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**The Italian demographic decline: how to
reverse the trend starting from youngsters'
necessities**

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Introduction

The aim of an effective research is providing concrete elements to answer a previously posed question. In particular, this thesis aims at illustrating the Italian demographic decline through the lens of ageing and understand how this phenomenon could be reversed by responding to youngsters' necessities.

The author wishes to open readers' minds on the serious risks that our country is going through due to the lack of both correct intergenerational turnover and of policies incentivising the reversal of this progressive decline. For this research to be fully understood, it is fundamental to recall the meaning of potential demography¹. This concept is grounded in the theoretical assumption that the future is similar to an economic good. Therefore, a population that owns more future – thus, young people – will be wealthier.²

The Italian problem is based on several factors which have evolved throughout the last decades. Among these, we may mention its cultural traditions, which appear to be less and less fitting in the modern evolutionary panorama; and the incapability of creating long-lasting, time-projected, people-oriented policies instead of self-oriented ones. For this reason, couples in Italy are more and more unable to foresee and project their future. Furthermore, the current COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the previously existing issues, creating additional obstacles for the process of Italian ageing to reverse.

Even in the light of the conspicuous amount of money injected by the European Union through the Recovery Plan, things seem destined to be kept as they are. The concern given to the demographic situation is worryingly scarce, and so are the resources devoted to the issue. This is particularly alarming since it once again appears to come from a political leading class that repeatedly underestimates the role of future generations and denies them the tools to create a more responsive country.

The research is structured in five different chapters, each one dealing with a specific issue related to our research question. In the first chapter, the author presents the overall Italian situation. She explains

¹ Hersch, L., "De quelques potentiels-vie et de certaines variétés de vie moyenn". *Revue de l'Institut International de Statistique*, 1940, Vol. 8(3-4), pp. 128-162

² Blangiardo, G.C.; Rimoldi, S., "The potential demography: a tool for evaluating differences among countries in the European Union". *Genus*, 2012, Vol. 68, No. 3, pp. 63-81

the national family model and the social conditions that constantly push youngsters to postpone their desire to have children. In this way, the fertility age is halved, and so is the number of potential children every woman could have. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic generated greater uncertainty by remodulating family schemes, pushing people to reinvent their jobs and daily routines. Despite what one may believe, being home more regularly does not automatically entail a greater number of pregnancies. Instead, it creates greater instability and uncertainty, which led several couples to postpone their intention to have a baby.

At the same time, although Italy relies a lot on migrant compensation for children, these last ones are – little by little – adapting to our scheme. Better said, even if they used to have more children in their country of origin, settling in Italy pushed them to have less babies, due to the cultural and work uncertainties they face as well as Italian people.

The second chapter illustrates the demographic indicator chosen by the author to explain the research question: ageing. In fact, it is one of the main needles to elucidate the Italian phenomenon. Currently, 22% of the Italian population is over the age of 65, and only 13.5% is under the age of 15³. This means that our country is rapidly ageing and that our generational turnover is not sufficient to compensate for this phenomenon.

Furthermore, a mature country is often pushed to use its resources in a different way comparing with younger ones. Pensions, healthcare, and research are some of the most necessary sectors in which the Italian administration has to invest. This subsequently generates less attention in future generations and their support. In this section, the author analyses the projections of various scholars⁴ on the Italian future scenarios and the problems that this could either create or emphasize. The Italian population structure has drastically changed in the last sixty years, and this has been reflected in economic, political, and social terms. In this section, readers are able to understand the magnitude of the phenomenon of ageing and reflect on whether this process is worth being reversed for the future of the country.

³World Population Review, “Italy Population Live 2022”, February 2022, available at: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/italy-population>

⁴Felice, E., & Vecchi, G., “Italy’s Growth and Decline, 1861–2011”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XLV:4, 2013, 507–548.; Giordano, A., “Quale spazio per l’Italia nella geografia del mondo globalizzato? Una riflessione su popolazione, investimenti e sostenibilità intergenerazionale”, *L’Italia e i processi di globalizzazione*, Edicussano-Edizioni Nuova Cultura, Roma, 2014, pp. 117–152; Goldstone, J., Kaufmann, E., & Duffy Toft, M. *Political Demography*, 2012, New York: Oxford University Press

In the third chapter, the author presents the most debated Italian social and economic policies. This section is divided in two parts. The first one presents the major issues originating from social gaps. Among these, we may mention regional disparities, with a deep focus on the *Mezzogiorno*, education inequalities and the weak mechanisms for the transition to adulthood and the insertion into the working field. Then, in the second part of the chapter, the analysis moves to economic policies and practices. Firstly, the author analyses maternity and paternity leaves, their adequacy in the modern context, the need for further gender equalization and the strive for the prevalence of the dual earner model on the male breadwinner one. Secondly, the chapter analyses the National Recovery and Resilience Plan conceived in the light of the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent economic crisis. Finally, the author analyses one of the most recent state policies aiming at supporting families and childbearing: the so-called *Assegno Unico e Universale*. Through her analysis, several inadequate points are highlighted, opening the way for the case study presented in the fourth chapter.

The fourth chapter gives space to the real protagonists of this research: young people. In the past months, the author has been investigating on their needs and demographic preferences by creating a questionnaire that was submitted to around 230 people through social networks and whose script and results may be found in the *Annexes* (page 85). The survey was addressed to people in between 20 and 35 years of age, inviting them to express their opinion on the actual demographic scenario and what prevents them from having children. Through their answers, the author was able to connect the economic, managerial and demographic domains of our country and demonstrate that juvenile policies are lacking. Therefore, the chapter describes the construction of the survey and the results thereby composed. Through the analysis of the collected answers, the author paves the way for the last chapter, illustrating the current flaws and the possible opportunities of the Italian demographic system by basing on the direct witness of a portion of Italian young adults.

The fifth chapter exposes the recommendations on which the author hopes to give the cues for posing the basis of a future political orientation that will hopefully be more youngsters oriented. This part highlights some specific domains, gathering the main themes analysed throughout the research. Initially, the author once again remarks the necessity for governmental stabilisation in favour of long projected and efficient policies. Successively, she deals with the theme of gender equality. This issue has resulted particularly crucial in letting young women conciliating the desire of motherhood with the one of a self-fulfilling career. In this light, the writer brings an innovative policy example operated

in Japan. There, the government implemented a more inclusive working environment to enhance female occupation, with the ultimate goal of reversing negative demographic trends.

The chapter also deals with other transversal State interventions to favour a friendlier environment for childbearing. The insertion of civic education initiatives both in schools and workplaces could (re)construct a different conception of parenthood, without considering only negative burdens and commitments. In this way, citizens could be guided throughout their formation towards a positive and stimulating idea of childbearing, reshaping their current demographic intentions.

Additionally, the State should also support new families with efficient tools, which could be fairly allocated among the population both economically and strategically.

Conclusively, the author focuses once more on the importance of regular migration for reversing the current demographic trends. By analysing the latest reports on the issue⁵, she will try to demonstrate the multiple enriching factors that a more effective inclusion process could generate in our country.

The final considerations aim at resuming the fundamental concepts of the research, with a hopeful auspice for the future. After demonstrating the multidisciplinary power of demographic issues, she concretely shows how population changes carry several consequences, that we are already experiencing, and we cannot ignore.⁶ In the light of an increasingly uncertain global context, it is fundamental for international relation students to be increasingly taught to be more than open-minded and far-sighted. The world is full of unforeseen possibilities, and potential future leaders must be aware of that and work restlessly to become conscious and proactive citizens.

⁵ Ambrosio, M., “Per una nuova governance delle migrazioni eco- nomiche: prospettive sovranazionali e interne”. *Rivista del Diritto della Sicurezza Sociale*, 2021, pp. 33-47; Blangiardo, G.C., “Primi riscontri e riflessioni sul bilancio demografico nel 2020”, *Istat per il Paese*; *United Nations Global Compact on Migration*, 2018, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/244/47/PDF/N1824447.pdf?OpenElement>

⁶ Goldstone, J., *Politics and Demography - A summary of Critical Relationships*. In Goldstone, J.; *op.cit.*

Chapter I – The Italian demographic decline: main drivers of the last decades

While dealing with demography and demographic-related issues, it is essential to have a wide, long-term view of the phenomenon under analysis. The main theme of this research is the severe demographic decline affecting Italy and the reasons why this tendency must be reversed. For this study to be fully understood, it is fundamental to recall the meaning of potential demography⁷. This concept is grounded in the theoretical assumption that the future is similar to an economic good. Therefore, a state that owns more future – thus a younger, resourceful population – will be wealthier.⁸ This is due to the fact that juvenile population may work more, in a further productive way, in order to increase the overall country's GDP. Hence, the Italian administration should not underestimate the potentials of its younger working resources, but rather it should provide efficient and resilient policies to guarantee the constant growth of the country.

In this chapter, the author will introduce the main causes of the problem, bringing the readers through a detailed journey. The current situation is the result of the intertwined connections in between modern and past decisions and policies. Some of these problematic factors even date back to the previous century.

This chapter will be divided in two parts. The first one aims at illustrating the circumstances and risks of the Italian demographic decline. Here, the author will mainly discuss the errors committed by past administrations and generations, which contributed to the reiteration of weak strategies, up to the consolidation of the actual situation.

The second section will give the empirical evidence supporting the arguments brought in the first part. The author will provide numbers, recent studies and current events explaining the snowball effects produced by decades of misleading administrative policies. In particular, the author believes that there are at least three main sources explaining the current stagnation. Initially, the Italian population, which is culturally conditioned in terms of family formation and parenthood. This discourse is deeply intertwined with the Italian job market conditions, the native customs, conducts and possibilities given to young couples.

⁷ Hersch, L., *op.cit.*

⁸ Blangiardo, G.C.; Rimoldi, S., "The potential demography: a tool for evaluating differences among countries in the European Union". *Genus*, 2012, Vol. 68, No. 3, pp. 63-81

Then, a further element is represented by the progressively adapting migrant population. More specifically, migrants have been observed to be constantly homogenizing with Italians in demographic terms. On the one hand, they are suffering from the Italian government's restraining policies. On the other hand, they are contributing to diminish childbearing as a "defensive" strategy for adapting to the lifestyle of the hosting country⁹. As a matter of fact, being migrant couples usually made up by two workers without any state incentives for their parenthood as well as a proper integration in the national context, it is quite common that even immigrant people abandon their higher demographic standards in favour of the lower, Italian ones.

Lastly, the author will address the drastic changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus truly affected Italian people's lives, jobs, future aspirations and projects. More than in other European states, the disease has deeply conditioned the population, with significant burdens posed especially on women. Therefore, the demographic decline continued to accelerate, heading to a condition that appears to be near to a non-return point.

1.1 Causes and future risks

Generally, the proper generational turnover is guaranteed by having a fertility rate of at least two children per woman¹⁰. In Italy, unfortunately, this seems not to be the case. The fertility rate is really low, and it is believed to continue decreasing in the upcoming years. Being one of the oldest countries on Earth, Italy risks incurring in severe consequences for both its economic and social systems.

As it will be further analysed in Chapter II, we should not underestimate the consequences of demographic circumstances. A country with a relatively old population is exposed to numerous vulnerabilities. Currently, 22% of the Italian population is over the age of 65, and only 13.5% is under the age of 15¹¹, which means that Italy will be increasingly committed to foster its pensions and healthcare systems. This holds true since older populations need both economic and sanitary

⁹ Blangiardo, G. C., "Riflessioni e proposte per una demografia vitale". *I Quaderni Di Scienza E Vita*, 2017, N.17, pp. 49-56

¹⁰ *Ibidem*

¹¹ World Population Review, "Italy Population Live 2022", February 2022, available at: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/italy-population>

assistance. Consequently, governmental resources are allocated differently with respect to other “younger” states.

Therefore, there is a severe lack of funds and assets to be devoted to young people, who appear to be the most active and productive generations. But where does this chain reaction come from? Although it may seem bizarre, the policies fostered in the post-war years created a huge well-being for the population of the time, without considering the damages it would have caused in the long term. Without going excessively back in the past, we can observe how the natality boom that occurred after the Second World War gave rise to generations which “had it all”.

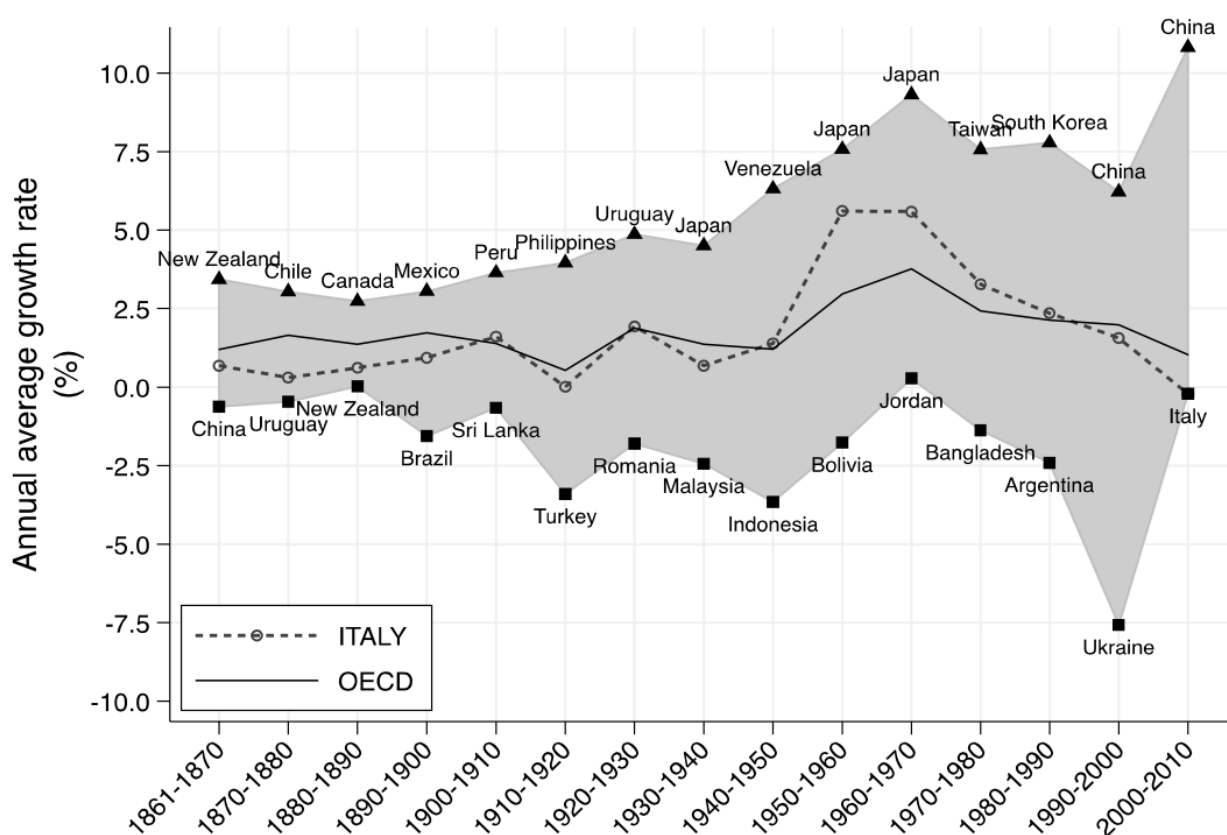


Figure 1, The Growth Rate of Italy's GDP in International Comparisons (1861–2010)¹²

The graph above shows the gait of the Italian growth rate in comparison with other OECD countries. The time span under analysis comprises more than one century, from its unification in 1861 until 2010. As it may be noted, the decades in between the 1950s and the 1970s were characterised by a

¹² Felice, E., & Vecchi, G., *op.cit.*

progressive growth, which built solid opportunities for the generations approaching adult life in those years. Afterwards, the lack of adaptation and resilience of Italian policies towards the changes of the external world led to a progressive decrease of both growth and well-being. On the one hand, globalisation weakened Italian industries and economics. On the other hand, the unique currency introduced by the European Union truly altered Italian equilibria, speeding up the pace of public debt growth.

The evidence shown by these data is truly useful to illustrate the readers that Italian misfunctions – as for demographic policies – did not come overnight. The graph above clearly witnesses how the Italian decline and the growth of public debt originated starting from the 1970s. The misleading belief that Italian economic problems only arrived during the 2007 crisis is a truly confusing conviction.¹³ Modern administrations seem not to be able to propose efficient solutions since they might have misunderstood the origin of the problem.

As a result, current younger generations risk facing serious problems in reaching out the same well-being that our parents and grandparents experienced. This is mostly due to the fact that the world has evolved, and so have the job market necessities. However, the Italian approach seems to have stuck in the past, without neither understanding nor indulging these shifts in favour younger generations, which also represent its future.

1.2 The Italian population's current demographic situation

The Italian modern setting is worth being analysed under several points of view. As hinted before, demographic issues can only be understood through a wide, in-depth, long-term analysis. Otherwise, readers risk losing entire segments of the problem, which could mislead their understanding. In this section, we will analyse three of the most outstanding outcomes of the Italian demographic decline: the native population, the immigrant one, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹³ Giordano, A., 2014, “Quale spazio per l'Italia nella geografia del mondo globalizzato? Una riflessione su popolazione, investimenti e sostenibilità intergenerazionale”. *L'Italia e i processi di globalizzazione*, Edicussano-Edizioni Nuova Cultura, Roma, 2014, pp. 117–152

1.2.1 Italians

Italy is going through a progressive and worrying demographic decline, which propagates in plain sight from one year to another. In 2019, the fertility rate was attributed to 1.27 children per woman¹⁴. In one-year time – despite what we may be tempted to think through the lens of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic¹⁵ – this value decreased to 1.24 children per woman¹⁶.

Let us now start our analysis by considering the ideas and projections of some thought-provoking scholars¹⁷. According to Blangiardo¹⁸, one of the main problems of the Italian demographic system relies on its cultural tradition. Primarily, our country is characterised by a long-lasting educational path, which brings young people to terminate – if perfectly on time – their academic formation around the age of 24. In most cases, once this step has been achieved, neo-graduates have to start the search of their job from zero. This activity may take several months or even years, postponing any long-term project, from marriage to having children.

Moreover, these factors delay the date of exit of students from their parents' house¹⁹. This element may influence the establishment of a solid, adult relationship which could possibly culminate with childbearing. Additionally, there are other highly cultural and religious²⁰ factors to be considered. Despite what we may be tempted to think, Italy is a deeply Catholic state. This religious feature seems

¹⁴ Battaglia, A., “Demografia, l'Italia invecchia. Tasso di fertilità fra i più bassi nell'Ue”. 2012, available at: <https://www.wallstreetitalia.com/demografia-litalia-invecchia-tasso-di-fertilita-fra-i-piu-bassi-nellue/>

¹⁵ Public opinion is increasingly shaped and influenced by internet and social media. Regarding this, in the last years, several influencers and celebrities have announced their pregnancy, bringing most of their followers believe that the restrictions brought by the pandemic incentivised young couples to have babies. This trend appears to be totally reversed in the rest of the Italian population, of which we will see the details in the next sections

¹⁶ ISTAT, “Natalità e fecondità della popolazione residente - anno 2020”, 2021, available at: <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/264643>

¹⁷ Blangiardo, G. C., “Riflessioni e proposte per una demografia vitale”. *I Quaderni Di Scienza E Vita*, 2017, N.17, pp.49-56; Felice, E., & Vecchi, G., *op.cit.*; Testa, M. R., Rosina, A., & Cavalli, L., “Couples Childbearing Behavior in Italy: Which of the Partners is leading it?”, 2011, *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research*, pp. 157-178

¹⁸ Blangiardo, G.C., *ivi*, p. 50

¹⁹ Arpino, B., F. Luppi, A. Rosina, “Changes in fertility plans during the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy: the role of occupation and income vulnerability”, 2021

²⁰ Basten, S., Sobotka, T., Zeman, K., Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, M., Adsera, A., Bavel, J., Testa, M. R., “Future fertility in low fertility countries”, 2013, *Vienna Institute of Demography Austrian Academy of Sciences*, pp. 1-136

to shape several people's lives, mostly involuntarily. In fact, as reported by Blangiardo²¹, 70% of the Italian new births are concentrated in married couples. Hence, it is quite evident that the sum of all these factors literally breaks off the Italian demographic chain. Sometimes, this may prevent almost 70% of new births to be realised due to lack of economic emancipation, the excessively-long academic formation and the general reluctance to move to an independent living place.

Furthermore, we should also consider what all these factors mean in terms of time. As a matter of fact, women are usually most fertile in between 20 and 30 years of age²². According to Eurostat statistics²³, European women mostly have their first child around the age of 30.8 years old. Conversely, the Italian mean corresponds to 32.1. This further explains how the Italian population is conditioned in having lower rates than the rest of Europe. These data, summed to all the previously mentioned factors, witness the evidence that Italian people have less children even because they get to a stable economic and working condition at an older age. Consequently, the potential number of children they could have dramatically decreases with vivid consequences for the whole Italian demographic situation with the lower rates than in the rest of Europe.

Another stimulating perspective emerges from an extensive study conducted by Testa and others²⁴. Their research collected the witnesses of 2356 Italian couples interviewed in between 2003 and 2007 with respect to how the share of the same childbearing opinions within the duo could change fertility intentions. In fact, despite what we may believe, fertility choices cannot be made unilaterally, as they concern both men and women²⁵.

Therefore, after the devious path of education and insertion in the job market, further problems may arise. According to the results collected by the authors, since Italy is characterised by low financial support to families with children, the subsequent lack of adequate policy measures facilitating the conciliation of work and family life may transform the conception of childbearing. It may be labelled

²¹ Blangiardo, G.C., *ivi*, p. 50

²² Ministero della Salute, "Età e fertilità", 2022, *Salute Riproduttiva*, available at: <https://www.salute.gov.it/portale/fertility/dettaglioContenutiFertility.jsp?id=4556&area=fertilita&menu=stilivita>

²³ Eurostat, "Table on fertility rates of European countries", *Total fertility rate*, 2022, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00199/default/table?lang=en>

²⁴ Testa, M. R., Rosina, A., & Cavalli, L., "Couples Childbearing Behavior in Italy: Which of the Partners is leading it?", 2011, *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research*, pp.157-178

²⁵ Testa, M. R., Rosina, A., & Cavalli, L., *ivi*, p.159

as a potential threat for the achieved standard of living, for instance economic and leisure.²⁶ Consequently, the lack of agreement between partners may favour the one who does not want to have a baby, given that delaying fertility is a normatively acceptable life course strategy, whereas having a child has immediate and permanent implications for individuals²⁷.

