citizens residing abroad. In the Decree Law of 4 January 2019, additional exclusionary criteria apply, as the beneficiary must be an Italian resident for at least 10 years before benefitting from minimum income protection. This condition was included to limit the benefits for immigrants residing in Italy but has the associated side-effect of also excluding Italians who return to Italy after a period of residency abroad. They, too, need to comply with the 10-years residency criteria.

Besides this scheme and as mentioned previously, there exist a cash benefit for Italians abroad “in a state of documented indigence” that can be obtained via the Consulate. It is an “absolutely exceptional” cash aid, annually determined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and/or a cash loan, due to unexpected economic difficulties and the impossibility of using the help of family members or third parties. Only the cash loan must be repaid. The “state of documented indigence”, and so the need to repay, or not, the cash aid, must be evaluated by the Consulate on a case-by-case basis, according to criteria annually defined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These temporary cash aids are offered to nationals residing both inside and outside the EU, but it is most frequently applied in the countries of Latin America (Narducci, 2014). They are primarily aimed at poor citizens who are not entitled to any social benefit, either from their home or host country.

16.3 Conclusions

The Italian diaspora is a large-scale historical phenomenon that has involved millions of people for at least a century and a half. To manage and, initially, encourage emigration, Italy has built throughout the years a composite diaspora infrastructure. Over the last 40 years Italy has attached great importance to the representation and consultation of nationals abroad. But probably the most important policy for Italians abroad, and in any case the most relevant one in the social protection field, from the end of the Second World War to today, was the creation of the Patronati, by the trade unions, in 1945, and their official recognition in 1947 as “private bodies of public interest”.

Italy is not the only country where private organizations linked to trade unions are funded to carry out functions of public interest in the field of social protection. Well-known examples are Belgium and the Scandinavian countries, where trade unions manage unemployment insurance (the so-called “Ghent system”). But Italy is the only country in the world to have made this system accessible to its citizens abroad. Moreover, unlike any other country, the services provided by the Italian Patronati are free for all, without any membership requirements, and, above all, they cover all areas of social protection (Caldarini, 2010).

In all the countries where the diaspora is significant, the Patronati are present and cooperate

closely with consulates and embassies. In some countries the Patronati often provide some consular services (consular correspondents), especially in the regions where the general consulates have been closed. The Italian law provides, in fact, that the Patronati must also carry out support activities for Italian diplomatic and consular authorities abroad. It is also a standard practice that the consulates redirect towards the Patronati for any social problem related to pensions, social protection, social assistance, repatriation, indigence, freedom of movement and residence, etc. All this allows them to have a voice on consular and diplomatic policies. In other words, while they are not a direct representation of the state abroad, Patronati conduct a series of mission that the state would usually take charge of.

Because of its central role in the life of many Italians residing abroad, Patronati are also a key political player in relation to the diaspora. Its voice weighs considerably on the election of the members of the COMITES and CGIE. Similarly, during election campaigns for the seats in the Foreign Constituency, the action of the Patronati has an influence on the vote of residents abroad, especially towards older people, and many candidates from these institutions. In this regard, it should be recalled that in the general elections of 2006, the vote of Italians abroad determined the victory of the center-left coalition (led by Romano Prodi) which defeated the center-right by several thousand votes (Silvio Berlusconi), thanks only to the results of the “Circoscrizione Estero” (Foreign Constituency).

Although most Italians abroad do not know or do not use Patronati, especially among the young and the most qualified, they are certainly an important network of protection, participation and solidarity. For people with more difficulties (such as isolated seniors and people who cannot read or write) the Patronati are sometimes a last safety net. Overall, it can be argued that the Patronati have become fairly powerful. For this reason, using the pretext of austerity, several political parties and lobbies have been calling for some years for their closure or reduction in number. A popular referendum on the abolition of funding and legal recognition of the Patronati had been promoted by some political forces 2000, but it was rejected by the Constitutional Court. This was probably one of the reasons why the last stability laws reduced funding and some free services will have to gradually become paid for.

As we are closing this chapter, we should consider what would happen if the Patronati were further downsized or, as some ask for, drastically closed?

We have already seen that the Italian social protection system is particularly fragmented and weak. Social expenditure is low and focused on old-age pensions.

The Patronati, as for them, born to help mainly the class of active workers, and the immigrants who were expatriates looking for work (therefore young people), have gradually become, in the last decades, “services for the elderly” above all (old age pensions, pensions for survivors, etc.) and are finding it increasingly difficult to intercept the new forms of the Italian diaspora, especially young people and atypical workers (Caldarini et al., 2014).

Because of the Patronati’s quasi-monopoly in dealing with citizens abroad, one can wonder, after all, if their position has weakened all other diaspora infrastructures. As shown in this book, in other EU countries, consulates and public social security institutes directly and effectively carry out policies and services facilitating access to social protection for nationals residing abroad. In these countries, a service like that of the Patronati would have no reason to exist (Caldarini, 2010). Yet, in the current Italian context, characterized by the reduction of consular services, the downsizing, or even, as some plead for, the closure of the Patronati, would significantly impact citizens abroad. The question now is whether it is more appropriate to reform, restructure, consolidate or secure the existing heritage and its wealth of experience, or, in order to rebuild, to first remove the rubble.

