



Italy-Morocco: A Mosaic of Talent Receives Business Training

Eighty skilled Moroccan migrants living in Italy are currently taking part in a comprehensive training course that aims to provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to help them successfully invest in the socio-economic development of their home country.

The course, part of IOM's MigResources programme, aims to create favourable investment conditions in Italy and Morocco for expatriates to invest at home, either through temporary or virtual returns programmes, targeted investments of remittances or through the creation of trans-national networks of firms, migrants' associations and public administrations in both countries.

IOM's Jean-Philippe Chauzy has met some of the expatriates taking part in this unique programme, which is funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

By Jean-Philippe Chauzy, IOM Geneva

Despite the constant rumble coming from the ancient and congested Via Nomentana, there's a quiet, studious atmosphere at the University of Malta campus in Rome.

In a couple of high-ceilinged rooms, some 40 Moroccan expatriates and budding entrepreneurs are outlining their nascent business plans to Simonetta Bormioli, a sociologist and researcher who works for CERFE, a non-profit organization that has teamed up with IOM to provide migrants

with the appropriate training to help them successfully invest at home.

"Our first task is to listen and identify some of the obstacles that could jeopardize their business plans," says Bormioli. "This is paramount to defining their training needs and to establish a realistic level of expectations for all involved. Once this is done, the programme will provide the migrants with the right technical baggage, contacts and skills to help them undertake a detailed feasibility study as part of their business plan."

The trainees, who have been selected on the basis of applications outlining their entrepreneurial goals in Morocco, are all keen to share their hopes for the future.

With a strong background as a social mediator in Italy, where he has lived and worked for more than 20 years, Malayo Abderrazak has decided to set up a financial intermediation venture.

"The idea is to build on the valuable experience I have acquired as a social mediator to set up a structure that would mobilize funds from Italian businesses and migrant communities to invest in promising, but often cash-starved start-ups in Morocco," says Abderrazak. "Businesses that are sponsoring or benefiting from this scheme would also employ, train and support young professionals in Morocco and Italy to ultimately help them come up with viable business plans to set up their own small enterprises."

Abderrazak, who also heads ATLAS, a vibrant NGO for Moroccans residing in Italy, believes twinning mechanisms between NGOs and small businesses on both sides of the Mediterranean would help promote sustainable development and reduce the incentive for many thousands of young Moroccans to emigrate at all costs.



▲ Bouhrim Said dreams of creating a clothing designer brand (Photo: © Jean-Philippe Chauzy/IOM, 2007)

“My work as a social mediator has taken me inside Italian prisons where I have helped fellow compatriots who have fallen on the wrong side of law. This has made me realize how many human tragedies and economic opportunities are wasted through irregular migration.”

Abderrazak sees himself as a true transnational who intends to make the most out of his unique background to encourage a greater mobility of people, skills and capital.

“The Moroccan community in Italy is ready to invest at home but many expatriates who have business ideas do not know how to carry them out. This training is also crucial because it will allow us to confront our dreams with the harsh realities of the business world.”

Also taking part in the training is Fatima Chegri who wants to develop a business plan with the active support of several family members who are currently living and working in Italy and Morocco.

“I have two brothers who are employed as skilled technicians in a chroming plant in Venice and another brother who works as a senior accountant in Rabat,” says Chegri, who adds her family is ready to mobilize some of the capital for the enterprise. “Over the past 20 years,



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▼ Fatima Chegri seeks to establish a family business in Rabat (Photo: © Jean-Philippe Chauzy/IOM, 2007)





▲ Malayo Abderrazak wants to set up a financial intermediation venture (Photo: © Jean-Philippe Chauzy/IOM, 2007)

we have bought land in and around the seaside resort of Temara, which we could sell to invest in the venture."

Chegri says her brothers have already carried out a limited feasibility survey in the region of Rabat and have identified what they believe to be a niche market. But the family also realizes they might not be able to set up this business without some strong backing.

"Ideally, we'd like to set up this business with the technical and logistical support of the Venetian firm," says Chegri. "A form of partnership would certainly kick start the venture and make it more sustainable in the short to medium term."

Chegri, who works full time for ARCI, an NGO that provides support for refugees and migrants, says she's only too familiar with the consequences of exile.

"Moroccan expatriates have a collective duty to invest in Morocco to provide our brothers and sisters with viable economic alternatives," adds Chegri who believes this training and her family's support are her best guarantees for success.

Bouhrim Said has spent most of his professional life working in the textile industry in Morocco. Last year, his wife, a consular officer, was posted in Rome, the capital of fashion in Said's eyes.

"I took a leave of absence from my Moroccan employer because I wanted to develop a business plan that would make best use of my knowledge and contacts in the textile industry to help aspiring Moroccan and Italian designers in their bid to create new brands," he explains.

Said firmly believes that the future for young designers lies in finished, high quality goods produced in small quantities. He says he wants to work with designers and textile manufacturers in Italy and Morocco to position his country's unique cultural heritage as a strong selling point for the European fashion industry.

"Fashion can be a wonderful cross-cultural mediator," says Said who believes his project could also promote new cultural synergies between young Italians and Moroccans.

IOM's Ugo Melchionda, who manages MigResources, is fully aware of the many pitfalls that lie on the way to successful entrepreneurship. "Migrants will only become successful agents of development if they are provided with the necessary financial and management skills and if they benefit from strong support networks among migrants' associations, public administrations and the private sector."

As part of the programme, a similar course was launched in May in Casablanca for 30 qualified Moroccans who wish to acquire new skills through on-the-job trainings in Italian businesses. The course, which is carried out in partnership with the Rabat-based *Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Démographiques*, provides practical guidance on how best to access the Italian job market with the aim of acquiring skills.

"Circular migration can be achieved through partnerships that promote mobility through job-training or job-matching services," explains Melchionda. "This programme is a first step to show that circular migration promotes skills transfer, investment and ultimately economic growth for all countries involved." **M**