In this vein, a final, curious, consideration can be made on the evidence emerging from the 2020 Assalco Zoomark Report²⁸ analysed by Testa²⁹. In one of their latest statements, they showed how the number of pets per Italian family is constantly rising. In particular, in the light of increasing economic and working uncertainty, it has been reported that many families tend to “substitute” the desire of maternity with the one for pets. The latest data reported 1.1 domestic animals per Italian family in 2020³⁰, which is slightly inferior to the fertility rate fixed at 1.24³¹ mentioned above.

Although these data were presented as a curious, provocative comparison, they show a quite alarming reality. The either inefficient or lacking Italian parental policies are slowly revolutionizing the natural equilibria of our native population, without considering the alarming results they could produce.

1.2.2 “Adapting” migration

Another truly revealing factor explained by Blangiardo³² is that even the immigrant population residing in Italy does no longer represent a positive relief for the national demographic situation. In 2008, the average fertility rate among immigrants equalled 2.65 children per woman. This number was actually influenced by migrants’ original culture and costumes. Initially, despite the obstacles posed by the Italian trends, foreign demographic habits seemed to have been maintained stable. However, with the passage of the years, there has been an inevitably progressive decrease. In 2012 –

²⁶ Testa, M. R., Rosina, A., & Cavalli, L., *ivi*, p.162

²⁷ Rindfuss, R., Morgan, P., & Swicegood, G., *First births in America: changes in the timing of parenthood*, 1988, Los Angeles: University of California Press

²⁸ Assalco, *XIII° edizione RAPPORTO ASSALCO – ZOOMARK 2020*, 2020, Bologna: ANMVI, p. 9

²⁹ Testa, M. R., “I figli mai nati dell’era Covid. Perché l’emergenza sanitaria ha inasprito la crisi demografica italiana”, 2021, *LUISS Open*, available at: <https://open.luiss.it/2021/02/01/i-figli-mai-nati-dellera-covid- perche-lemergenza-sanitaria-ha-inasprito-la-crisi-demografica-italiana/>

³⁰ Assalco, *op.cit.*, p. 10

³¹ ISTAT, “Natalità e fecondità della popolazione residente - anno 2020”, 2021, *Istat - Istituto Nazionale di Statistica*, available at: <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/264643>

³² Blangiardo, G. C., “Riflessioni e proposte per una demografia vitale”. *I Quaderni Di Scienza E Vita*, 2017, N.17, pp. 50, 51

so, only four years after – the fertility rate among foreign women had already lowered to 2.37. Finally, the lowest rate was reached in 2015, with 1.93 children per immigrant woman.³³

These data reflect the progressive adaptation of foreign couples to a system which appears to be hostile towards large households. In a certain sense, Blangiardo³⁴ has defined it as a “defensive” strategy from these families to better fit into the Italian system. Usually, these couples are composed by two workers, who may also lack the external help of relatives to take care of the children due to their geographical displacement from their country of origin.

These numbers represent a quite alarming scenario which deals with both immigration and demographic policies. On the one hand, these data seem to describe the fact that the Italian leading class largely ignores the benefits that regular immigration could bring to the country under several perspectives. Primarily, it could stimulate the economy, filling up plenty of job places that are currently left empty by Italian workers. Then, their economic stabilization could give them the solid incentives to have children, contributing to the Italian demographic relief, maybe even better than local natives.

On the other hand, these themes demonstrate how demography is not at the centre of today’s Italian politics. This senseless mechanism seems to be able to even reverse foreign traditions, which would have given birth to more children, overcoming the cultural constraints affecting Italians. The phenomenon of adapting migration is the demonstration of a rooted failure of the Italian system which affects both its local and immigrant population. It may also spotlight entrenched xenophobia and unacceptance of the phenomenon of migration, which is one of the backwardness features that were mentioned earlier. It is not tolerable that such an important country still disregards the significance of migration and globalization for modern politics and economics. Thus, even if this may be considered as a marginal problem, there is strong need for finding efficient solutions to better accommodate immigrants.

³³ *Ibidem*

³⁴ Blangiardo, G.C., *ivi*, p. 51

1.2.3 COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic added further burden to an already delicate situation. Italy was the first European state to report people infected with the novel Coronavirus and one of the countries with the highest number of cases.³⁵ The pandemic affected reproductive mechanisms through the destabilization of life habits, changing people's lives and lifestyles. In this section, the author is going to analyse several daily-related domains through the studies of numerous relevant scholar³⁶ to guide the readers through the two-folded concept gathering the pandemic to the further worsening of the Italian demographic situation.

Firstly, the COVID-19 virus modified both couples' stability and sexual health³⁷. As reported by Micelli and others³⁸, remote working modalities often charged people with extra work, without neither breaks nor the possibility to detach from professional life, especially during the strictest lockdown periods. According to their studies, this severely conditioned both singles and couples, their life projects and their approach to reproductive activities.

Secondly, this shift in habits and life goals has been also influenced by a great imbalance, spreading even in the working field. As a matter of fact, lots of Italians have been shaken by a dramatic change in their well-being distribution. During the first months of the pandemic, Micelli³⁹ and her team realised a study for demonstrating the effects of the virus on the desire of parenthood. They conducted a survey involving 1482 respondents. Among these, 944 were women (63.7% of total N) and 538 were men (36.3%). From this study, it emerged that from 18.1% participants who were planning to

³⁵ Del Boca, D., Oggero, N., Profeta, P., & Rossi, M., "Women's Work, Housework and Childcare, before and during COVID-19", 2020, *CESifo Working Papers*

³⁶ Dashraath, P., Lim, M., Biswas, A., Choolani, M., Mattar, C., Su, L., & Li, S., "Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and pregnancy", 2020, *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology*; Micelli, E., Cito, G., Cocci, A., Polloni, G., Russo, G., Minervini, A., Coccia, M., "Desire for parenthood at the time of COVID-19 pandemic: an insight into the Italian situation", 2020, *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics & Gynecology*; Testa, M. R., "I figli mai nati dell'era Covid. Perché l'emergenza sanitaria ha inasprito la crisi demografica italiana", 2021, *LUISS Open*, available at: <https://open.luiss.it/2021/02/01/>; Villa, P., & Bettio, F., "Gli effetti del Covid sull'occupazione femminile", 2020, *Ingenere*, available at: <https://www.ingenere.it/articoli/effetti-covid-occupazione-femminile>

³⁷ Arpino, B., F. Luppi, e A. Rosina, "Dismissed and newly planned babies during the COVID-19 pandemic. A study of the motivations behind changes in fertility plans and behaviors in Italy", 2021, pp.1-38

³⁸ Micelli, E., Cito, G., Cocci, A., Polloni, G., Russo, G., Minervini, A., Coccia, M., *op.cit.*

³⁹ Micelli, E. et al., *ivi*, p.3

have a child, 37.3% abandoned the intention for causes related to both economic and pregnancies-related worries.⁴⁰ Furthermore, their study reported significant changes in well-being levels.

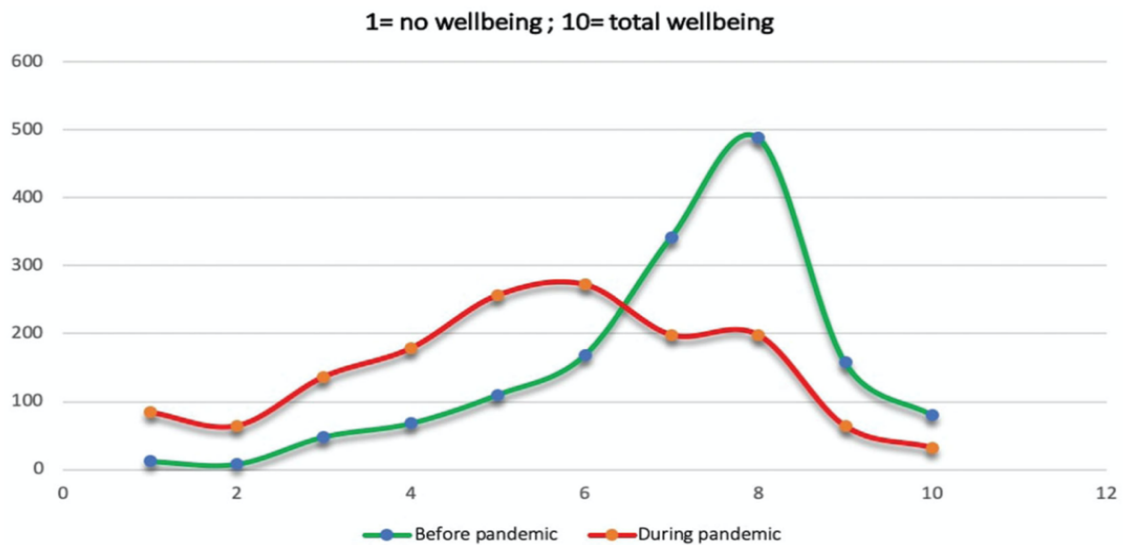


Figure 2, Distribution of well-being before and during the pandemic⁴¹

As it may be observed from the graph, the pandemic has caused a drastic decline in well-being. As a result, several couples and families have been forced to re-modulate their choices and future plans due to the sudden changes occurring both their private and working lives.

Further evidence of these disruptive shifts – primarily hitting women – may be witnessed by the empirical proofs collected by other Italian scholars⁴². At the beginning of the pandemic, Villa and Bettio analysed the data collected by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), revealing how the pandemic had already disproportionately affected women after just one month from its beginning.

⁴⁰ Micelli, E. et al., *ivi*, p.1

⁴¹ Micelli, E. et al., *ivi*, p. 4

⁴² Arpino, B., F. Luppi, e A. Rosina, “Dismissed and newly planned babies during the COVID-19 pandemic. A study of the motivations behind changes in fertility plans and behaviors in Italy”, 2021, pp. 1-38 ; Villa, P., & Bettio, F., *op.cit.*

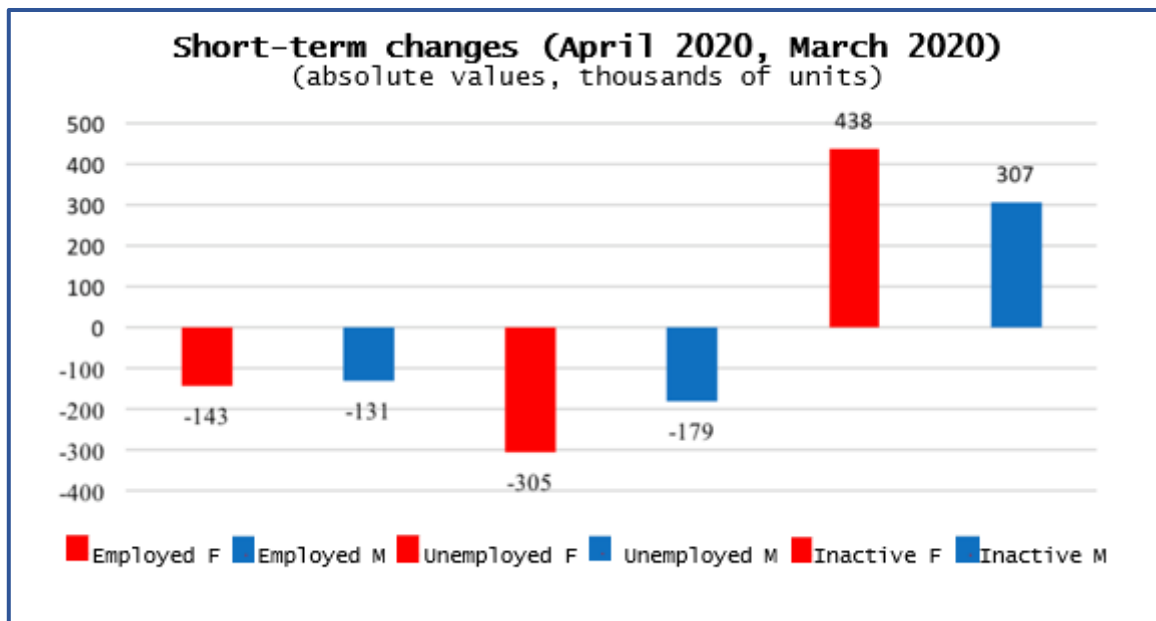


Figure 3, Conjunctural variations in employment and unemployment from March to April 2020 in Italy⁴³

From the histogram, we can see that the pandemic has caused an excessive imbalance in between male and female occupation, leading several million women to either unemployment or professionally inactivity starting from the first months of the pandemic. These data lead to one, almost non-surprising, finding, which has also been shared by the results collected by Arpino, Luppi and Rosina: the Italian demographic trend has been ulteriorly damaged. Although newspapers and social media tend to publicize a different tendency through the several pregnancies of influencers and pop stars, “normal” people have either abandoned or postponed their idea of having a child due to the deterioration of their life certainties.⁴⁴

Additionally, within this context, pregnancy has been labelled as a truly delicate condition in case of contact with the COVID-19 virus. As witnessed in a study conducted by Dashraath and others⁴⁵ in 2020, pregnant women are currently exposed to a series of virus-related complications that may be emphasised by their condition. In their study, Dashraath and his colleagues have reported several cases of accentuated asthma and pulmonary fibrosis in pregnant women, especially within the third trimester. Other common symptoms have been manifested through fever, cough, dyspnoea, need for

⁴³ *Ibidem*

⁴⁴ Arpino, B., F. Luppi, e A. Rosina, “Dismissed and newly planned babies during the COVID-19 pandemic. A study of the motivations behind changes in fertility plans and behaviors in Italy”, 2021, p.13

⁴⁵ Dashraath, P., Lim, M., Biswas, A., Choolani, M., Mattar, C., Su, L., & Li, S., *op.cit.*

mechanical ventilation and even death. As a result, several foetal complications have been diagnosed. Among those, they observed numerous cases of anomalous miscarriage and preterm birth. In the worst scenarios, there was even the case for neonatal death.⁴⁶

The considerations of this first chapters may be summarised by some empirical data described by Testa in a truly thought-provoking article⁴⁷. In her work, she described the exacerbation of the Italian demographic setting through a comparison originated from a survey conducted among young Europeans.

From this study, it emerged that 37% of Italian people within the reproductive age postponed childbearing due to the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020. At the same time, 36% of them declared to have totally abandoned this perspective.⁴⁸ These results appear to be particularly impressive if compared with other European countries. For instance, the percentages of other youngsters were lower compared to Italy. In France, only 17% of the respondents declared to have either abandoned or postponed parenthood. Lower negative data have also been recorded in Germany (14%), the United Kingdom (19%) and Spain (29%).⁴⁹

All these elements lead us to the introduction of the next chapter, where the author will further demonstrate the need for the reversal of the vicious demographic circle experienced in Italy.

The chart below summarises the key mechanisms of the “Low Fertility Trap”, which clearly shows that Italy needs an urgent and appropriate response the serious demographic decline it has been experiencing for decades. The pandemic has been one additional setback, but it should not be considered the sole, decisive cause. On the contrary, the weak, few policies supporting parenthood seem to have been definitely wiped out by the strong wind brought by the virus. In the next chapters, we are going to discover additional features of our research through our demographic indicator: ageing. This will guide the readers through a detailed discovery, unveiling the hidden risks carried by a progressively older country which does not invest on its younger population.

⁴⁶ Dashraath, P. et al., *ivi*, p. 524

⁴⁷ Testa, M. R., “I figli mai nati dell’era Covid. Perché l’emergenza sanitaria ha inasprito la crisi demografica italiana”, 2021, *LUISS Open*, available at: <https://open.luiss.it/2021/02/01/i-figli-mai-nati-dellera-covid-perche-lemergenza-sanitaria-ha-inasprito-la-crisi-demografica-italiana/>

⁴⁸ Testa, M.R., *ivi*, p.1

⁴⁹ Testa, M.R., *ivi*, p.2

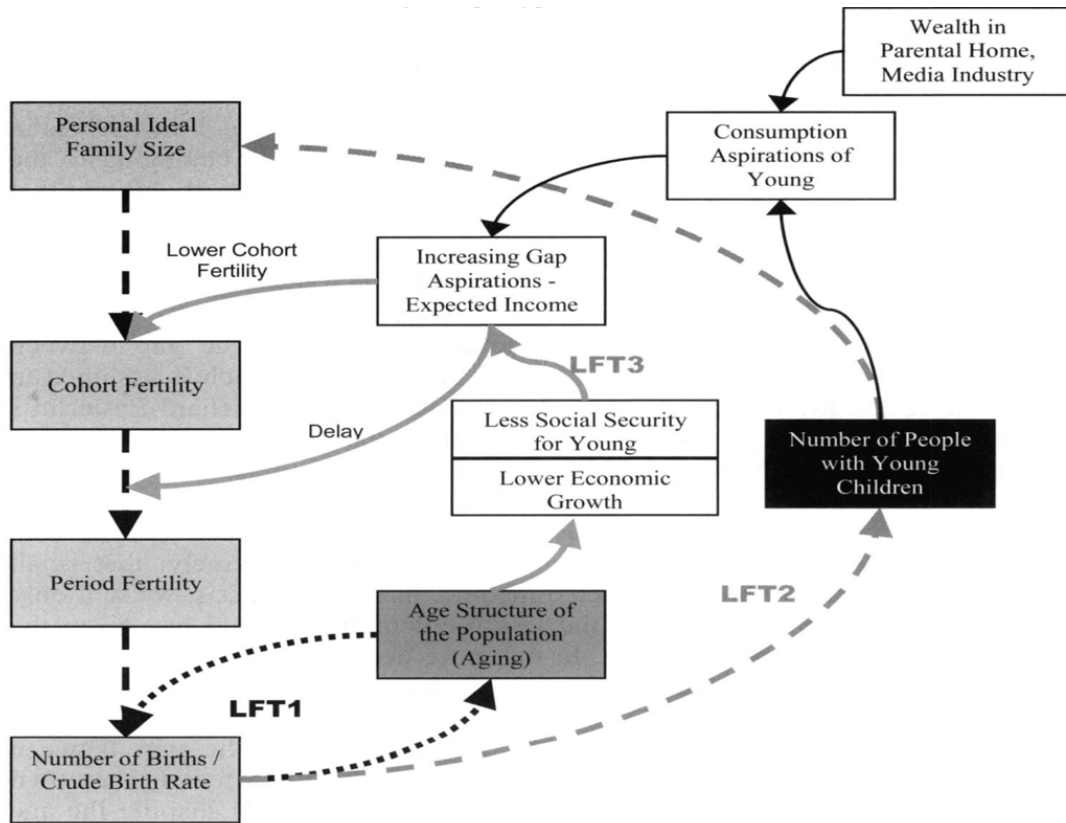


Figure 4, The demographic (LFT-1), sociological (LFT-2) and economic (LFT-3) mechanisms that constitute the Low-Fertility Trap Hypothesis⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Lutz, W., Skirbekk, V., & Testa, M.R., "The Low-Fertility Trap Hypothesis: Forces that May Lead to Further Postponement and Fewer Births in Europe". *Vienna Yearbook of Population Research*, 2006, Vol. 4, Postponement of Childbearing in Europe, p. 175

Chapter II – Getting into the demographic indicator: ageing

Why should we care about population growth and its related issues while considering the relevance and stability of a country? This is the main question we are going to answer in this chapter. In fact, GDP per capita increase is not independent from demographic growth⁵¹. On the contrary, higher younger population progression would enhance productivity, leading to a remarkable rise in per capita GDP. From this economic perspective, we can already grasp the importance of this demographic issue.

More generally, from a political and historical angle, we may analyse the example of the Power Transition Theory⁵². According to this model, there are three main variables contributing to state's power: population size, productivity, political capacity.⁵³ Although they may seem a bit obsolete, these elements are still fundamental for the relevance of a country even in the modern world order even though there is one, albeit subtle, difference in this theory with respect to the past.

For the sake of clarity, we may mention one example coming from the last century. Under the imposition of authoritarian regimes, such as the Italian fascist one, it was normal to conceive that numbers represented the strength of a nation⁵⁴. In fact, by then, quantities truly denoted the prestige of a country since they were converted in greater workforce which could have been exploited – due to the weak entity of the then workers' rights – as the regime preferred. Moreover, women were far from emancipation, and they could not choose for their future and aspirations. Especially under authoritarian establishments, males represented most of the working class, whereas females were mainly considered for their role of mothers, and for the potential progeny that natural gift fertility could generate.

However, the economic conditions of fascist Italy were remarkably different, and society was organised in a totally dissimilar way. Nowadays, this concept has taken a completely diverse pace. Women have acquired social rights and the concept of gender equality is constantly evolving. Therefore, family schemes have been re-structured based on feminine emancipation. Within this

⁵¹ Peterson, E., & Wesley, F., “The Role of Population in Economic Growth”. *Sage Open*, 2017, vol. 7, n. 4, p.6

⁵² Dabbs Sciubba, J., “A new framework for aging and security - Lessons from power transition theory”. In Goldstone, J.; Kaufmann, E. & Duffy Toft, M., *Political Demography*, 2012, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 66

⁵³ *Ibidem*

⁵⁴ Citation taken from the *Ascensione* discourse on March 26th, 1926

framework, children are no more seen as a social necessity. Rather, they represent the free choice of families based on their economic, education⁵⁵ and social possibilities. Consequently, the true power of a state is currently symbolized by the allocation of different age ranges and what they could provide the state in terms of juvenile resources, working forces and pensions to be paid.

This chapter is going to analyse the demographic indicator of ageing, since the author believes it to be a complete and exhaustive parameter to describe the Italian situation. In particular, being the local population mainly composed of people over the age of 65, it is essential to understand the risks that an improper intergenerational turnover could generate for both national productivity and international prominence.

