

Italy: A case of inefficient and opaque administration of research funds

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Lack of opportunities for researchers

- Low mobility of researchers, across institutions and borders.
- Fragmentation of programs and lack of adequate financing
- Irregular programs: Centri di Eccellenza / PRIN / CNR / Interlink / etc
- Lack of transparency, inward oriented
- Research funds are **only part of the problem**: the entire system is in bad shape

Public funding

Ministry of University and Research (MIUR) is the main provider of public funding.

Three examples

- **FIRB** (basic research, similar to EU Collaborative Projects)
- “**Rientro dei cervelli**” (similar to Marie Curie actions for junior and senior researchers)
- **Futuro in Ricerca**: similar to ERC (but smaller scale)
- **COFIN** (very small scale networks)

Public funding: FIRB projects

- Basic Research Investment Fund (FIRB): Annual Budget €174mE. in 2002-03.
- Support basic research, projects to enhance large scale facilities and projects for creating and networking centres of excellence.
- **In Economics:** typically **small grants:** €0.2- €0.3 for three years / and 4 teams of researchers: (15,000 Euro per year per team)
- In the past, 4-5 grants awarded to research in Economics at each call.

Public funding: Rientro dei Cervelli

- Launched in 2001 to facilitate Italian scholars who work abroad and foreign scholars to work in Italy.
- Open to researchers who hold positions abroad.
- Covered four year full time contracts. No “tenure” after the contract
- 2001-06: **25 out of 593** grants awarded to Professors in Economics, mostly Italians.
- Program stopped in 2007, not clear if and how it will be reactivated.

Public funding: Futuro in Ricerca

- Programme for individual research funding targeted to young researchers.
- Supports basic research from all disciplines
- Started in 2009, Budget: €50m for all disciplines
- Grants sized between €0.3m and €2 for 4 years.
- **Two categories:**
 - Under 33 year, not employed by an Italian university.
 - Under 38 year, all researchers
- **Likely outcome: 4-5 grants for Economics (€1.5-2m)**

Co-Financing of Research Activities (COFIN):

- Co-finances (70% from MIUR) projects of professors **employed by Italian universities**.
- Project driven, subject to ex-ante evaluation (ex-post not effective).
- Budget is very small: Economics between 3-4 M€ per year, financing about 25-30 projects.
- Amounts: 8-10,000 Euro per year per research unit
- Not open to foreigners

Private financing

- Some public and private institutions provide research grants.
- Bank of Italy, Unicredit, Compagnia di San Paolo, Fondazione Cariplo, Fondazione Antonveneta
- Other Foundations
- Often targeted to regional research programs

For economics

- 10 fellowships for PhD students abroad
- 2 Post-docs for returning PhD students
- Irregular funding of research programs, usually one-year horizon, opaque evaluation, not open to foreigners
- Exceptions: Collegio Carlo Alberto, EIEF

Italian academic system is not attractive

- Lack of funding, inefficient and opaque administration of funds, lack of information
- Funds cannot be part of compensation or researchers
- Irregular timing, funds are frequently reshaped
- Financial uncertainty, delayed payments
- When you get it, hard to administer
- Research funds are **only part of the problem**: the entire system is in bad shape

Suggestion – at least for the short-run

- Italy currently lacks the infrastructure and culture to administer research funds in open and competitive way.
- For this reason I have advocated that we delegate evaluation, at least in the short-run.
- Italy should fund “**Research chairs**” borrowing from the ERC list: projects with positive evaluation but insufficient EU funding should be financed by MIUR
- Regional funds exist, and, if anything, are even less transparent. Same advice: finance from the ERC list