16.4 References

- Ascoli, U. (1979). *Movimenti migratori in Italia*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Battiston, S. & Luconi, S. (2018) *Autopsia di un diritto politico. Il voto degli italiani all'estero nelle elezioni del 2018*. Torino: Centro Altrettalie, Accademia University Press.
- Caldarini, C. (2010). *Dire, fare, tutelare. L'azione sindacale di tutela individuale in cinque paesi europei*. Roma: Ediesse.
- Caldarini, C. (2014). Il coordinamento dei sistemi di sicurezza sociale in Europa. Ovvero, perché in Europa i regimi di welfare sono così diversi tra loro. In Vv.Aa.. *Il manuale dei diritti sociali* (pp. 79-86). Roma: Ediesse.
- Caldarini, C., Giubboni, S. & McKay, S. (2014). *The "place" of atypical work in the European social security coordination: A transnational comparative analysis*. Catania: WP C.S.D.L.E. "Massimo D'Antona". Collective Volumes Caritas (2001). *Dossier statistico Immigrazione*. Roma: Anterem.
- CSRIP (2018). *Il bilancio del sistema previdenziale italiano. Rapporto n.5*. Milano: Itinerari Previdenziali.
- De Saintignon, P., Guedj, J., Osterrieder, H. & Saintoyant, V. (2005). *Étude d'administration comparée sur le financement des syndicats (Allemagne, Belgique, Grande Bretagne, Italie, Suède)*. Paris: Igas.
- European Commission (2017). *Your social security rights in Italy*. Brussels.
- Foerster, R.F. (1919). *The Italian Emigration of Our Times*. New York: Harvard University Press.
- Fondazione Migrantes (2017). *Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo*. Todi: TAU.
- Fondazione Migrantes (2018). *Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo*. Todi: TAU.
- Gabaccia, D.R. (2000). *Italy's Many Diasporas*. London: UCL Press.
- IOM (2001). *Migration in Italy. Current situation and perspectives*. Rome: Idos.
- King, R. (1978). *Report: The Italian Diaspora*. Area 10. 385.
- Ministero degli Affari Esteri (2011). *Annuario Statistico 2011*. Roma: Sistema Statistico Nazionale.
- Ministero degli Affari Esteri (2017). *Annuario Statistico 2017*. Roma: Sistema Statistico Nazionale.
- Ministero del Lavoro e delle Politiche Sociali (2017). *Finanziamento degli Istituti di patronato e di assistenza sociale*. Comunicato stampa del 13 gennaio 2017.
- Murat, M., Pistoiesi, B. & Rinaldi, A., (2008). Italian Diaspora and Foreign Direct Investment. Paper. March 28-30. University of Nottingham.
- Narducci, F. (2014). Povertà e indigenza degli italiani all'estero. *Rapporto italiani nel mondo 2014*, 298-307. Fondazione Migrantes.
- Pugliese, E. (2006). *L'Italia tra migrazioni internazionali e migrazioni interne*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Saraceno, C. (2014). Da dove partire per la riforma del welfare. *lavoce.info*. [www.lavoce.info /archives/30291/dove-partire-per-riforma-welfare](http://www.lavoce.info/archives/30291/dove-partire-per-riforma-welfare).
- Senato della Repubblica (2016). *Indagine conoscitiva sulla riforma dei patronati italiani che operano fuori dal territorio nazionale per le comunità italiane residenti all'estero*.
- Zoli, M. (2004). I sistemi di welfare state nei paesi dell'Unione Europea. *LLEE Working Document*. No.1 January.

Legal References

- CONVENZIONE FRA L'ITALIA E LA FRANCIA 15 aprile 1904 per la reciproca concessione di guarentigie ed agevolzze ai rispettivi operai.
- DECRETO DEL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA 5 gennaio 1967, n. 18. Ordinamento dell'Amministrazione degli affari esteri.
- DECRETO DEL PRESIDENTE DELLA REPUBBLICA 31 luglio 1980, n. 618, Assistenza sanitaria ai cittadini italiani all'estero.

DECRETO LEGISLATIVO DEL CAPO PROVVISORIO DELLO STATO 29 luglio 1947, n. 804.

Istituti di patronato e di assistenza sociale.

DECRETO LEGISLATIVO 3 febbraio 2011, n. 71. Ordinamento e funzioni degli uffici consolari.

LEGGE 8 maggio 1985, n. 205. Istituzione dei comitati dell'emigrazione italiana (COEMIT).

LEGGE 27 ottobre 1988, n.470. Istituzione dell'Anagrafe e censimento degli italiani all'estero (AIRE).

LEGGE 6 novembre 1989, n. 368. Istituzione del Consiglio generale degli italiani all'estero (CGIE).

LEGGE 5 luglio 1990, n.172. Istituzione dei comitati degli italiani all'estero (COMITES).

LEGGE 27 dicembre 2001, n. 459. Norme per l'esercizio del diritto di voto dei cittadini italiani residenti all' estero.