Before digging deeper into the concept of ageing, it is crucial to understand where Italy currently finds itself. For this purpose, we may introduce the Demographic Transition Model (DTM)⁵⁶, which portrays population change over time. In particular, it observes how birth rate and death rate affect the overall population of a country. Generally, this model is composed by five phases, each one characterised by a different gap in between the two parameters. By observing the Italian current situation, it is quite clear to assume that our country is going through the fourth stage of the DTM⁵⁷. As a matter of fact, Italy is experiencing an epoch characterised by low birth and death rates, leading to a weak intergenerational turnover. These data result by several factors, which are not necessarily negative ones. On the one hand, the increase of life expectancy symbolizes the medical and technological achievements of our country, summed up with the enhancement of the quality of life.

⁵⁵ Testa, M.R., “On the positive correlation between education and fertility intentions in Europe: Individual- and country-level evidence”, 2014, *Vienna Institute of Demography*, pp. 28-42

⁵⁶ BBC, “Demographic Transition Model”, 2022, *Population Growth and Change*, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zpgjk2p/revision/2>

⁵⁷ Varrella, S., “Demographics of Italy - Statistics and Facts”, 2021, *Statista*, available at: https://www.statista.com/topics/5925/demographics-in-italy/#topicHeader__wrapper

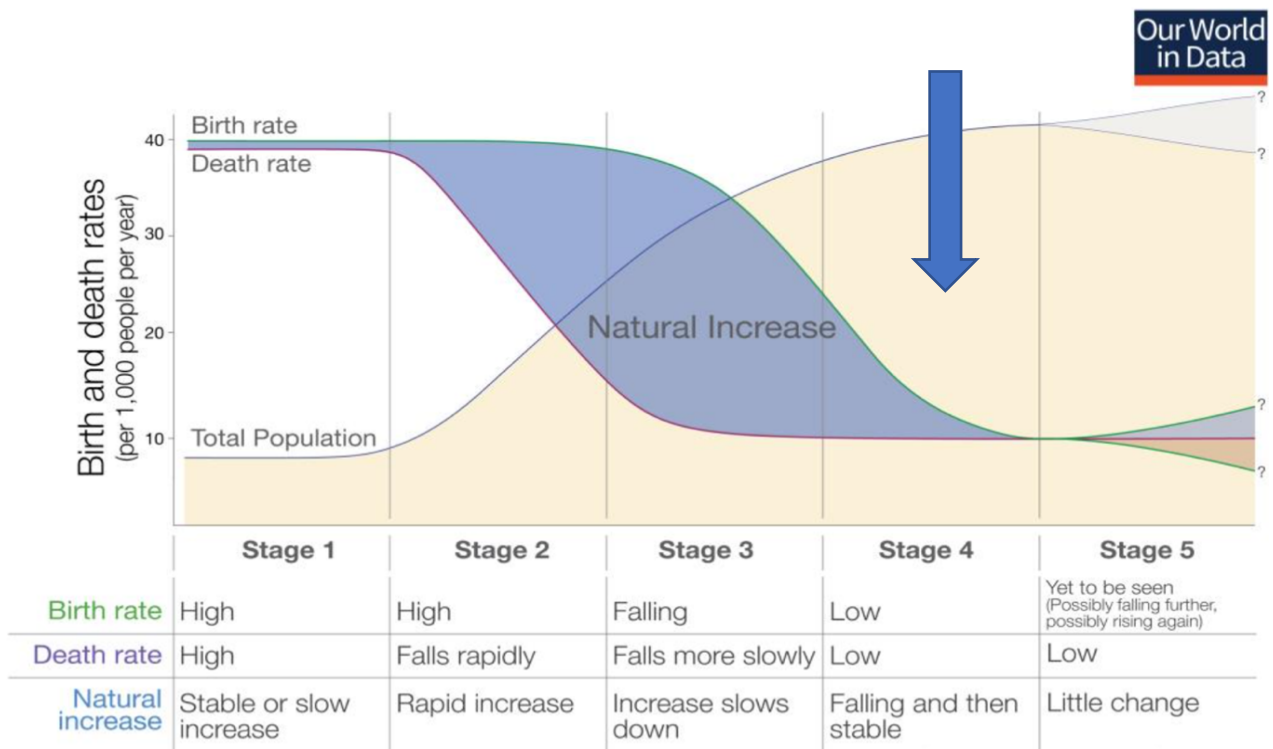


Figure 5, Demographic Transition Model⁵⁸

On the other hand, these changes and the current precarity of our country – especially in economic terms⁵⁹ – led many families to decrease the number of births. Therefore, most recent statistics have registered very low fertility rates, fixed at 1.24 children per woman⁶⁰.

As hinted in the previous chapter, this issue is not only about numbers. Instead, it portrays a series of entrenched malfunctioning mechanisms of the Italian administration. Among these, we may mention inefficient and inadequate policies to reverse the demographic trend, lack of incentives for younger generations and – more generally – improper management of national economic resources.

Nevertheless, the aim of this section is not the one of condemning the elderly segment of our population, which was the author of the Italian construction through hard work and the carrying of fundamental values and principle of our national identity. Rather, these pages wish to open readers’

⁵⁸ Roser, M., Ritchie, H., & Ortiz-Ospina, E., “World Population Growth”, 2019, *Our World in Data*, available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/world-population-growth>

⁵⁹ Luppi, F., A. Rosina, e E. Sironi, “On the changes of the intention to leave the parental home during the COVID-19 pandemic: a comparison among five European countries”, 2021, *Genus*, pp. 1-23

⁶⁰ ISTAT, “Natalità e fecondità della popolazione residente - anno 2020”, 2021, *Istat - Istituto Nazionale di Statistica*, available at: <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/264643>

eyes on the problems that an inadequate demographic management may generate, giving full resources to elderlies following past schemes, but almost null ones to youngsters.

This chapter will be divided in three sections. Initially, we are going to analyse the indicator of ageing to understand the entity of our demographic problem, in terms of numbers and future risks. Then, the author will examine the current Italian situation. By doing so, readers would be shown the relationship between the different age ranges, Italian population pyramids evolving throughout the last century and the allocation of public funds. Conclusively, the final part will display the potential future scenarios through the predictions of some of the most important demographic scholars⁶¹.

2.1 Ageing: a definition

Biomedical and public health innovations of the past century have increased human longevity around the globe. Consequently, since ageing witnesses social and medical evolution, it has not to be evaluated only as negative per se. Nonetheless, the increase in life expectancy has parallely resulted in the growth of an aging population worldwide, without compensating it with an adequate increase in births due to the lack of ad hoc strategies. This posed a set of medical, public health and socioeconomic challenges.⁶²

As described by the definition elaborated by the Harvard Medical School, aging population often requires urgent and unmet health care and economic needs related to issues such as chronic diseases, which require solutions at the national and international levels.⁶³ Therefore, it is quite intuitive to understand that, within social contexts, ageing could be synonym of increasing, unpredicted, governmental spending.

Generally, the growth in the percentage of elderly population of a country significantly shrinks both productivity and economic growth.⁶⁴ In fact, having fewer younger workers within the productive sector may cause slowdowns, decrease in efficiency and, consequently, lesser economic overall output. Moreover, alterations in workforce levels also lead to a change in social costs and public

⁶¹ Blangiardo, G. C., "Italians of Today And Tomorrow: Awareness Of Next Scenarios And Search Of New Equilibrium", *Rivista Italiana di Economia Demografia e Statistica*, 2013, Volume LXVII n. 2, pp. 9-20; Felice, E., & Vecchi, G., *op.cit.*; Goldstone, J., *op.cit.*, pp. 49-62

⁶² Harvard Medical School, "Defining Aging", 2019, *Harvard Medical School - News and Research*, available at: <https://hms.harvard.edu/news/defining-aging>

⁶³ *Ibidem*

⁶⁴ Haas, M., "America's Golden Years? - U.S. security in an aging world", 2012, In Goldstone, J.; *op.cit.*, p.55

spending.⁶⁵ Being elderly people more needy in terms of health assistance and nursing⁶⁶, government spending will be increasingly pivoted towards related investments. Within this category, we may also mention the need for the development of new technologies, machineries and robots that may support elderly people in their daily routines⁶⁷. Furthermore, the progressive increase in longevity brought countries like Italy to significantly allocate their economic resources in pensions. This drastically reduced the amounts of social spending devoted to youngsters, their future, and their job career.

Lastly, the author would like to grab the readers' attention onto a further thought-provoking element generated by an ageing population: the alteration of political capacity. As mentioned earlier, the power of a country is importantly defined by the electoral will of its citizens and the consequences there-by generated. It has been observed that older countries tend to have an administrative orientation not adequately mirroring future generations⁶⁸. Better said, due to the great number of elderly people owned by a relatively old country, political orientations and choices will be highly conditioned by this segment of the population. Usually, these people may have a conservative approach, shaping political decisions towards a path that is no longer responding to younger generations' needs.

In this way, the weakly responsive political class that was mentioned at the beginning of the research is totally unable to even hear the necessities of its future generations. Moreover, due to the instability and fragmentation of Italian governments, it is almost impossible to formulate adequate, long-term demographic policies. This vicious circle is one of greyest sides of the Italian demographic decline issue.

2.2 Ageing in Italy

In this section we are going to analyse the current Italian data in terms of numbers and relationship in between the different age ranges within the country. It is fundamental to grasp the links in between these elements to depict a complete, comprehensive scenario.

⁶⁵ Haas, M., "America's Golden Years? - U.S. security in an aging world", 2012, In Goldstone, J.; *op.cit.*, p.55

⁶⁶ Dabbs Sciubba, J., *op.cit.*, p. 63

⁶⁷ Golini, A., Reynaud, C., & Basso, S., "Population ageing in Italy: A challenge for our country, a workshop for the world", 2003, *Relazione Presentata in Occasione Del 48° Congresso Nazionale Della Società Italiana Di Gerontologia E Geriatria*, p. 542

⁶⁸ Dabbs, Sciubba, *ivi*, p.74

In between 1981 and 2001, the amount of over 65 people in Italy increased from 9.9 to 14 million.⁶⁹ By then, it was expected that, by 2021, this segment would have increased by 3.8 million, reaching 17.8 million people. These results were portrayed as particularly worrying, since elderly people would have equalled 30.6% of the overall national population.⁷⁰ Fortunately, this threshold has not been reached. As hinted before, over 65 people equal 22% of the actual Italian population.⁷¹ However, these numbers have triggered severe consequences on the allocation of national economic resources, intergenerational turnover, juvenile opportunities.

Until 1995, the effects of the situation reported at the end of the XX century did not generate significant shifts. This was mainly due to the fact that those years were still benefitting from the baby-boom of the 1960s. Consequently, there was an elevated number of fertile women, which generated enough births to compensate for the intergenerational turnover.⁷²

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the relationship in between different age shares was depicted as shown by the graph below.

⁶⁹ Golini, A., Reynaud, C., & Basso, S., “Population ageing in Italy: A challenge for our country, a workshop for the world”, 2003, *Relazione Presentata in Occasione Del 48° Congresso Nazionale Della Società Italiana Di Gerontologia E Geriatria*, p. 3

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*

⁷¹ World Population Review, “Italy Population Live 2022”, February 2022, available at: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/italy-population>

⁷² Golini, A., Reynaud, C., & Basso, S., *ivi*, p. 4

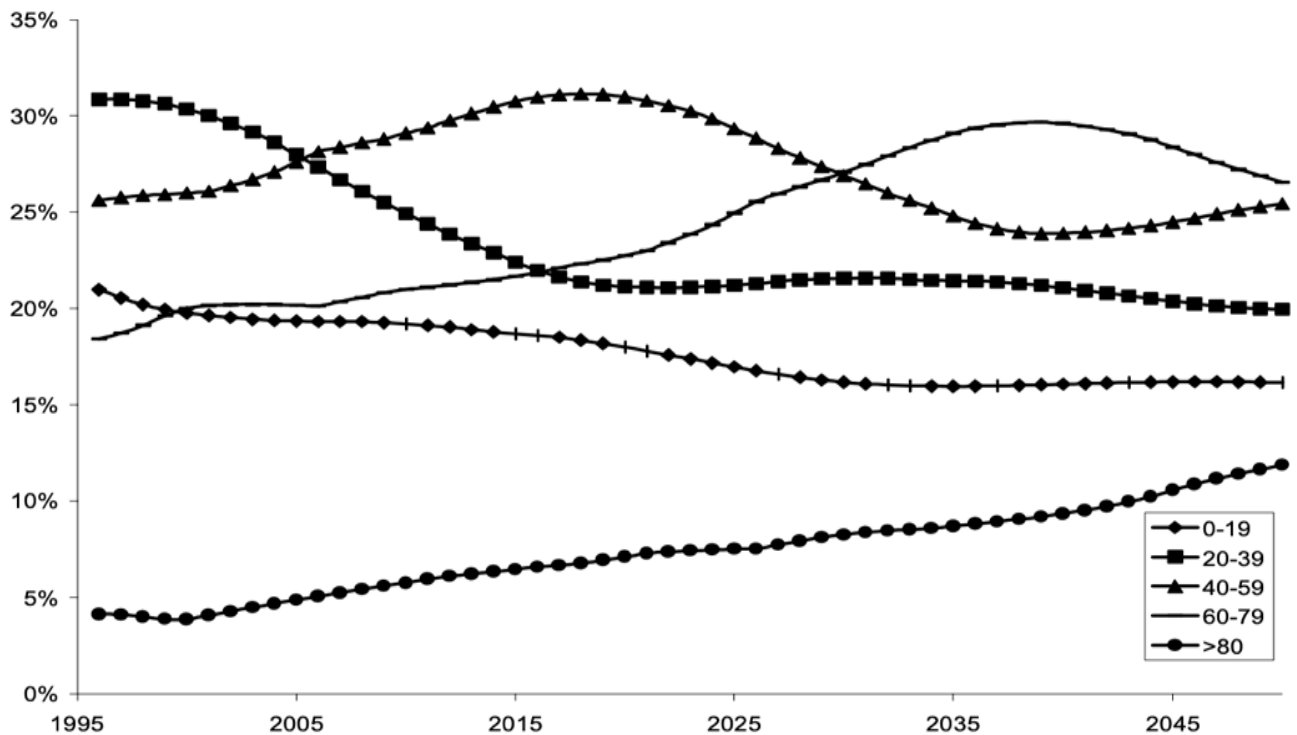


Figure 6, Demographic Transition and Population Quota⁷³

This graphical representation divides the Italian population in five groups, respectively describing the age shares of 0-19, 20-39, 40-59, 60-79 and ≥ 80 . This chart allows us to better understand the mechanisms of the Demographic Transition Model mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. As it may be observed, in between 2015 and 2020, there has been a huge decline in individuals in between 20 and 39 years of age. At the same time, the segment of people in between 40 and 59 years has grown. As a result, the increase in this last portion, will fuel the elderly section in the upcoming years. As a matter of fact, the seniors of the future are already born, and they represent most of our national population, equalling 63.49%⁷⁴, even if today they are classified as “working age population”. In a few decades, these people will grow older, leading the elderly population to a further massive increase. At the same time, there has been a constant rise in over 80 individuals, whereas people under the age of 19 are worryingly decreasing due to the overall decline of births. If national politics do not give the possibility to youngsters to contribute to the demographic renaissance, this tendency may suffer additional downtrends.

⁷³ Baldini, M., & Mazzaferro, C., “Transizione demografica e formazione del risparmio delle famiglie italiane”, *Quaderni - Working Paper DSE*, 2000 No. 366, p.32

⁷⁴ World Population Prospects, United Nations, & Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Italy”, 2022, *Population pyramid*, available at: <https://population-pyramid.net/en/pp/italy>

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these trends. On the one hand, it altered the growth of the elderly population, causing the death of more than 150.000 people⁷⁵. On the other hand, these deaths deepened the intergenerational turnover. As a matter of fact, at the end of 2020, after only nine months since the beginning of the pandemic, we witnessed an astonishing decrease in births, leading to a reduction of - 405.275 new-born individuals in comparison with 2019.⁷⁶

2.2.1 Where are we now?

Having arrived at this point, it would be quite useful to compare the different Italian population pyramids. This would allow the readers to have a complete and evolving picture of how Italian age ranges moved and distributed themselves within the last century.

Seeing these two pyramids in the same page is truly impressive. In around 60 years' time, the Italian demographic scenario has been totally reversed. In the 1960s, the baby-boom phenomenon contributed to an extensive growth in the juvenile segment of the population, which currently occupies the 50-70 ranges of the 2022 pyramid. In the following decades, the intergenerational turnover was kept stable, even though it started to progressively decrease around the end of the XX century.

⁷⁵ Rai News, "Emergenza Covid-19", 2022, *Rai News*, available at: <https://www.rainews.it/ran24/speciali/2020/covid19/>

⁷⁶ ISTAT, "ISTAT Nascite", 2022, *ISTAT*, available at: <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/nascite>

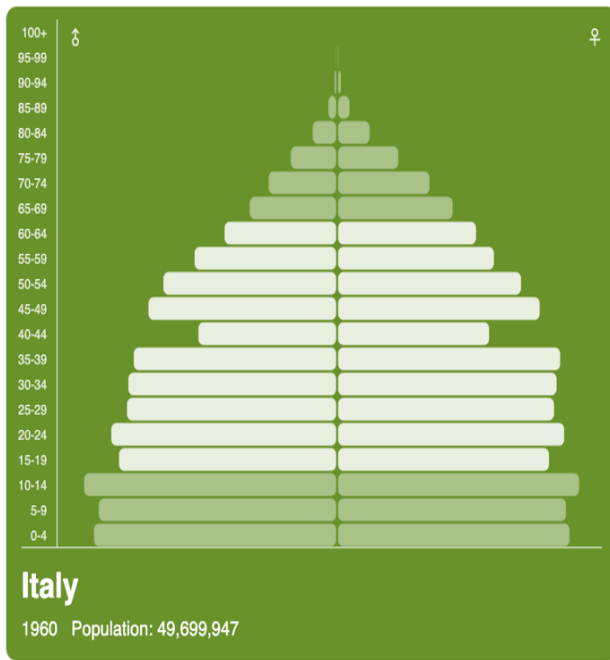


Figure 7, Italian Population Pyramid in 1960⁷⁷

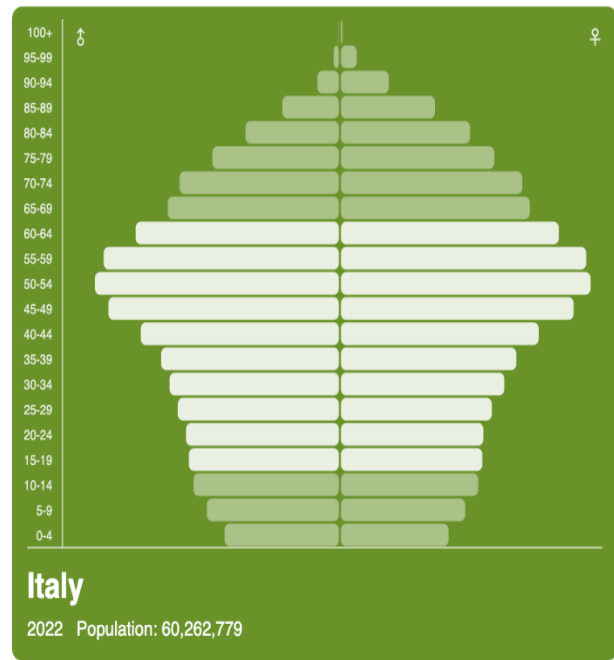


Figure 8, Italian Population Pyramid in 2022⁷⁸

At the same time, the increase in life expectancy has added a new age range within the pyramid. By looking at the 1960 one, the ranges in between 90 and 99 years old are almost empty. On the contrary, they have more than doubled in the 2022 one, spreading also in the 100+ space. These graphical representations aim at visually displaying the distribution of the Italian population and explain them through the previously mentioned concepts and theories. Even without a deep knowledge on the topic, the consequences of these percentages are blatant. From the pyramids, readers can immediately grasp how economic resources are allocated in Italy, and how the juvenile population is often left behind, being a tiny, small minority.

The last pyramid that the author wishes to analyse is the one derived from the projection of the actual situation in 2050. As reported by the numbers in the bottom-left part, the overall population will decrease, due to a progression in death rates and a disproportionate, insufficient number of new births. Thus, by 2050, Italy will lose more than 6 million citizens, which will not be replaced by new births. Then, if not even the immigrant population would be able to compensate for these lacks, the Italian population risks no longer being able to feed its intergenerational turnover.

⁷⁷ World Population Prospects, *op.cit.*

⁷⁸ *Idem*

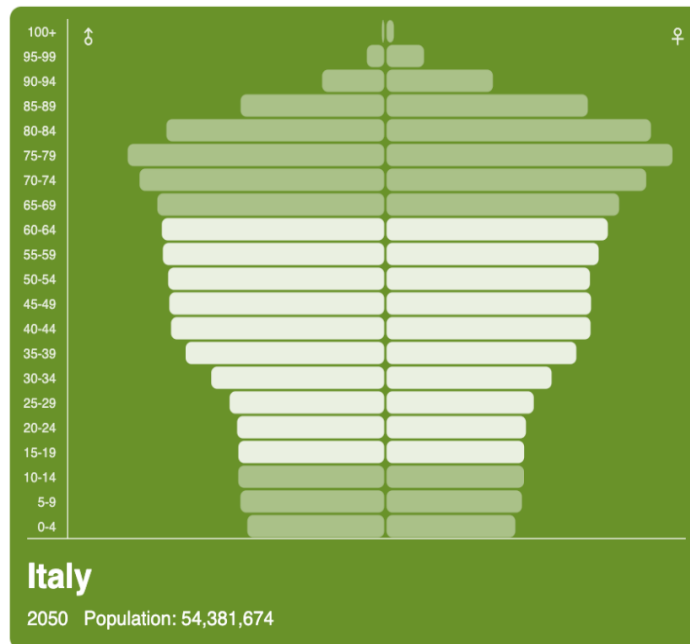


Figure 9, Italian Population Pyramid in 2050⁷⁹

2.2.2 Current allocation of resources under ageing

Going towards the conclusions of this section on ageing, it is time to display the unbalanced allocation of resources operated by the national government to support the majoritarian segment of the Italian population: elderly people.

The histogram below portrays the global scenario of an overall ageing western Europe. However, Italy appears to be the first country for pensions allocations, with more than 60% of its total GDP. At the same time, the country has a high percentage of resources devoted to health, which further increased in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The truly frightening findings are represented by the blue segments. These histograms show the truly tiny number of economic resources that Italy devoted to both “unemployment” – which mostly affects younger generations – and “household”. These elements represent fundamental prerogatives for families to set up and have children. Lastly, the fact that the share for “housing” is not even present in the Italian chart is truly astonishing and worrying. At present, the percentage devoted to this last

⁷⁹ World Population Prospects, *op.cit.*

category equals 2.8%⁸⁰ of the total national GDP. This huge gap in between the allocation of resources between pensions and other categories is of course dictated by the necessities arising from the conformation of the population. However, Italian institutions should no longer underestimate these data and take actions to avoid irreversible future consequences for the sake of its younger population.

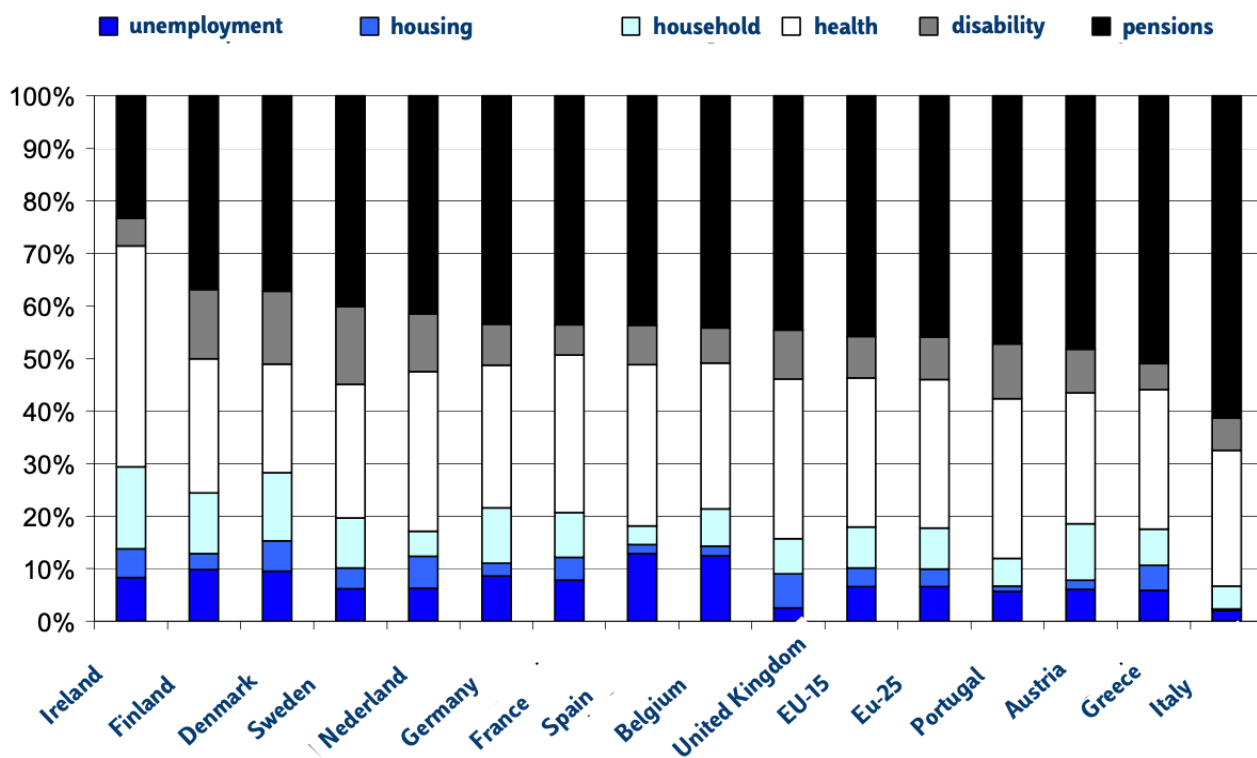


Figure 10, Percentage breakdown of social spending in the various items⁸¹

2.3 Future decline from the perspective of ageing

By terminating this dense chapter, the author wishes to draw some closing considerations. In 161 years of unified Italian history, our country has been able to pursue great deeds. After inserting itself within the great economic powers of the time – France, Great Britain and Germany – its administrations have been working restlessly for increasing its international prestige.⁸² In the modern

⁸⁰ Giordano, A., “L’impatto del calo delle nascite sul sistema economico”, in *Fondazione Onda, La salute della donna*, 2020, La sfida della denatalità, 69-78, Milano: Franco Angeli

⁸¹ Giordano, A., 2014. “Quale spazio per l’Italia nella geografia del mondo globalizzato? Una riflessione su popolazione, investimenti e sostenibilità intergenerazionale”. *L’Italia e i processi di globalizzazione*, Edicussano-Edizioni Nuova Cultura, Roma, 2014, p.136

⁸² Felice, E., & Vecchi, G., *op.cit.*, p.31

epoch, the economic and demographic miracle of the 1960s has allowed our country to continuously grow both in financial and social terms.

However, the demographic discourse and its related consequences seem to be of few interest for current administrations. The leading class is not properly worried, and it partially ignores the enormous consequences that these intergenerational gaps could have. Even though more than a half million foreigners have become Italians in the last decades, this will not be sufficient to fill these huge intergenerational gaps without the proper legislative changes.⁸³ Moreover, migration represents only 4%⁸⁴ of the Italian population, which makes it clear that this portion cannot be labelled as determinant for the reversal of the current trends.

Furthermore, the majority of Italian youngsters tends to follow the totally opposite path, aiming at migration abroad. By comparing Italian citizens aged 15-19 at 2001 census with those 25–29 years old of the 2011 one, it is possible to highlight a discrepancy equalling almost 30,000 units. The unbalance may even rise to 40,000 if we consider also the comparison between those aged 20-24 in 2001 and 30-34 in 2011.⁸⁵

Even if these data are in contrasts with the positive balance for the younger (10-14 years old in 2001) and women aged 25-29, unfortunately, we cannot have a sigh of relief. On the contrary, it should be considered that this resulted from 383,000 people – of which 56% females – becoming Italians in the last decades. This was possible by either by naturalization or marriage, which explains the surplus of women and younger. Eventually, even considering such contribution, it can be estimated that the "net loss" of young Italians in the decade going from 2001 to 2011 goes well beyond the 100,000 units as a whole.⁸⁶

⁸³ Blangiardo, G. C., "Italians Of Today And Tomorrow: Awareness Of Next Scenarios And Search Of New Equilibrium", *Rivista Italiana di Economia Demografia e Statistica*, 2013, Volume LXVII n. 2, p. 17

⁸⁴ World Population Prospects, *op.cit.*

⁸⁵ Blangiardo, G.C., *ivi*, pp. 17-19

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*

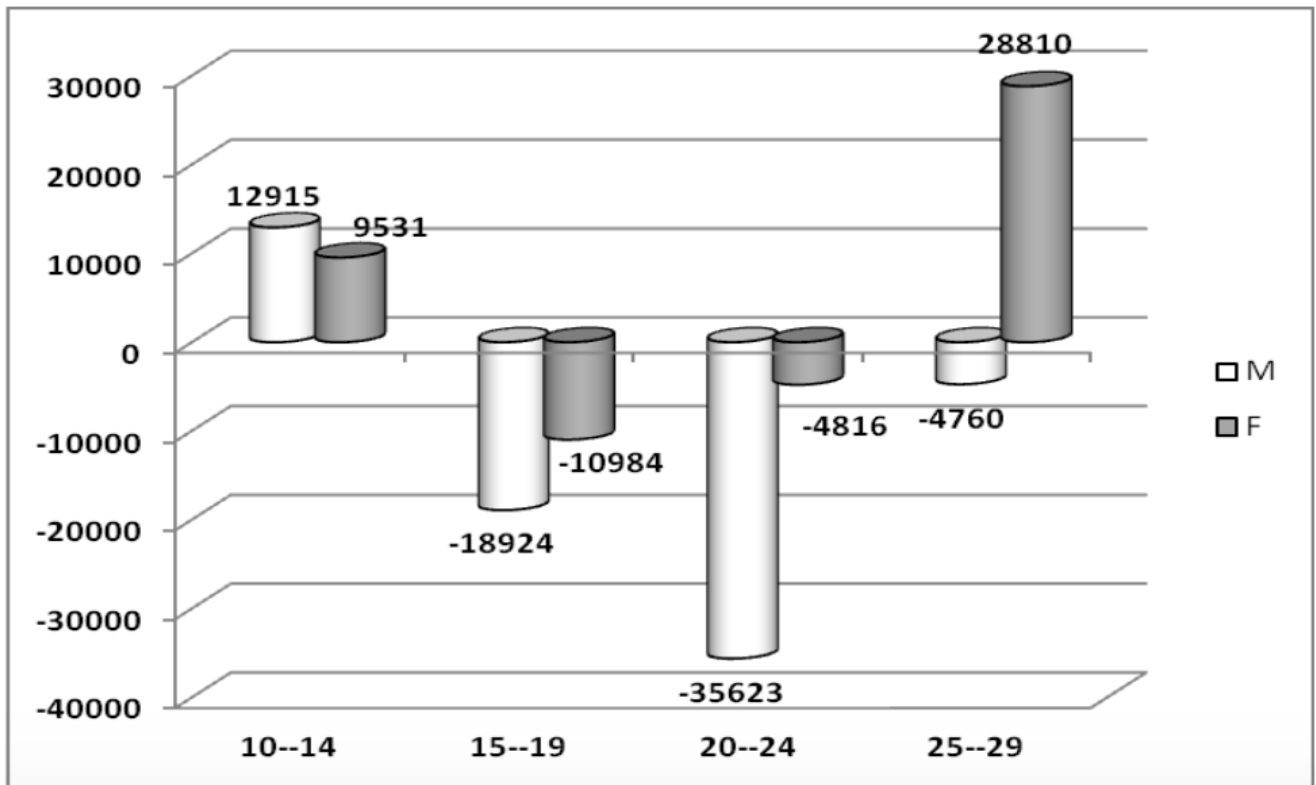


Figure 11, Balance of young residents with Italian citizenship 2001-2011 by gender⁸⁷

The overhead graphical representation displays the above mentioned “net loss”, making it even more tangible and frightening. These elements aim at demonstrating how negative mechanisms of the past may become even more damaging in the light of the current national scenario.

Finally, the relentless increase of elderly summed up to the inexorable decline of youngsters poses a further, frightening, challenge. As a matter of fact, the economic output produced by people within the working age segment is definitely inferior to the one needed to properly accommodate both salaries and huge amounts of pensions.

This chapter has extensively displayed all the risks created a progressively ageing population through a demographic angle. After these two sections devoted to the explanation of the research question and its methodology, the investigation will follow by considering concrete state norms and evaluating their pertinence with respect to the actual demographic and social situation.

⁸⁷ Blangiardo, G. C., “Italians Of Today And Tomorrow: Awareness Of Next Scenarios And Search Of New Equilibrium”, *Rivista Italiana di Economia Demografia e Statistica*, 2013, Volume LXVII n. 2, p. 17

Chapter III – Italian current politics and demographic policies

The third chapter aims at having a closer look at some of the most recent governmental policies to further understand how even contemporary crises were apparently not sufficient to grab the government's attention on the theme of demographic decline and the risks that this phenomenon carries, especially in the light of ageing. This section will pave the way for the case study that will be analysed in the next unit, reporting direct witnesses from a cluster of Italian youngsters coming from all around Italy.

The chapter will be divided in two main sections. The first one will deal with what the author believes to be the most crucial fields identifying the flaws of the current Italian administration. In particular, she wishes to focus on three main topics: inequalities across geographical areas, education and the transition to adulthood. The second section will then present three of the most currently debated social policies: maternity and paternity leaves, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)⁸⁸ and the *Assegno Unico e Universale*⁸⁹.

3.1 Crucial fields

As hinted in the previous pages, demographic analyses include wide, time-projected themes concerning several aspects of our daily routines. In the next paragraphs, we will dig deeper in the topic of inequalities across geographical areas, education and transition to adulthood. These sections have been identified by the author as the most delicate and relevant in the conditioning of youngsters' choices towards both demography and childbearing.

Furthermore, current uncertainties provoked by the health situation, the war in Ukraine and the Italian precariat, further exacerbate the present flaws of the national demographic system and its already weak possibilities to drastically invert its declining trend.

⁸⁸ The National Recovery and Resilience Plan illustrates the allocation and destination criteria for resources arriving from Europe for post-COVID recovery. Italy sent the national recovery plan to Brussels on April 30th, 2021. The European Commission has already expressed a favourable opinion, approving a first tranche of 13% of the total amount, equal to about 25 billion euros, *Bilancio dello Stato*, *op.cit.*

⁸⁹ The single and universal allowance is an economic support to families awarded for each dependent minor child and up to the age of majority and, under certain conditions, up to the age of 21. The single allowance is also recognized for each dependent child with disabilities without age limits, INPS, 2021, available at: <https://www.inps.it/news/assegno-unico-e-universale-le-istruzioni>

3.1.1 Inequalities across geographical areas

Our geographical analysis starts from the considerations portrayed in various studies conducted by a number of remarkable scholars⁹⁰. Their researches aimed at grasping the influence given by childbearing regional contexts on the ideal family size across Europe. The researchers specified that, apart from the intergenerational turnover model that we already know, at the moment, there is no exact study to establish a theoretical framework for the concept of ideal family size.

By taking a closer look to the Italian case, either childlessness or the postponing of the first child is mainly due to the explicit choice not to have a baby, which varies according to the geographical area of provenience. This choice may depend on both voluntary and involuntary decisions, based on the personal situation of young couples and the areas they live in.

In view of deliberate will, Tanturri and Mencarini⁹¹ focused on the theme of voluntary childlessness⁹² beside the traditional cause of infertility, by submitting a survey involving 59 married, fertile, childless women from all around Italy⁹³. From their analysis it emerged that, in our country, the deliberate choice of not having a baby may come from the intention of remaining free from the commitments of parenthood⁹⁴. This explanation appears to be mainly linked to the emancipatory conquests of young Italian women. Therefore, the desire of undertaking a binding career, and the preference for different achievements leads many Italian women to choose this path.

However, this reasoning may also be linked to the lack of proper governmental incentives. For instance, on the side of involuntary choices, many women may be forced to be childless because of strategical restraints. Women aiming at both binding careers and babies are often not supported by the State through appropriate policies, and this may push them to give up on childbearing, especially for economic reasons.

⁹⁰ Tanturri, M., & Mencarini, L., "Childless Or Childfree? A Qualitative Insight Into Childlessness In Italy", 2004, *Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America*; Testa, M. R., & Grilli, L., "The Influence of Childbearing Regional Contexts on Ideal Family Size in Europe", *Population Volume 61*, 2006, Issue 1-2, pp. 99-127

⁹¹ Tanturri, M., & Mencarini, L., *ibidem*

⁹² Bloom, E., & Pebley, A., "Voluntary Childlessness: a Review of the Evidence and Implications", 1982, *Population Research and Policy Review 1*, p. 204

⁹³ Tanturri, M., & Mencarini, L., *ivi*, p.6

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*

Additionally, as suggested in the previous lines, these elements may vary depending on the region of residence. The graph below shows the population percentages of the Italian constituencies, highlighting several remarkable aspects. We may observe how the first regions for population and demographic increase – situated on the left side – are those mostly welcoming working life and immigration. Conversely, by going on the right side of the histogram – so, the one with inferior population and consequent demographic growth – we can find four out of five regions holding a special status, namely: Sardinia, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Trentino Alto-Adige and Valle d’Aosta. This correlation has been explained by a study conducted by the AISP Population Report in 2021⁹⁵. The examiners witnessed how special status regions are characterised by a lower degree of accessibility, both in terms of foreign and national immigration. In particular, Trentino Alto-Adige and Valle d’Aosta have been labelled as the most critical ones⁹⁶. Despite being known as “the mountains of well-being”, their demographic indicators are particularly worrying. As a matter of fact, their low degree of accessibility does not encourage the proper intergenerational turnover, presenting a relevant number of elderlies with respect to younger ones. Moreover, these data are not even rebalanced by external migration due to the high cost of living and the low degree of accessibility.

⁹⁵ Benassi, F., Busetta, A., Gallo, G., & Stranges, M., “Inequalities Across Geographical Areas. In AISP Population Report, 2021, The Italian Demographic Exceptionalism”, p. 7. *Associazione Italiana per gli Studi di Popolazione (AISP)-Italian Association for Population Studies*

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*

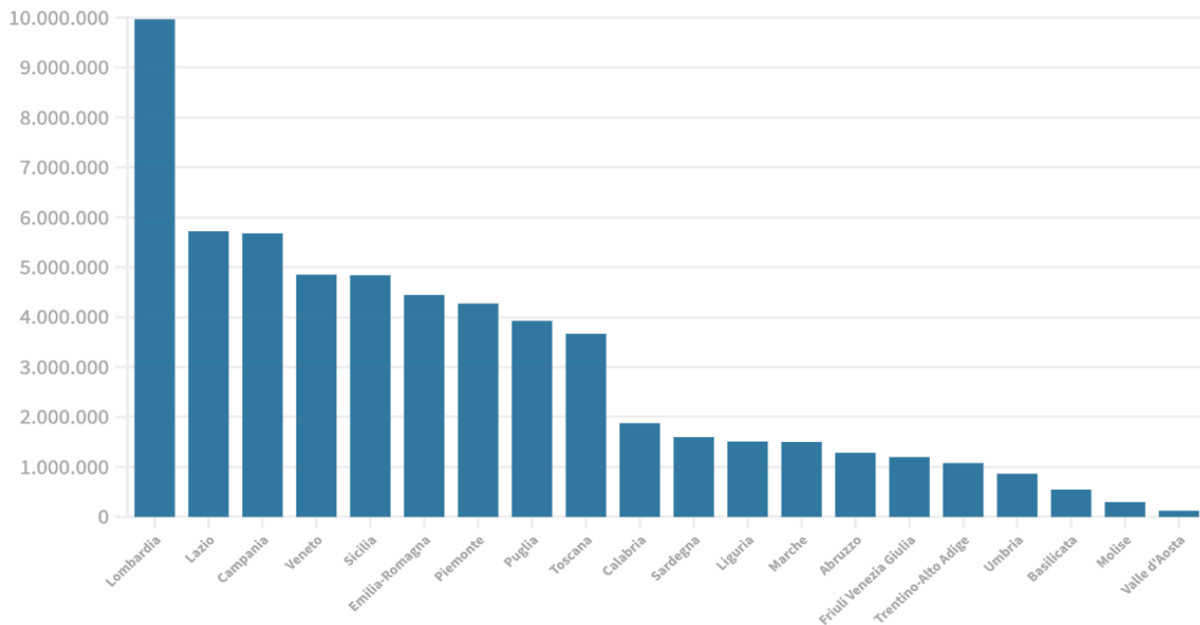


Figure 12, Distribution of the Italian population according to regions in January 2021⁹⁷

Furthermore, an alternatively useful element for determining the comfort of a region from a demographic perspective is the one of urbanization. Generally, most populous urban areas are the most urbanised ones⁹⁸. In terms of infrastructures, this assumption can be immediately confirmed by re-observing the graph above.

By concluding this paragraph on regional inequalities, we should also mention the further increase of the interregional and intergenerational divide caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by looking at it from a district perspective, which has been analysed by several scholars, in particular Luppi, Rosina and Sironi⁹⁹. In their research, they witnessed the profound changes that the pandemic has brought to regional distribution of new births. However, by taking a more restricted approach, we may focus on a report published by the Piedmont region¹⁰⁰ showed how the constituency was hardly hit by the health emergency. The general decrease in the regional population (- 11.720) was mainly caused by a broad

⁹⁷ ISTAT, “Istat - Regioni e città più popolate”, 2021, *Italia in Dati*, available at: <https://italiaindati.com/demografia/>

⁹⁸ Chiassino, G., “Aspetti demografici dell'urbanizzazione in Italia”. *Giornale degli Economisti e Annali di Economia*, 1970, Nuova Serie, Anno 29, No. 3/4, p. 214

⁹⁹ Arpino, B., F. Luppi, e A. Rosina, “Regional trends in births during the COVID-19 crisis in France, Germany, Italy, and Spain”, 2021, *DISIA*, University of Florence

¹⁰⁰ Migliore, M., “Osservatorio Demografico Territoriale del Piemonte 2021”, 2021, *IRES Piemonte*

reduction of residents within the Turin province (- 4.430), which accounts for 51.9% of the overall Piedmontite population.¹⁰¹ Having been one of the most hit regions by the sanitary crisis, plus the lack of the proper intergenerational turnover, it is, at this point of our research, almost no surprise that these data show these results.

3.1.2 Education

Education, in particular school one, is a truly important indicator for evaluating demographic trends and governmental policies. In fact, it portrays the number of current young students, which will then potentially become part of the Italian adult society, workforce and fertility booster. Therefore, the State should sustain education and the subsequent flow into adulthood to build a solid and meritocratic society.

Related avoidance could prevent this portion of the population from economic stability and the conditions deriving from it. Among these, we should recall the fact that – despite what it may be thought – greater economic financial solidity given by a stable work position is a great incentive for couples to have babies and contributing to national growth and renovation.

¹⁰¹ *Ivi*, p.9

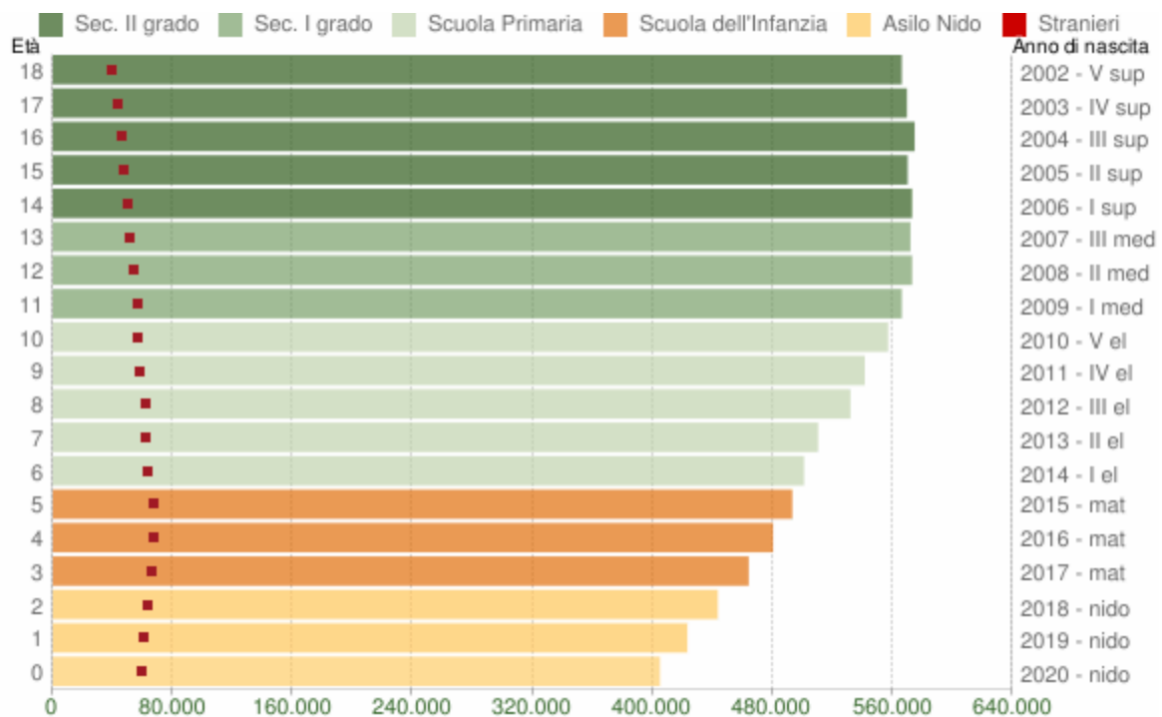


Figure 13, Population by school age¹⁰²

The graph above shows the precise number of Italian youngsters currently attending school. Among them, the great majority has already started secondary school. The number of those attending school and completing the education cycle has been increasing the last decades. In fact, within the last sixty years, 90% of young students accomplished the whole school cycle by obtaining a diploma¹⁰³. Among them, there have been several changes in the orientation of high school choice depending on students' orientations. In fact, there has been a decrease in the number of students attending "Liceo Classico", whereas "Liceo Scientifico" and technical institutes have experienced a remarkable increase. This phenomenon has been particularly observed in northern regions due to more direct link to the labour market.¹⁰⁴ Analysing these data is truly useful for predicting the most requested academia and working sectors in the next future.

Considering university, the last sixty years have shown several ups and downs, which may be observed in the graph below. However, these data show a remarkable increase in university freshmen,

¹⁰² ISTAT, "Istat - Popolazione per classi di età scolastica 2021", 2021, *Tutta Italia*, available at: <https://www.tuttitalia.it/statistiche/popolazione-eta-scolastica-2021/>

¹⁰³ Porcu, M., & Attanasio, M., "Education". In A. P. Report, *The Italian Demographic Exceptionalism*, 2021, p. 8

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*

especially in the last decade. This additionally shows the necessity for the Italian administration to formulate adequate policies for its students to find a successful merge into the working field. This would refrain youngsters from further increasing the already present brain drain, contributing to the further growth of a modern, solid state.



Figure 14, University freshmen in Italy by gender (%)¹⁰⁵

Regarding this last problematic issue, the graph below shows the actual phenomenon of brain drain in percentages. According to AIRE (Registry of Italians Residing Abroad)¹⁰⁶, since 2000, the number of Italian abroad has significantly increased. The data reported by the Italian ministry of the Interior marked that the number of Italians abroad in between 21 and 60 years old is currently particularly elevate. From our previous reasoning, we can understand the seriousness of the phenomenon. We are talking about almost 3 million people within the productive and reproductive age going abroad. For this phenomenon to be contained, the Italian parliament already approved a law in 2003 to incentivise the reversion of brain drains. The provision entitled those who come back of a significant reduction

¹⁰⁵ Porcu, M., & Attanasio, M., *op.cit.*, p. 8

¹⁰⁶ The Registry of Italians Residing Abroad (A.I.R.E.) was established by law no. 470 and contains the data of Italian citizens residing abroad for a period of more than twelve months. It is managed by the Municipalities on the basis of data and information from consular representations abroad, Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale e della Cooperazione Internazionale e della Cooperazione Internazionale e della Cooperazione Internazionale, 2022, available at: https://www.esteri.it/it/servizi-consolari-e-visti/italiani-all-estero/aire_0/

in the percentage of the individual income tax (IRPEF)¹⁰⁷ on the total work income. This cutback amounted to 10% instead of 23%.¹⁰⁸ However, this strategy seems not to have produced significant fallouts, since emigration rates continue to be very high and these economic incentives appear to be often exploited for the sake of personal – and thus, not national – interest.

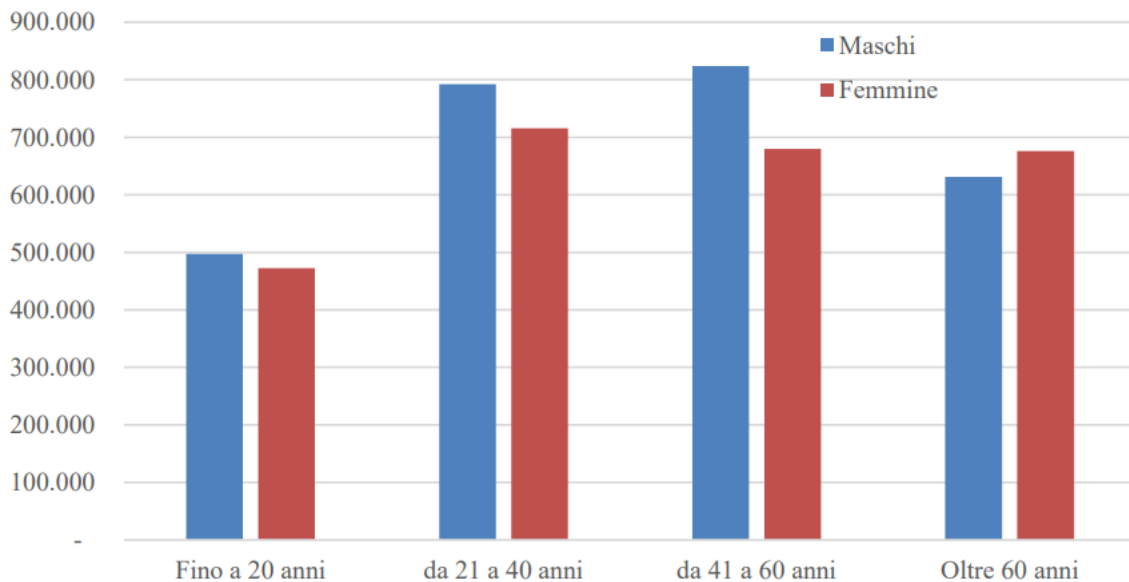


Figure 15, % Incidence of each age group on the total number of AIRE members¹⁰⁹

By mainly focusing on students, in between 2009 and 2016, the number of those going abroad for education-related issues increased by 111%¹¹⁰. The most surprising data have been recorded in 2017. They showed that, within the totality of emigrants 37.4% was made up of young people (of which 25% are young adults).¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ IRPEF: Individual Income Tax. This tax was established in 1974. It replaces the movable wealth tax, a tax on real income, and the additional, progressive personal tax, for higher-income taxpayers. Paladini, R. “Dizionario di Economia e Finanza”, *Treccani*, 2012, available at: [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/irpef_\(Dizionario-di-Economia-e-Finanza\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/irpef_(Dizionario-di-Economia-e-Finanza)/)

¹⁰⁸ Florio, P., “Tornare a lavorare in Italia non pagando tasse sul 70% dello stipendio: legge contro la fuga di Cervelli”, 2013, *La legge per tutti - Informazione e consulenza legale*, available at: https://www.laleggepertutti.it/28288_tornare-a-lavorare-in-italia-non-pagando-tasse-sul-70-dello-stipendio-legge-contro-la-fuga-di-cervelli

¹⁰⁹ Ministero dell'Interno, *Annuario delle statistiche ufficiali dell'interno del ministero dell'interno*, 2019

¹¹⁰ Redazione Scuola, “Formazione all'estero: perchè gli italiani scelgono di studiare negli Stati Uniti?”, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 2021, available at: https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/formazione-all-estero-perche-italiani-scelgono-studiare-stati-uniti-AEjIZdZ?refresh_ce=1

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*

This strong phenomenon of emigration is due to the desire of finding better opportunities and perspectives. In these abroad scenarios, academic skills and achievements are usually more recognised than they are in Italy. Consequently, young Italians can settle before and achieve the stability that allows them to have children. Unfortunately, the intensification of this phenomenon will progressively deprive our country of potential brilliant minds, which could contribute to improve the actual conditions, instead of fleeing for the sake of easiness.

3.1.3 Youth condition and the transition to adulthood

The transition to adulthood is one of the most complex and delicate moments in life. Italian youngsters currently show multiple uncertainties given by the lack of adequate policies to insert them into the job market. In general, welfare provisions for young people have always been considerably weak, even in the Glorious Thirties following the end of the Second World War.¹¹² From this evidence, we can understand that the Italian family model has always had a strong role in representing the main supporter provider¹¹³ to younger generations under several points of view. In the last decades, both intergenerational social mobility and their potential boosts have decreased, leading to worrying results. The employment level of Italian people in between 15 and 34 years of age has dropped to 42% in 2019, whereas it was registered at 53% in 2000.¹¹⁴ This has led more and more young citizens to a situation of no sufficient autonomy, forcing them to remain at the parental house even up to the age of 40. As hinted in the first chapter, a delay in the approach to adulthood also causes a general postponement of several choices, among which, most importantly, parenthood.

In particular, one research conducted by Rosina and Testa¹¹⁵ further demonstrated how these choices might be linked to uncertainty and lack of appropriate policies. The two researchers analysed the most proximate determinants of fertility behaviour. In Italy, it has been detected that, despite the possibility of controlling births and accessing contraception methods, first child postponement mainly comes

¹¹² Fraboni, R., Rosina, A., & Marzilli, E., “Youth Condition & The Transition to Adulthood”. In Associazione Italiana per gli Studi di Popolazione (AISP)-Italian Association for Population Studies, 2021, *The Italian Demographic Exceptionalism*, p. 9

¹¹³ *Ibidem*

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*

¹¹⁵ Rosina, A., & Testa, M.R., “Couples' first child intentions and disagreement: an analysis of the Italian case”, *Revue européenne de Démographie*, 2009, 25(4), pp. 487-502

from hesitation, which can be – particularly in this historical moment – caused by disagreements within couples concerning fertility intentions.¹¹⁶

As a matter of fact, it has been observed that couples with imbalanced levels of emancipation between the two components tend to have children earlier.¹¹⁷ On the contrary, those with equal levels of emancipation have resulted to be less likely to desire a child.¹¹⁸ In this case, more emancipation in terms of working career is not properly compensated by the adequate policies which could support equally men and women in both having babies and continuing their job fairly. Self-fulfilment is a fundamental prerogative of modern times. It is thus essential that the state could provide appropriate strategies to combine work and family tasks for the sake of the working population and future generations. Fertility intentions play a crucial role in explaining current fertility trends¹¹⁹. Seconding them is the only possible solution we have in order to revert the current progressive ageing into a virtuous circle welcoming young minds with great potentials in terms of work performance and parenthood.

3.2 Political policies

In this section we are going to take a closer look to three of the most debated current policies affecting Italian youngsters' and their subsequent fertility intentions. As hinted in the previous pages, strong supportive policies may play a decisive role in incentivizing demographic purposes. Namely, we are going to analyse the actual terms for maternity and paternity leave, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) and a new, debated family support policy titled *Assegno Unico e Universale*. According to the author, each one of these policies presents structural flaws that prevent both their correct application and successful results. The aim of this section is conducting a constructive analysis on these policies to demonstrate how their sole existence has not to be forcibly interpreted as synonym of efficiency and coherence with current population needs. Rather, reasoning and deepening of these notions is needed for integrating these strategies with successful means.

¹¹⁶ *Ivi*, p. 489

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*

¹¹⁹ Testa, M.R., “On the positive correlation between education and fertility intentions in Europe: Individual- and country-level evidence”, 2014, *Vienna Institute of Demography*, p. 28

3.2.1 Maternal and Paternal leaves

The last years have been characterised by an increasingly heated debate concerning gender equality and the homogenization of women and men's rights, especially concerning the working field and the division of parental tasks. This was mainly pushed by the intention of dismantling the male breadwinner model¹²⁰ in favour of a dual earner one. However, despite the recent progresses marked by some slight changes occurred in the last months, these policies still appear to be either weak or unbalanced.

the last decades, maternity leaves have allowed Italian women to have five months depart for work with – in most cases – a 100% remuneration. The process appears to be quite flexible, so that women may decide to take it from either the seventh or the eighth month of pregnancy. Depending on the start of the period, the rest of the leave is subsequently calculated, by keeping track of the full remuneration right. However, this does not hold true for autonomous workers, who are entitled of a partial compensation based on their registered salary from the previous year.¹²¹ Regarding unemployed women, financial support is very limited, if not even absent.¹²²

Coming to paternal leaves, the situation appears to be much more complex. Since January 1st, 2022, the Italian legislation has approved ten days of mandatory leave and one day of discretionary one. Under these two cases, fathers are entitled to receive a 100% remuneration. Then, there is another form of “extendable” paternal leave, which may be used up to 12 years from the child's birth and guarantees full remuneration.¹²³ Currently, this form is enjoyable for both parents for a period in between seven and eleven months depending on the family situation.

However, the existence of these policies alone cannot be automatically translated into efficiency. These strategies present a great gap in between parent roles and the division of tasks. In this scenario, the male breadwinner model is still preponderant and may obstacle women in continuing their

¹²⁰ Fanlo Cortés, I., “Congedi genitoriali, politiche del diritto e diseguglianze di genere”, *Politiche familiari e demografiche in Europa e in Italia*, 2015, p. 38

¹²¹ Fanlo Cortés, I., *op.cit.*, p. 38

¹²² *Ivi*, p. 43

¹²³ Arija Garcia, C., “Avere un figlio senza essere sposati: diritti e doveri”, *La legge per tutti - Informazione e consulenza legale*, 2018, available at: https://www.laleggepertutti.it/250339_avere-un-figlio-senza-essere-sposati-diritti-e-doveri#Quali_sono_i_diritti_del_figlio

working career after the birth of their offspring due to the unequal allocation of familiar tasks between the two partners. In fact, these policies are mainly tailored on women, sometimes totally excluding the male partner from the overall scenario. This further commits women to hard sacrifices in reconciling maternity with a binding career. Moreover, their inadequacy is further confirmed being some categories of workers either limited or excluded from the enjoyability of these policies.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has revolutionised both working and educational domains, barely considering the difficulties of parents to adapt to these sudden changes. Working from home has not been necessarily easier, since, due to the frequent combination of smart working with the online didactic format and the impossibility of having a baby-sitter for either sanitary or economic restrictions, many parents found themselves in true difficulty. Therefore, as mentioned in the first chapter, many couples which were still childless, either postponed or renounced to have a baby due to the great uncertainties provoked by the pandemic and the lack of supportive incentives and strategies. Furthermore, we should also consider that the recent developments of the war in Ukraine are causing even vaster insecurities and precarity of the global equilibrium, which will inevitably be reflected on our future demographic situation, by adding to the already present ones caused by the pandemic.

3.2.2 National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)

This paragraph aims at presenting the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) in the light of the demographic discourse on which this research is based. This economic strategy points at reforming and giving relief to our State after the strong crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the remarkable goals it sets, and the huge sums of money allocated for its realization, there are several disregarded issues which totally marginalize some of the most problematic Italian concerns. Among these, the demographic one is surely one of the most underrated. The author wishes to open the readers' eyes on the necessity of shifting state priorities through the reinforcement of similar domains through efficient policies.

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan represents the allocation and destination criteria for resources arriving from Europe for post-COVID recovery.¹²⁴ Italy has been one of the most affected

¹²⁴ Bilancio dello Stato, *op.cit.*

countries by the sanitary crisis, with a total reduction of 8.9% in GDP ¹²⁵. This number is particularly worrying if compared with the European average, which amounts to 6.2%.¹²⁶ As a result, the European Union has provided a fund equal to 750 billion euros to support its member states and, in particular, most damaged ones. This form of economic recovery also aims at building more resilient countries, by building greener and more technological capacities. In this vein, several funds have been allocated for both digital and ecological transitions, incentivising further elasticity.

However, according to the author, the Italian administration has mainly concentrated on things it cannot yet afford. More precisely, being Italy a country characterised by a huge demographic decline, inefficient social policies, great corruption, fiscal evasion, and geographical disparity, concentrating a huge amount of economic resources mainly on the green revolution may be – for the time being – partially inadequate. Rather, it would be necessary to focus most of the contemporary resilience strategy on the already present core issues. This could be done even without necessarily excluding ecologic and technological ones. In this way, both past and new challenges would be faced with more structured, successful policies which could pose the basis for solid and effective recovery and development.



Figure 16, Allocation of funds devoted to the National Recovery and Resilience Plan¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Governo Italiano, “Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza”, *Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza*, 2022, available at: <https://www.mef.gov.it/focus/Il-Piano-Nazionale-di-Ripresa-e-Resilienza-PNRR>

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*

¹²⁷ Bilancio dello Stato, *op.cit.*, p. 2

The chart above displays the total sum of the recovery strategy, which amounts to 222.1 billion euros. Among these, the plan provides for investments and a subsequent package of reforms to which resources of 191.5 billion euros have been allocated, financed through the mechanism for recovery and resilience.¹²⁸ The latter sum has been financed through the subsidized rates and non-repayable grants promoted by the European Union. Additionally, further 30.6 billion euro have been raised through the complementary fund established with decree law n°59 of 6 May 2021.¹²⁹

The strategy has been constructed around six main missions: digitalization and innovation, green revolution and ecological transition, infrastructures for sustainable mobility, education and research, social inclusion and cohesion, health. At a first glance, it is quite straightforward to understand that our main focus should be posted on the fourth and fifth missions, since their goals ought to be mainly focused on the portion of the population we are mostly interested in: young people, with special emphasis on women.

By taking a closer look to these two tasks, we can start by considering mission n°4, which allocates 30.88 billion euros¹³⁰ to education and research for enhancing the teaching and learning sectors and reinforcing the link in between academic institutions and the working field. For this goal to be achieved, 19.4 billion euros¹³¹ will be destined to improving the educational offer – from kindergartens to university –, whereas the remaining 11.48 billion euros¹³² will be devoted to the connection in between research and enterprises.

Moving on to mission n°5, this one focuses on social inclusion and cohesion. Its devoted budget will count on 19.81 billion euros¹³³, which will be distributed in between three main domains. The first one concerns strategies for work and equals 6.66 billion euros¹³⁴. The second one regards social

¹²⁸ Vourfreude, “PNRR cos'è e come funziona”, *Altervista*, 2022, available at: https://vourfreude.altervista.org/pnrr-cose-e-come-funziona/?doing_wp_cron=1647862822.8976569175720214843750

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*

¹³⁰ Governo Italiano, “Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza”, *Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza*, 2022, available at: <https://www.mef.gov.it/focus/Il-Piano-Nazionale-di-Ripresa-e-Resilienza-PNRR>, p. 171

¹³¹ *Ibidem*

¹³² *Ibidem*

¹³³ *Ivi*, p. 198

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*

infrastructures, family and the third sector and owns an 11.17 billion euros¹³⁵ prize. Finally, the third sector focuses on special interventions for territorial cohesion with a sum of 1.98 billion euros¹³⁶.

Despite these remarkable sums and intentions, the plan has demonstrated its inefficiency even before the beginning of its actuation. As a matter of fact, these policies are built on weak premises, which do not properly consider the true needs of the population. On the one hand, the reform of the academic system might support new generations in giving them greater possibilities and links with the job market. However, on the other hand, it is not yet clear what will happen to present generations experiencing difficulties in this sector. For the time being, it seems that they will remain in their current precarious condition.

Additionally, the strategy does not even consider the possibility of establishing paid curricular internships as a connection in between the academic and the working field. In most of the other European countries, curricular *stages* currently help young students in posing the basis of their future both in experience and economic terms. Lastly, and most importantly, the demographic decline and its subsequent consequences provoked by the above-mentioned inefficiency is not even taken into consideration.

Another quite disregarded domain is the one of juvenile politics. During the approval phase of the PNRR, the government announced that the resources allocated to the support of young generations would have accounted for 1% of the total amount. After this declaration, Italian youngsters have gathered around the hymn of “*Uno non basta*” (“*One is not enough*”)¹³⁷. This movement does not represent political goals, but rather awareness ones. More precisely, it aims at increasing consciousness throughout the population without acquiring a political connotation. Their main focus is posed on youngsters since, as witnessed by several studies and reports¹³⁸, they have been one of the

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*

¹³⁷ Uno non basta, “Siamo il futuro. E siamo senza soldi”, *Uno non basta*, 2021, available at: <https://www.unononbasta.it/>

¹³⁸ Cro, F., “Pandemia, Ecco i danni sugli adolescent”, *La Repubblica*, 2021, available at: https://www.repubblica.it/salute/2021/05/09/news/adolescenti_a_disagio_il_costo_della_pandemia-299527420/; Giansoldati, F., “Covid, devastanti effetti della pandemia sui giovani europei: il 64% a rischio depressione”, *Il Messaggero*, 2021, available at: https://www.ilmessaggero.it/italia/covid_giovani_depressione_disagio_mentale_ricerca_europa_stress-6007947.html; Redazione ANSA, “Covid: Axa, donne e giovani più colpiti nella salute mentale”, *ANSA.it*, 2022, available at: https://www.ansa.it/canale_salutebenessere/notizie/medicina/2022/01/25/covid-axa-donne-e-giovani-piu-colpiti-nella-salute-mentale_e0313053-2ebd-43f0-9340-f20fc5953116.html; UNESCO, “COVID-19 –

most damaged categories by the pandemic. This holds true in terms of daily social life, forthcoming opportunities, academic formation, future fertility intentions and job opportunities.

Regarding this last category, the outcomes have been particularly shocking. Among the few remunerated *stage* positions established before the pandemic, many have been switched online, and often they have become unpaid: it seems youngsters' time does not matter, and, consequently, they deserve no remuneration. Furthermore, it also seems that being younger presupposes the condition of not needing opportunities. The most shocking factor is that firms regularly even obtain incentives from the state for paying their staff.

This is just one of the many possible examples to demonstrate how little the Italian administrations consider its new generations. In fact, it seems the elderly are considered as the sole in need aid and support.

Despite the slight, formal changes brought to the PNRR after the complaints generated by *Uno non basta*, Italian youngsters are currently feeling abandoned by a state that barely considers them. This is even more absurd since the Italian public administration urgently needs prepared personnel to realise the goals stated precisely in the national resilience strategy. On December 9th, 2021, the movement published a post on its Instagram profile, announcing that more than 56% of the goals set by the PNRR still had to be initiated. The most upsetting news was represented by the fact that the time limit for them to be realised had been fixed by December 31st, 2021.¹³⁹ Furthermore, on January 11th, 2022, *Uno non basta* published a post declaring the difficulty of Italian regions in managing the PNRR resources due to the lack of administrative personnel.¹⁴⁰ From this update, it emerged a heated debate aiming at devoting 30% of available job place within public administration to youngsters, giving them the possibility of reforming the sector using juvenile skills and knowledge, bringing significant and appropriate changes for their generations through an appropriate use of these funds.

Finally, this evidence has been further reinforced by another disconcerting finding: an inquiry of the Italian Ministry of Economics and Finance highlighted that both Italian firms and administration complain about a 33% lack of personnel, whereas national youngsters lament a 31% mismatch in

UNESCO: In che modo i giovani sono colpiti dalla pandemia?", *United Nations*, 2020, available at: <https://unric.org/it/covid-19-unesco-in-che-modo-i-giovani-sono-colpiti-dalla-pandemia/>

¹³⁹ Uno non basta, "Siamo il futuro. E siamo senza soldi", *Uno non basta*, 2021, available at: <https://www.unononbasta.it/>

¹⁴⁰ *Idem*

between their academic career and the job market.¹⁴¹ At this point, we may suppose that one of the most prominent causes for the inefficiency of both past and present strategies may reside in the lack of communication and interaction between the social and the working sector. Consequently, this further shows the urgent necessity for these to be restructured.

3.2.3 Assegno Unico e Universale

Despite the considerable disregard for both demographic policies and the progressive ageing of the population caused by the misleading effects of current strategies, the government has recently approved a new financial instrument focusing on families and natality: the *Assegno Unico e Universale*, which can be translated into Single and Universal Support.

Since January 1st, 2022, it is possible to apply for this supportive tool through the online state services. The benefit will be granted from March and will replace all the other previously existing benefits and deductions.¹⁴² This economic support to families may be awarded for each dependent minor child, up to the age of majority (18 years old) and, under certain conditions, up to the age of 21. This allowance is also recognized for each dependent child with disabilities without age limits.¹⁴³

The two adjectives attributed to this financial tool should represent its innovative character. On the one hand, it is defined as "unique" since it aims at both enhancing and simplifying interventions in favour of parenting and birth. On the other hand, it is described as "universal" since it should be guaranteed to all families with dependent children, both resident and domiciled in Italy.¹⁴⁴ Despite this tool may be described as a homogeneous and revolutionary strategy aligning families' necessities with demographic ones¹⁴⁵, there are a series of critical considerations to be made.

¹⁴¹ Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze, "Il Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza" (*PNRR*, Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze, 2021, available at: <https://www.mef.gov.it/focus/Il-Piano-Nazionale-di-Ripresa-e-Resilienza-PNRR/>)

¹⁴² Rosina, A., "L'assegno unico e universale per i figli: una novità italiana e il contesto europeo", 2021, *Neodemos: popolazione, società, politiche*, p.7

¹⁴³ INPS, *INPS*, 2021, available at: <https://www.inps.it/news/assegno-unico-e-universale-le-istruzioni>

¹⁴⁴ INPS, *INPS*, 2021, available at: <https://www.inps.it/news/assegno-unico-e-universale-le-istruzioni>

¹⁴⁵ Saraceno, C., *L'assegno unico per i figli nella giungla del welfare*, 2021, p.10, in Rosina, A., *L'assegno unico e universale per i figli: una novità italiana e il contesto europeo*, 2021, *Neodemos: popolazione, società, politiche*

Among the requisites for the obtainment of this economic facilitation, we can find the so called ISEE, the Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator¹⁴⁶. This is a crucial evaluator for identifying those who either deserve the accession to economic facilitations or not and to which extent they could obtain them. Indeed, the INPS website also provides for an automatic generator¹⁴⁷ of the deserved amount destined to families according to their number of children and their ISEE. The author tried to simulate the amount destined to a family in the worst scenario allowed by the website, thus with an annual income below 25.000 euros. By supposing a number of two children, the sum of the economic facilitation amounts to 410 euros per month. This quantity is referred to the totality of both kids, so this means 205 euros each.

By taking a realistic and meticulous approach, this sum of money is, to say the least, insignificant. Given the fact that the institution of the *Assegno Unico e Universale* assimilates most of the previously existing economic facilitations for families¹⁴⁸ – such as familiar check for families with at least three minor children and the natality check – these numbers are not sufficient for neither encouraging greater fertility rates nor supporting already established families.

By considering once again a family with two kids, based on the dual earner model with an annual income below 25.000 euros – and in the need of a baby-sitter taking care of the children during their working times, we can calculate the due salary through the data provided by INPS¹⁴⁹. For this operation to be conducted, we should take into account that the current price per hour is set 10.01 euros per hour for children below the age of six, whereas it equals 9.11 euros per hour for kids above this age range. These sums hold true for registered baby-sitters and include holiday leave, contributions and *tredicesima*¹⁵⁰. This means that, in the first case, by taking an average of three hours

¹⁴⁶ CAF CISL, “ISEE” (Indicator of the Equivalent Economic Situation) is a tool that adopted by many public and private bodies to assess the economic situation of families who intend to request a subsidized social service (performance or reduction of the cost of the service), 2022, available at: https://www.cafcisl.it/schede-43-modello_isee

¹⁴⁷ INPS, *INPS*, 2021, available at: <https://servizi2.inps.it/servizi/AssegnoUnicoFigli/Simulatore>

¹⁴⁸ INPS, *INPS*, 2021, available at: <https://www.inps.it/news/assegno-unico-e-universale-le-istruzioni>. The complete list of facilitations assimilated by the introduction of the *Assegno Unico e Universale* may be found on the INPS website: the birth or adoption bonus (Mom tomorrow bonus); allowance for families with at least three minor children; family allowances for families with children and orphans; birth allowance (so-called Baby Bonus); tax deductions for children up to 21 years of age

¹⁴⁹ INPS, *INPS*, 2021, available at: <https://www.inps.it/>, p. 27

¹⁵⁰ Zeppilli, “Tredicesima and Quattordicesima” are additional month remunerations that workers receive in specific times of the year, enjoying an additional economic availability, 2021, available at: <https://www.studiocataldi.it/articoli/30746-tredicesima-e-quattordicesima.asp>

per day for each day of the working week, the family would need 600,60 euros per month. In the second case, by considering the same number of hours and days, the total sum would equal 592,17 euros per month. Therefore, in both cases, the fiscal aid provided by the Single and Universal Support appears to be once again insufficient and non-responsive to the needs of the Italian population in respect to its own national norms and rules.

Finally, by concluding our meticulous analysis, we should also consider some additional factors. On the one hand, the family taken as instance of our case study could also have other economic necessities, which should be as well supported by the State. For this reason, it would be fundamental to conduct an in-depth analysis evaluating whether the substitution of the previously existent tools with the Single Universal Support would result in an effective strategy.

On the other hand, we may also mention the case of an average family, with an ISEE which is superior to the one allowed for the obtainment of the *Assegno Unico e Universale*. Even though this may seem an overstatement, it is quite unjust that these families are totally excluded from the enjoyability of similar tools. Unfortunately, ISEE has appeared to be repeatedly and significantly biased in allocating a fair division of resources in between more or less wealthy households. In fact, it is sufficient for a worker not to declare his or her actual income, to be considered as someone deserving financial aid.

On the contrary, dependent workers with automatic tax deduction from their salary are considered to be undeservedly privileged, and thus too much often not in need of economic support of any kind. However, unfortunately, this mechanism continuously fuels fiscal evasion. This vicious circle is leading to a considerable decrease in public services, especially for those paying all taxes without infringing the rules. Additionally, it is also plausible that this could even lead to a further increase in their taxes. Especially in this historical period, characterised by a general increase in the cost of services due to both the health and security crisis, it is fundamental for these mechanisms to work in a fair and effective way to prevent additional injustices.

3.3 Is there a way out?

This dense chapter has shown some of the most debated and relevant policies for families and childbearing, especially in the light of the recent economic and health crises. The evidence analysed by the author wished to demonstrate the recurring weakness and inadequacy of these tools, which may be induced by the problems mentioned in the first two chapters concerning increasing aging of the population and feebly representative, fragmented leading class.

Italian politics has once again tried to appear under a good light for its deeds, which in this case have been unprecedented and revolutionary. However, currently, these policies seem to be once again not enough for an efficient recovery from the crisis and with almost no consequences for the demographic situation. These factors, summed with all the already existing disparities mentioned in the first part of the chapter, portray a quite worryingly situation, which needs to be urgently overturned.

These concrete examples have aimed at giving a complete picture of these strategies, in order to demonstrate that the sole existence of such does not automatically induce efficacy and success. However, these disapprovals have been supported by strong empirical evidence, for demonstrating that they do not represent just a sterile complaint following a populist rhetoric. Rather, they aim at posing the basis for an encouraging future in the light of awareness, with concrete proposals and demonstrations of how these misleading processes need to be reversed.

In the next section, the author is going to illustrate her case study for giving empirical evidence to the information collected in the last pages. Hearing from the truly needy portions of the populations is the only feasible way of finding concrete solutions to the problems that affect younger generations.

Chapter IV – Case study: youngster’s perspectives

The author could not move to this last stage without hearing from the main characters of this demographic crisis: young Italians. As explained by Testa¹⁵¹, fertility intentions play a central role in explaining contemporary demographic trends¹⁵². For this reason, our case study appears to be particularly significant for exploring and explaining the will of new generations with respect to the possibilities they are given by the national administration. From their answers, it will be possible to make concrete, empirical reflections, which could solidly establish new aspirations and policies with more efficient and direct results.

In fact, as mentioned in the previous sections, some of the main problems connected to the formulation of either juvenile or demographic policies, mostly rely on two aspects. On the one hand, strategies are fragmented, shortly projected, without considering the potential length of processes such as the demographic one. The fast alteration of different Italian administrations and the huge competition in between different parties makes it almost impossible to formulate long-term policies, which can be kept stable over time.

On the other hand, these strategies are tailored on a theoretical social class, without effectively hearing the real necessities of the truly needy categories. The issue of population ageing may lead to an alteration in political representation, which could become particularly hazardous in domains such as the demographic and social ones. For them to be efficient, resolute policies should be designed by carefully listening to the needs of the most fragile ones.

The chapter will be divided in five parts. The first one will present the structure of the case study and its modalities. More precisely, the readers will get to know the contributors’ age ranges and gender distribution, and there will also be some preliminary interrogations on fertility intentions.

In the second section, the author will compare the initial findings by constructing a correlation in between the current occupation of the partakers and their future childbearing perspective. This section will be particularly useful also to understand the gait of the working field with respect to youngsters.

Then, the third and fourth parts will focus on two factors that have been identified in the previous sections of the research as obstacles, among the others, to fertility intentions. More specifically, we

¹⁵¹ Testa, M.R., “On the positive correlation between education and fertility intentions in Europe: Individual- and country-level evidence”, 2014, *Vienna Institute of Demography*, p. 28

¹⁵² *Ivi*, p. 33

are talking about the Italian religious tradition and COVID-19. The author believes that these factors are truly important for understanding the future intentions of younger generations, since our country is both deeply entrenched in its traditions, and it has suffered a lot from the pandemic situation.

In the last section of the chapter, we are going to analyse the opinions of contributors regarding what they consider to be essential elements for incentivising parenthood. This choice is certainly conditioned by multiple variables – such as economic and work stability – which will be explained in greater detail in the following pages. The evaluation of such strategies will then pave the way for our conclusive chapter.

4.1 Case study: structure

The survey was ideated by the author through the formulation of thirteen detailed questions aiming at grasping the true opinions and orientations of involved youngsters. The inquiries have been constructed following both quantitative and qualitative typologies, with either open-ended questions or multiple-choice ones. The complete script of the survey may be found in the *Annex* section, situated at page 78.

The author submitted the questionnaire mostly through social media and reached a totality of 230 people in between 20 and 35 years of age, coming from all around Italy¹⁵³. The results were recorded and analysed through the gathering on Excel spreadsheets, which allowed the writer to construct a complete and detailed scrutiny of the data.

¹⁵³ Most of the answers were sent from people living in Rome, Naples, Palermo, Milan, Turin, and Siena

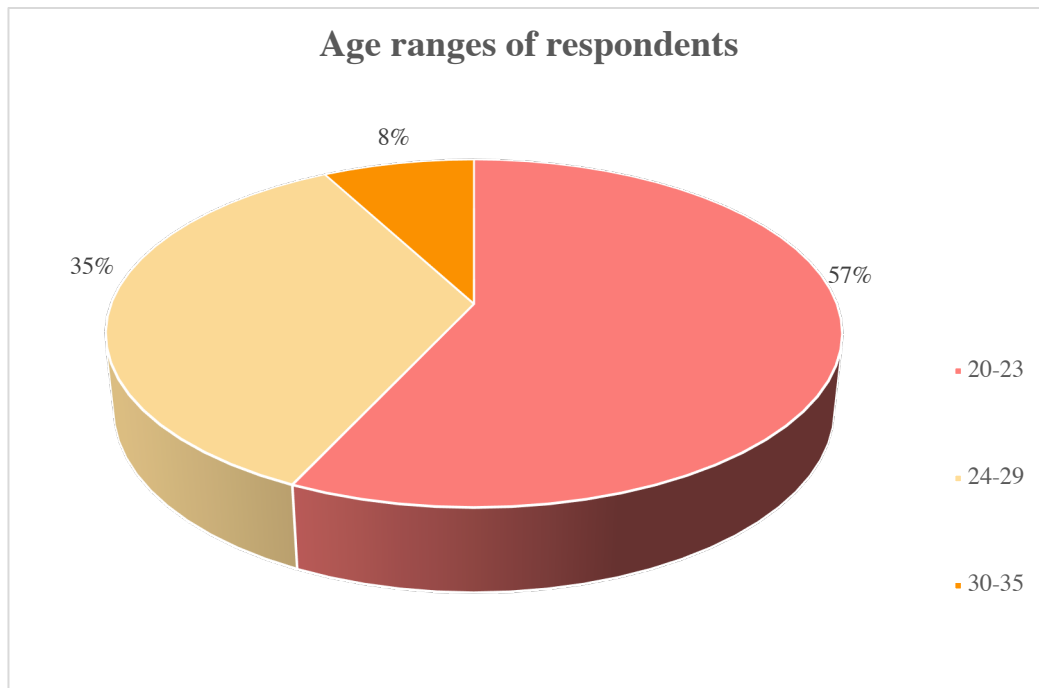


Figure 17, Distribution of survey participants by age range, question n°1 ¹⁵⁴

The author was interested in questioning both young people within the academic formation period and those already inserted in the working field. One of the main goals was the one of emphasising the differences in between these age ranges. More precisely, those who are currently studying or have just entered the job market and have no children may have different perspectives from those already having kids. As it may be noted – being the author aged 23 – most of the respondents came from her same age range. Among these, 37% were males, whereas 63% were females.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, 97.4% of the respondents – due to their very young age – were childless, whereas only 2.6% had in between one and two children.¹⁵⁶

Analysing the turnouts of this assortment has shown interesting cues. One of the first questions examined whether the contributors wished to have children or not. Surprisingly, despite the widespread precarity and uncertainty caused by both the economic, health and security crisis and the overall Italian disincentives to become parents, the respondents have been quite optimistic on their

¹⁵⁴ Author's evaluation of survey results, question n°1

¹⁵⁵ Author's evaluation of survey results, question n°1

¹⁵⁶ Author's evaluation of survey results, question n°1

fertility intentions. As a matter of fact, most of them, namely 85.3%¹⁵⁷ have expressed the desire of becoming parents. On the contrary, only 14.7%¹⁵⁸ has stood in favour of childlessness.

4.2 Case study: correlation in between current occupation and fertility intentions

Regarding the participants' occupational status, the results have been quite diversified. The categories structured by the author aimed at grasping the most common domains where people within the selected age range could have been allocated. Among these, respondents could choose between the following classifications: student, paid trainee, unpaid trainee, part-time worker, and full-time worker.

Even if most participants still fall within the "student" category, the remaining groups amount for 41.9%¹⁵⁹ of the total. This means that all those who are no more students are starting to insert themselves into the working field. Furthermore, the percentage of full-time workers is relatively high with respect to the author's expectations, whereas the percentage of unpaid trainees only counts for 4%¹⁶⁰ of the total contributors.

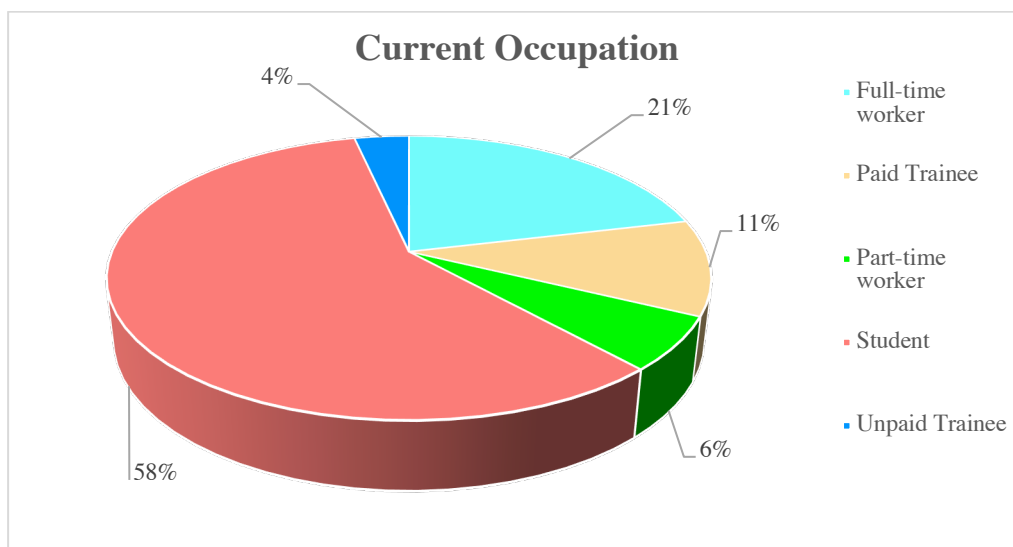


Figure 18, Respondents' occupational status, question n°3¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Author's evaluation of survey results, question n°5

¹⁵⁸ *Idem*

¹⁵⁹ *Ivi*, question n°3

¹⁶⁰ *Idem*

¹⁶¹ *Idem*

From this section, the author has had the possibility of constructing a correlation through the link in between the occupational status and the desire of having kids. As mentioned earlier, those already having children represented only 2.6%¹⁶² of the total respondents. By looking at the detailed survey scripts, it is possible to associate this percentage with the number of those who already own either a part- or full-time working position. This denotes the fact that having children without a stable occupation is almost unconceivable in our country, and this may be once again due to the structural lack of supportive policies. Nevertheless, this involuntary limit is not necessarily negative, since having a child also presupposes having the resources to sustain his/her growth.

Finally, as mentioned in the precedent paragraph, the great majority of participants has expressed its will in favour of parenthood, despite their actual condition of either student or precarious worker. This poses the bases for an optimistic belief. In fact, it is expected that these people will be interested in finding a stable working position in order to have the possibility to become parents.

Thought-provoking results have also emerged by analysing the number of children that participants wished to have. The results of this section are summarised in the graph below. The greatest majority of partakers, which corresponds to 47%¹⁶³ opted for two children. As we already know, this number would be optimal for the ends of the intergenerational turnover, increasing the Italian fertility rate, which is currently registered at 1.24 per woman¹⁶⁴. At the same time, 21%¹⁶⁵ of the contestants voted for three children. We can also notice some higher numbers, which could be quite promising in the light of the current demographic situation. The other most preeminent percentages have been the options for no children, 16,1%¹⁶⁶, and those corresponding to either one or four children, respectively amounting to 4.35%¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶² Author's evaluation of survey results, question n°4

¹⁶³ *Ivi*, question n°6

¹⁶⁴ ISTAT, *Istat - Istituto Nazionale di Statistica*, available at: <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/264643>

¹⁶⁵ Author's evaluation of survey results, question n°6

¹⁶⁶ *Idem*

¹⁶⁷ *Idem*

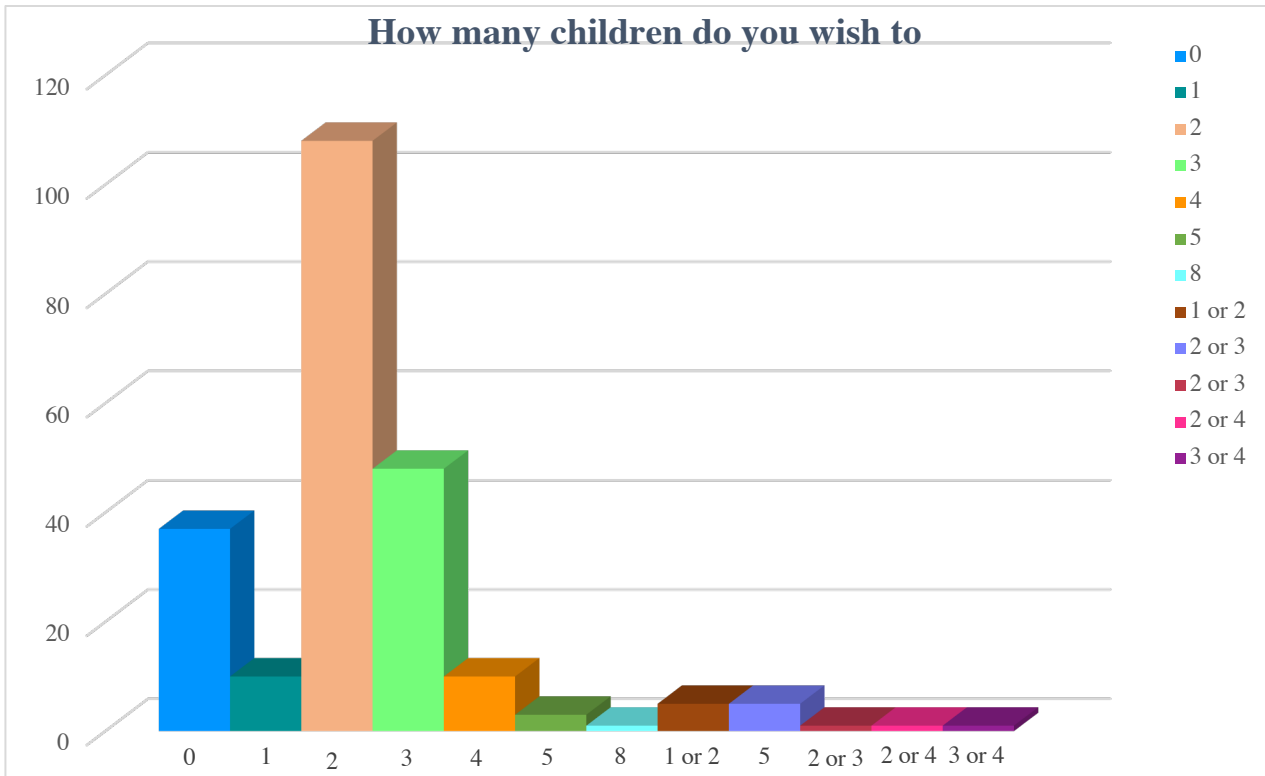


Figure 19, Number of potential children the respondents wish to have, question n°6¹⁶⁸

By summarising our considerations, the desire of having more than one kid seems to be preponderant with respect to childlessness. This is quite optimistic news despite all the previously mentioned prospective obstacles to both economic stabilization and parenthood, not at all incentivising new potential parents.

4.3 Case study: cultural influence

This section is devoted to the analysis of question number 7 of the survey, regarding respondents' attitudes towards the theme of marriage. More precisely, partakers were asked whether they believe marital status to be an essential prerogative to have a baby in our country. The author was particularly curious about these turnouts. In fact, as mentioned in the first chapter, it seemed that the Italian cultural tradition played a pivotal role in childbearing intentions. In particular, social prejudices towards unmarried couples had been labelled as heavily conditioning deterrents. In 2017,

¹⁶⁸ Author's evaluation of survey results, question n°6

Blangiardo¹⁶⁹ reported that nearly 70% of Italian children mostly come from married couples for protecting the family from social stigma and acquiring legislative recognition for the offspring.

Surprisingly, by looking at the result collected by the inquiry, the attitudes coming from the author's cluster seem to be slightly different from what we mentioned at the beginning of the research.

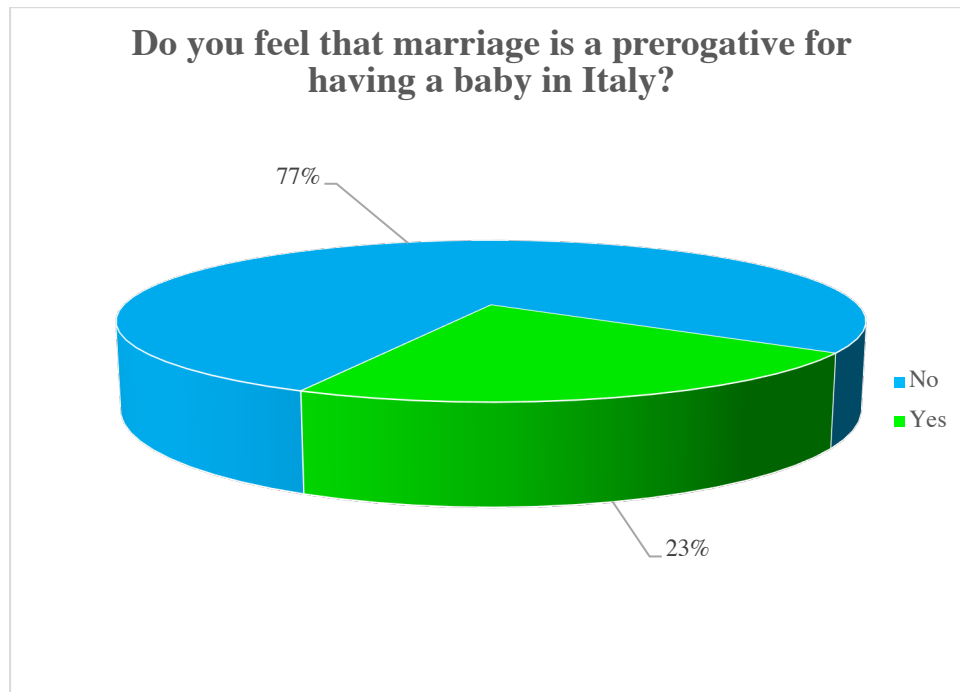


Figure 20, Distribution of the answers to the question on the correlation in between marriage and childbearing, question n°7¹⁷⁰

As we can observe, most participants, namely 77%¹⁷¹, expressed themselves against this statement. Among them, the great majority was composed by youngsters. On the contrary, only 23%¹⁷² of the cluster agreed on the correlation in between marriage and fertility intentions. In this scenario, Blangiardo's assumptions seem to have been drastically reversed by new generations, and this – if translated into facts – may represent a truly revolutionary attitude towards Italian culture and tradition.

In order to further investigate on the reasons driving the answers to this question, the author additionally asked the contributors to expand on their previous response, justifying their orientation for either “yes” or “no”. By analysing these explanations, several considerations emerged.

¹⁶⁹ Blangiardo, G. C., “Riflessioni e proposte per una demografia vitale”. *I Quaderni Di Scienza E Vita*, 2017, N.17, p. 50

¹⁷⁰ Author's evaluation of survey results, question n°7

¹⁷¹ *Idem*

¹⁷² *Idem*

On the one hand, those who opted for “yes” may be considered as more conservative and attached to the Italian cultural tradition¹⁷³. More precisely, those who believe in this correlation sustain their argument through a rhetoric for social and economic stability, solidity of the parental union and subsequent advantages for children to be raised. At the same time, it seems that they are unaware of the fact that today, even unmarried couples enjoy a number of social rights that were previously reserved exclusively to married couples. Among these, we can mention the right to education, economic assistance and family status¹⁷⁴.

On the other hand, the picture is much more complex. Most of the respondents within this category have expressed a harsh repression of Italian tradition, in particular towards Catholic-established ones, without considering that, in our country, marriage may also be officiated through a civil union outside the Church institution. This factor was also evaluated as truly interesting by the author, since it highlights a further thought-provoking cue, which, however, will not be analysed for the sake of sticking to the research theme.

At the same time, the remaining participants expressed themselves in a more moderated way. They do not believe marriage to be a social prerogative anymore, especially thanks to the social rights that have been extended even to *de facto* couples. In this vein, they defend the conviction of having children outside marriage in the light of the same rights and supports conferred to unmarried parents. They identify this as an emancipatory and evolutive achievement of modern society which brings about greater truth and loyalty. In fact, most of these contributors do not believe that a formal marriage necessarily implied faithfulness and stability. On the contrary, they believe that a non-formalized union may be stronger in this sense, since it is not based on a formalized “contract”, but rather on true feelings and commitment.

4.4 Case study: COVID-19 influence

Due to the huge impact of the pandemic in the last two years, it was essential to devote part of the survey to the issue. In this vein, participants have been questioned on the impact of the health crisis on their fertility intentions in several queries.

¹⁷³ Author’s evaluation of survey results, question n°8

¹⁷⁴ Arija Garcia, C., *op.cit.*

Starting from the analysis of question n°10, people have been asked to express – on a scale from 1 to 5¹⁷⁵ – how much the pandemic influenced their desire of having a child. The related results can be observed in the graph below. At a first glance, it may seem that most of the participants have not been affected at all. This may be primarily due to their young age and their current student occupation. However, by taking a more attentive look, we can see how more than $\frac{1}{4}$ ¹⁷⁶ of the participants was indeed significantly influenced by the health crisis, since there were several registered responses for the indicators in between “3” and “5”.

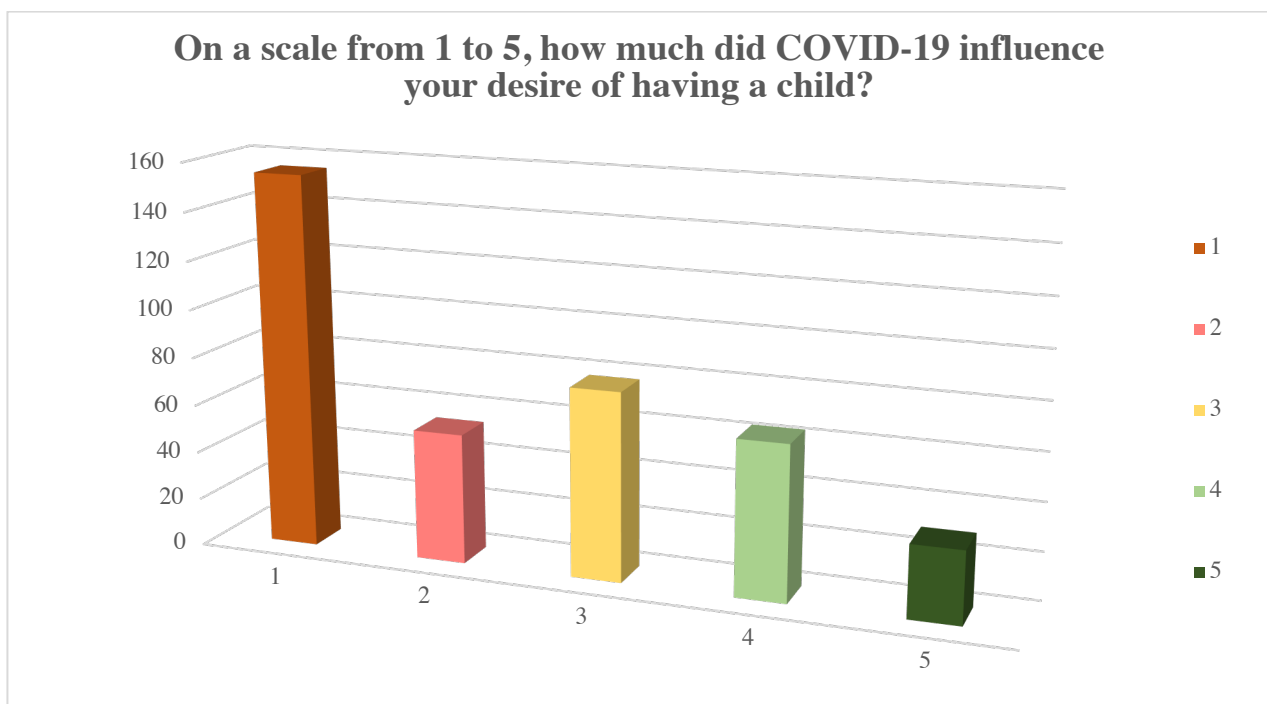


Figure 21, Scale of influence of COVID-19 pandemic on fertility intentions, question n°10¹⁷⁷

Additionally, question n°11 demanded to expand on the degree of conditionality partakers expressed towards the pandemic in relation to their future fertility and life intentions. By analysing these answers, they can be grouped in four main spheres. Firstly, those reactions falling within the “1” category have appeared to be quite optimistic. They have justified their choice by the fact of being too young to think about children, and confident about a future world without further crises and

¹⁷⁵ 1 = not at all; 5 = a lot

¹⁷⁶ Author’s evaluation of survey results, question n°10

¹⁷⁷ *Idem*

uncertainties. These responses, indeed, mainly derived from the participants within the 20-23 years old age range¹⁷⁸.

A second group has stressed the magnitude of the pandemic in terms of the great disadvantages it caused for women, especially regarding health and job stability. Regarding the first issue, some of the respondents have lamented the unprecedented risks arising from hospital visits under the sanitary emergency, the increasing scale of obstetrical violence and the impossibility of sharing some of the most important steps – such as delivery – with the partner due to sanitary restrictions.¹⁷⁹ Concerning working and economic stability, participants have highlighted the impossibility of assuring a respectable life to children in such an uncertain world.¹⁸⁰

By following this line, a third group has mainly focused on the issues of increasing anxiety and uncertainty generated by the health crisis. In this vein, they were mostly concentrated on the economic precarity this would have brought to their personal lives, leading to the postponement of several choice related to adulthood, including childbearing.

The fourth group considers the most pessimistic approach that has been found among the many responses. Within this category, several contributors manifested their puzzlement through a long-term, wide-range reasoning. Among their greatest concerns for the future, they not only mentioned the pandemic, but they also highlighted the consequences of climate change and of the latest developments of the war in Ukraine.

These results surely unveil several unenthusiastic aspects concerning the national demographic future perspectives and intentions. However, these data may be significantly useful to understand the exact roots of the main problems affecting Italian youngsters and conditioning their future choices.

4.5 Case study: prerogatives for parenthood

The last survey section on which the author wishes to grab the readers' attention is the one presenting respondents' cues and suggestions concerning essential prerogatives supporting parenthood. This paragraph will analyse the final points of the questionnaire, whose answers have been summarised in two histograms for the sake of clarity and preciseness.

¹⁷⁸ *Ivi*, question n°11

¹⁷⁹ Author's evaluation of survey results, question n°11

¹⁸⁰ *Idem*

Question n°12 asked participants to indicate what they considered as the most important prerogatives for parenthood among seven different categories suggested by the author. Each of them could indicate as many preferences as they wished. By looking at the histogram below, most people have stressed the importance of both economic and work stability. These two categories have been separated since the writer also considered situations in which financial solidity could exist regardless the job position.

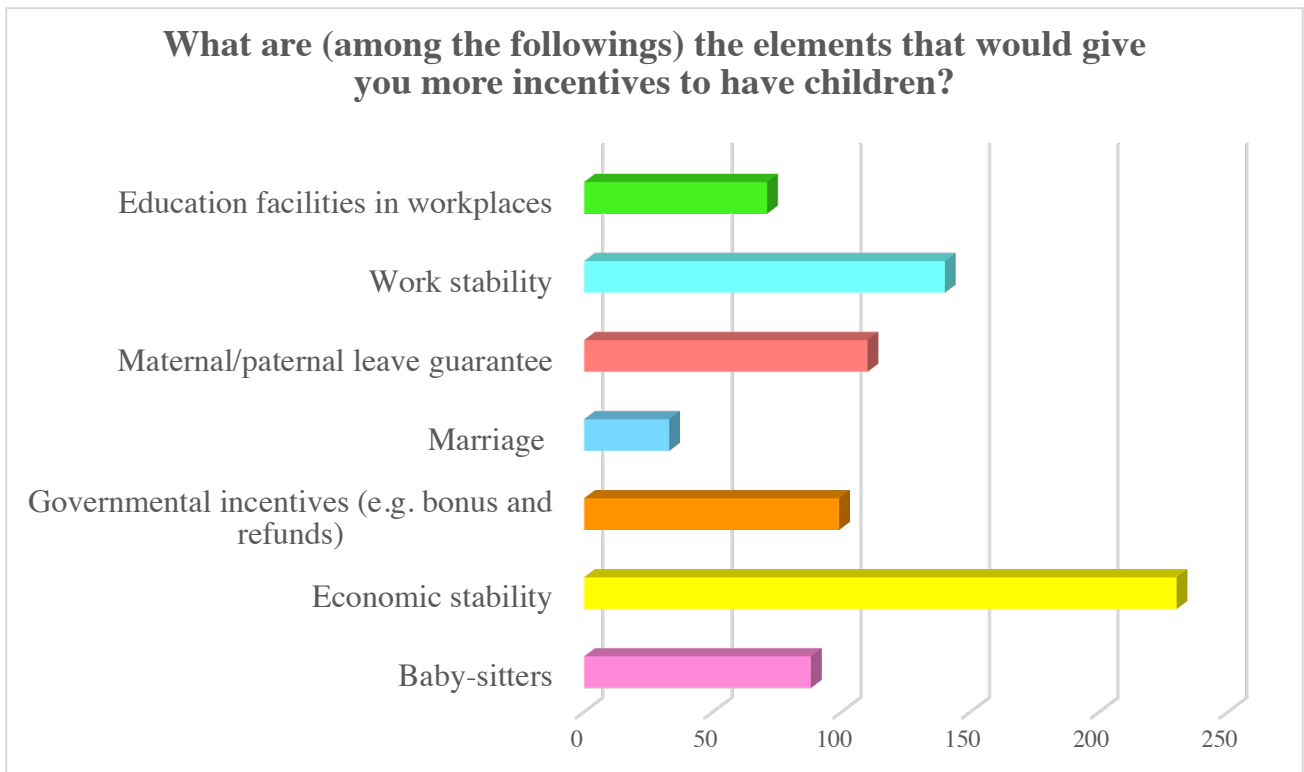


Figure 22, Participants' preferences among the author's suggested parenthood prerogatives, question n°12¹⁸¹

The following most popular options have resulted in maternal and paternal leave guarantees and governmental incentives. These preferences confirmed the assumptions made in third chapter concerning State support, which is currently either lacking or insufficient in meeting the true needs of citizens.

Surprisingly, baby-sitters and education facilities options have received few preferences. This appears to be particularly bizarre, since there should be a way of leaving children to someone during the working day. According to the author, situating education institutions – for instance kindergartens or

¹⁸¹ Author's evaluation of survey results, question n°12

schools – either inside or in the close proximity of job places would be an important logistic incentive to support parents in taking care of their children without being forced to neglect their career.

Moreover, the baby-sitter option – given a situation of either financial stability or governmental ad hoc incentives – could also contribute to the creation of new job places. If set correctly, these positions may benefit both workers and the State, contributing to the fostering of the national economic system through both taxes and salaries.

Finally, as it was already confirmed in the previous sections of the survey, marriage has only been considered by a few participants as a fundamental prerogative for conciliating parenthood. Therefore, it can be reconfirmed that this kind of union does no longer represent a necessary step towards family formation for today's youngsters.

Successively, the author has asked participants to present their own suggestions to be added to the already present ones. This last point has been crucial in analysing the final outcomes of the research, since it has given the possibility to all participants to personally contribute to the drawing of final considerations.

Despite many did not give their additional contribution since they believed that the previously indicated categories were sufficient, many others have proposed really interesting points which are worth being closely analysed. The author has thoroughly studied all the proposals, and, in the end, she gathered them under some thematic categories in order to make the analysis clearer and more straightforward.¹⁸²

¹⁸² Author's evaluation of survey results, question n°13

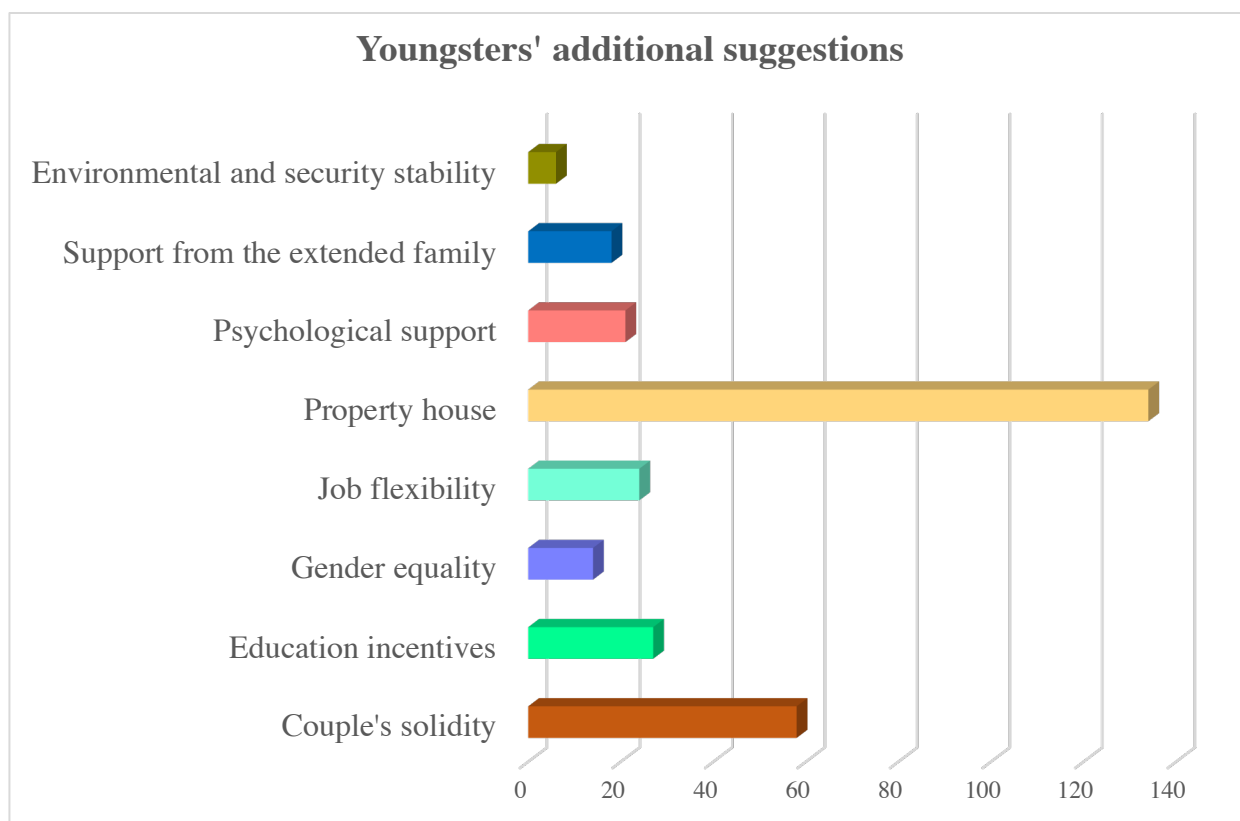


Figure 23, Respondents' most suggested parenthood prerogatives, question n°13¹⁸³

As it may be noted, even here, each respondent had the possibility to suggest multiple points. The displayed policies will now be explained in detail, by following an order based on their impact, which has been assessed in accordance with the number of their supporters.

The category on environment and security has really grabbed the author's attention. A cohort which is concerned for these issues really reflects the increasing difficulties that these generations are going through. The uncertainty characterising our lives in the last two years truly shaped our way of thinking and projecting the future.

Furthermore, another category has stressed the importance of reinforcing gender equality for the sake of greater redistribution of family roles, equal salary allocation and overall parity within the couple. Even though women have achieved great rights in the last decades, there is still plenty of work to do, and we will discuss about it in the next chapter.

¹⁸³ Author's evaluation of survey results, question n°13

Another proposal necessarily deriving from the novelties experienced in the last two years is the one of job flexibility. Youngsters have learnt how to re-schedule their daily routines, sometimes inserting more time for their own interests and hobbies. In this sense, both smart working and learning have given people greater time amount disposals. Consequently, it is possible that, currently, future working and parents' generations would ask for established remote working days, in order to use that interval to do things they would not be able to do in a normal in-presence working time. Among these things, there could also be duties related to parenthood.

Additionally, the option on psychological support further originates from the current need of mental aid that is being demanded by younger generations in these months. In fact, there have been several sensibilisation movements in the past weeks, asking the government for ad hoc financial supports to give the possibility to younger generations hit by the pandemic to access to psychological care services. In the case of parenthood, this issue is equally important. Mothers and fathers may be in need for help, and they should be entitled of receiving it. Even in the light of a preparatory itinerary to parenthood, the author believes that the existence of a similar service would be essential.

For what concerns the category dealing with the potential help that could be given by the extended family, this topic really portrays a special trait of Italian culture. In fact, foreign societies have less consideration for the closeness of all the family components and the potential role they could have in each other's lives. In Italy instead, either restricted or enlarged families may be really close, and grandparents may offer great support to neo-ones, especially within the initial parenthood years.

Some participants have also expressed their concern for education incentives and couple's solidity. These are also really crucial points, especially the one of stability in the absence of marriage. Since the latter represents a sort of contract, it is expected – at least ideologically – to confer stability to the union. Without this formalised bond, both couple and partner's stability per se could be even more crucial to assure the right premises for parenthood.

Finally, the most suggested option has been the one of property house. This aspect is truly decisive for young couples and holds fundamental importance. In fact, having your own estate allows you to avoid paying a monthly rent. Even though one would pay for the loan, all the there-invested money would come back in terms of stability and house utilisation. Paying a rent may be interpreted as a waste, especially when someone is planning to remain in the same habitation for the rest of their life.

However, a rental may be easier to obtain with respect to a loan, especially in the cases of precarious working situation in which youngsters may find themselves. Even in this case, the Italian family structure would play a fundamental supportive role in sustaining the first deposit and in playing the guarantor's role.

Overall, this chapter has unveiled truly thought-provoking cues. Having the possibility to interact with all these young people has been particularly enriching and revealing for the author. She has even further realised how necessities and perspectives may change according to the historical period we live in. Furthermore, this has given greater vitality to the whole research, since it has also been based on concrete facts, and not just unrepresentative opinions.

From this case study, it has been showed that society's needs are rapidly changing, and that instead the Italian government's support seems to have not. The author hopes that these findings could be useful to build future solid policies to fill these huge gaps in favour of younger generations. For the latter instances to take a more institutionalised form, the next chapter will offer some detailed policy proposals gathering all the most crucial elements we have met along this dense research.

Chapter V – Policy recommendations and research outcomes

This last, decisive chapter aims at giving concrete policy recommendations in the light of what has been observed throughout the research. The author has analysed several domains related to the Italian demographic decline, its plausible future outcomes, and their repercussions on future generations. The in-depth analysis conducted through the analysis of the survey results gave us some initial clues on the possible outcomes of this research. As hinted in the previous sections, this study has not been conceived as a sterile critique to the current Italian demographic and social situation. Rather, it wishes to pose the bases for a more prosperous and effective future. Therefore, it is now time to organise these ideas into a well-structured, tangible, and efficient scheme which could concretely respond to the demographic necessities of our country.

The chapter will analyse some of the most salient aspects emerged throughout the research, aiming at covering as many problematic issues as possible. More specifically, the author has highlighted five focal domains. Initially, we will deal with the political aspect, which urgently needs to be re-structured by following long-term, constant reforms incentivising the demographic development. From the reform of the administrative domain, there will be some other fields to be analysed. To begin, the still considerable gender gap present in Italy needs to be filled up through the establishment

of equalization policies, redistributing and homogenising parental rights and duties. In this context, we will recall the risks originating by the lack of equality in both demographic and social terms.

Additionally, the general approach to parenthood – which may be currently considered as a burden – has to be reconsidered. More specifically, the author wishes to propose ad hoc education programmes which could help citizens to learn about this social role throughout their lives. In this way, the population would be more conscious of the responsibilities of their potential role, and consequently more prepared and mindful about its necessities and tasks.

In this vein, this chapter also wishes to suggest the creation of more efficient supportive policies by the State. Among these, as mentioned in the fourth chapter, logistic facilitations may be an asset. For instance, installing education institutions in proximity of job places may help parents in conciliating parenthood and working career. Moreover, the accession requisites to supportive policies should allow greater portions of the population to reach these means, without further incentivising tax evasions, but rather, fighting against it. This would pose the basis for a truly meritocratic society, which could also contribute to the reduction of the gender gap.

Conclusively, the author also wishes to remark the importance of the increase of regular migration, which could be a fundamental element for influencing population structure¹⁸⁴. All along the research, we have observed how this phenomenon could also supported the reversal of the overall Italian ageing, favouring both Italian demography and economy.

For all these goals to be achieved, we will observe international examples given by demographically similar countries – for instance, Japan. In this light, the author also hopes to propose diplomatic partnerships for States in a difficult situation to support each other, further reinforcing the mechanisms of international cooperation.

5.1 Governmental stabilisation

As hinted multiple times in the previous pages, demographic policies presuppose a far-sighted perspective, which should be kept constant throughout the succession of different governments and

¹⁸⁴ Dabbs Sciubba, J., *op.cit.*, p. 66

legislatures for them to result effective.¹⁸⁵ Unfortunately, these strategies are often disregarded since each administration tries to shape the political scenario in favour of the votes it could obtain from its supporters. Being most of the Italian population unaware of the huge risks connected to the progressive ageing of the population, it is – at this point of the research – no more surprising to see how this issue is not correctly addressed.

Therefore, this section aims at once again recalling the importance of a responsive and representative political leadership, which could truly represent and satisfy population's needs. Political capacity is one of the most crucial factors of the Power Transition Theory¹⁸⁶, especially while defining the stability of a country.

Italian citizens should deeply understand the importance of a consistent political representation since it could confer them aid and support for posing the bases of their future. Although this argumentation may seem quite abstract, the next paragraphs will be devoted to concrete examples that may derive from a representative, long-term-oriented administration. Even in the light of alternating executives, there should be some key issues that ought to never be forgotten. Demographic development and the difficulties connected to an increasingly ageing world should surely be two of these fixed topics.

5.2 Filling up the gender gap

Unfortunately, in Italy it is still quite common to wonder if having female employees is either an advantage for a firm or not.¹⁸⁷ This astonishing example perfectly helps us to understand that gender inequality is still present in Italy, affecting several domains, especially the one of parenthood. In this vein, as already described in Chapter IV, the equalisation of family tasks may commence from the stabilisation of parental leaves. Surprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have significantly posed the basis for a re-organisational shift. In 2020, a group of note-worthy scholars¹⁸⁸ conducted an analysis on the matter by engaging more than one thousand Italian parents. Their main interest was

¹⁸⁵ Blangiardo, G. C., “Riflessioni e proposte per una demografia vitale”, *I Quaderni Di Scienza E Vita*, 2017, N.17, p. 56

¹⁸⁶ Dabbs Sciubba, J., *op.cit.*, p. 66

¹⁸⁷ Valente, L., “Se assumere le donne conviene”, *Ingenere*, 2022, available at: <https://www.ingenere.it/articoli/se-assumere-le-donne-conviene>

¹⁸⁸ Zannella, M., Aloè, E., Corsi, M., & De Rose, A., “Un'occasione per i padri”, *Ingenere*, available at: <https://www.ingenere.it/articoli/occasione-per-padri>

seeing how childcare and housework time have changed with the advent of the pandemic.¹⁸⁹ They summarised their most relevant findings in the graphs below.

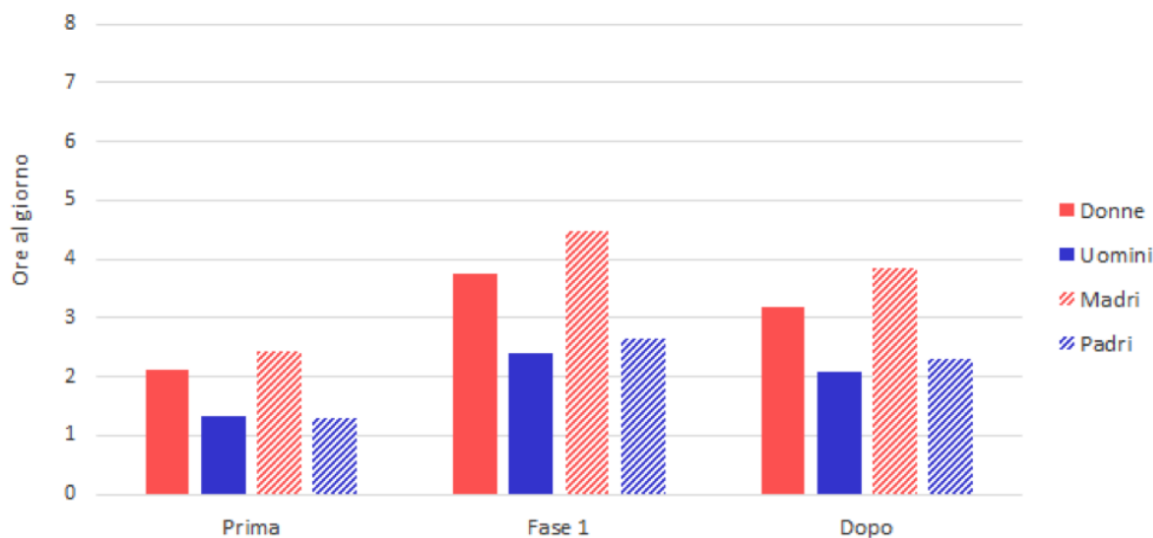


Figure 24, Average time dedicated to housework¹⁹⁰

This first histogram reports the average time dedicated to housework by men – indicated in blue – and women – indicated in red – before, during and after the first phase of the pandemic. From the data reported above, it appears that men’s commitment to housekeeping has exponentially increased during the health crisis. According to the research, this was mainly due to the increase in flexibility given by the possibility of working remotely. This has brought to a greater share of domestic duties in between family members, even though the gap is still present. Moreover, despite the decreasing records registered after the first phase of the pandemic, the overall level of shared duties has remained superior with respect to the one preceding the crisis.

However, we should also consider that, unfortunately, in most luckless cases, greater time availability has also been emphasised by the loss of job provoked by the economic crisis generating from the sanitary one.

¹⁸⁹ *Idem*

¹⁹⁰ Zannella, M., Aloè, E., Corsi, M., & De Rose, A., “Un'occasione per i padri”, *Ingenere*, available at: <https://www.ingenere.it/articoli/occasione-per-padri>

The second graph illustrates the changes in the average time dedicated to childcare. Even here, data are divided in three time spans, which describe the situation before, during and after the first phase of the health crisis. Here, the results are even more remarkable.

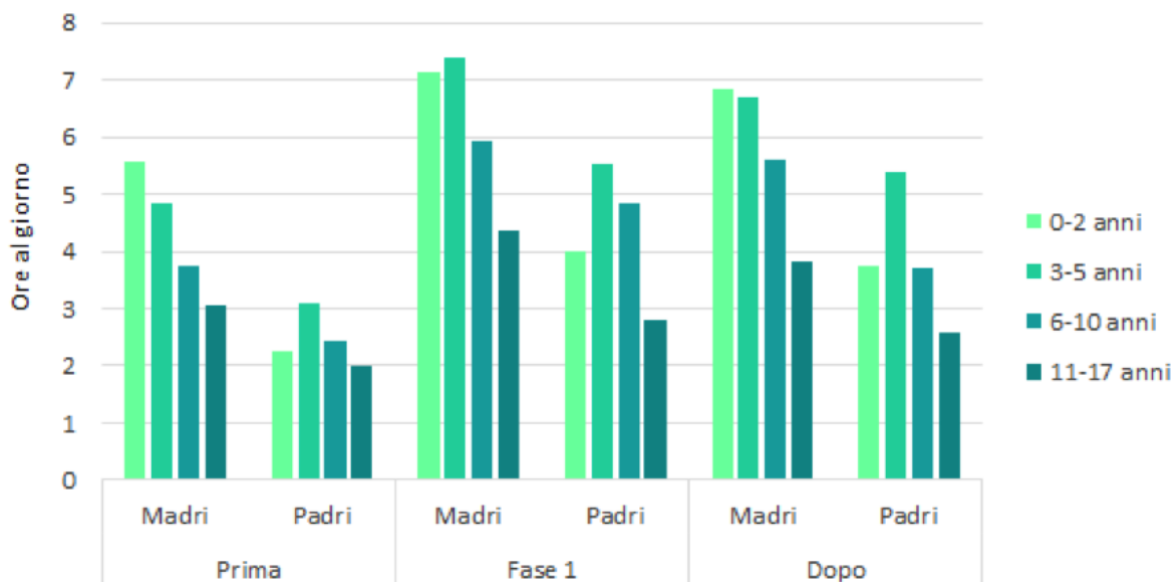


Figure 25, Average time dedicated to childcare¹⁹¹

As a matter of fact, fathers' time dedicated to childcare has – depending on the age range of children – almost doubled in between the first and second phase. Afterwards, this level has been kept stable, even leading to a decrease in mother's one.

These findings shed a light on the existing desire from fathers to sustain their partner in these duties. This marks a significant social shift, which could pose the basis for great further developments. Rescheduling parental duties could create greater equality and efficiency in the family scheme. Moreover, and most importantly, children will be able to equally count on both parents, without discrepancies due to the division of tasks. However, this process may only be achieved if even the job market adapts to these changes.

¹⁹¹ Zannella, M., Aloè, E., Corsi, M., & De Rose, A., "Un'occasione per i padri", *Ingenere*, available at: <https://www.ingenere.it/articoli/occasione-per-padri>

5.2.1 Womenomics

The above-analysed data witness important outcomes. As suggested in chapter IV, greater work flexibility could be fundamental in redistributing parental duties. At the same time, a greater degree of elasticity could help more women in entering the job market earlier. In this way, the absence of the precarity given by joblessness could give greater possibilities to childbearing¹⁹², pushing both women and couples in general to anticipate the arrival of the first child¹⁹³.

In particular, the author wants to illustrate a model which has been introduced in Japan in 2013, named *Womenomics*¹⁹⁴. As a matter of fact, the Asian State resembles Italy in its accelerating demographic decline and population ageing. As for our country, it holds great longevity¹⁹⁵ records, which contribute to the growth in the elderly population. Moreover, there is no sufficient intergenerational turnover due to the marginal role women hold in society. In 2019, the fertility rate per woman was registered at 1.42¹⁹⁶. Additionally, the significant burden of cultural traditions further prevents women from entering the job market in a prolonged manner.¹⁹⁷

Consequently, the *Womenomics* strategy has been promoted by the local government to find effective solutions to the increasing population ageing, the lack of workers and the reversal of the declining fertility trends. The Japanese government has been particularly far-sighted in understanding how

¹⁹² Meron, M., & Widmer, I., “Les Femmes Au Chômage Retardent L'arrivée Du Premier Enfant”, 2002, *Ined éditions*, 327-357

¹⁹³ Rosina, A., & Testa, M.R., “Couples' first child intentions and disagreement: an analysis of the Italian case”, *Revue européenne de Démographie*, 2009, 25(4), pp. 487-502

¹⁹⁴ Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, “Womenomics In Japan”, *ASIA PACIFIC CURRICULUM*, 2019, available at: <https://asiapacificcurriculum.ca/learning-module/womenomics-japan>

¹⁹⁵ Average life expectancy is set at 85 years old, *ivi*, p.3

¹⁹⁶ SkyTg24, “Calo delle nascite in Giappone nel 2019: mai così poche negli ultimi 120 anni”, *SkyTg24*, 2019, available at: <https://tg24.sky.it/mondo/2019/12/26/cal-nascite-giappone>

¹⁹⁷ According to Japanese analysts, “one of the greatest barriers to higher Japanese female employment is Japanese society itself”. For instance, getting a job promotion in Japan is often based at least partly on tenure, which refers to the length of time a person has worked for a company or other organization. This has disadvantages for those women who leave their jobs temporarily to have children. Japanese work culture also tends to reward people for their willingness to work overtime, and for going out with one’s supervisor and co-workers after work for team-building purposes. This sometimes includes late nights of drinking with co-workers, which is seen as an extension of work. In a country where women still have the primary responsibility for being at home to care for children, it is far more difficult for them to do overtime or participate in these after-hours activities, in Matsui, K., Suzuki, H., Tatabe, K., & Akiba, T., “Womenomics 4.0: Time to Walk the Talk”, 2014, *Goldman Sachs Portfolio Strategy Research*

including women in the job market could have had multiple positive results in several social domains, from population growth to economic productivity.

5.2.2 Potential partnerships

The economic strategy pursued by Japan is a powerful example of an intelligent State intervention, which looks at the future of the nation. In this vein, the author would like to suggest the possibility for demographically similar countries to cooperate both in economic and human terms.

More precisely, in the case of Italy and Japan, the two countries could start exchanging resolute strategies combating population ageing. At the same time, their firms and working establishments could cooperate in order to give greater space to women and allow them to establish a solid international career, or even to move from one country to another according to their preferences.

Especially in the light of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, similar solutions must be contemplated to effectively enhance the inclusion of women in the working field. This shows us that an ambitious and nuanced strategy of adaptation may serve ageing countries better than short term attempts to reverse what is ultimately an inevitable consequence of human development.¹⁹⁸

In Italy, this is even more urgently needed even because, as mentioned earlier, both women and youngsters have been significantly hit by the pandemic. After the presentation of this inspiring model, we can now move on to the other subjects of this section, by taking an even more open view.

5.3 Civic education

As mentioned by Testa¹⁹⁹, the correlation in between young women's education and fertility intentions may generate controversial results in terms of childbearing. More educated girls usually tend to postpone the arrival of the first child due to the desire of self-fulfilment in working terms. Particularly in Italy, these two conditions are sometimes seen as mutually exclusive. Becoming parents may be perceived as the loss of a certain social status, implying more duties than rights, especially if coupled with a job career. We should not forget that these orientations are also caused

¹⁹⁸ Parsons, A., & Gilmour, S., "An evaluation of fertility- and migration-based policy responses to Japan's ageing population," *PLOS One*, 2018, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0209285>

¹⁹⁹ Testa, M.R., "On the positive correlation between education and fertility intentions in Europe: Individual- and country-level evidence", 2014, *Vienna Institute of Demography*, p.28

by the incapacity of several working domains to adapt the necessities of women in general and, in particular, maternity. This mechanism has been summarised by the scheme below.

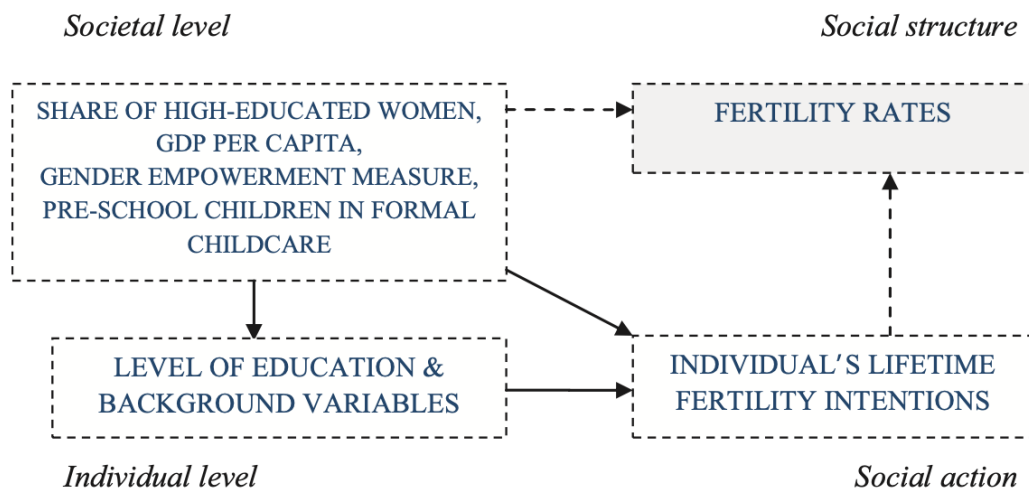


Figure 26, A micro-macro model of fertility²⁰⁰

Once again, societal orientations given by either education or other background variables may influence social deeds. As a chain reaction, these behaviours can, in the long run, also impact the social structure. More concretely, if society contributes at forming highly educated women with great employment and career expectations, without supporting maternity within these fields, then the individual childlessness choice of several women ends up changing the social structure as a whole. This mechanism is particularly problematic since workers are not conceived for their natural characteristics, but only for their productive capacities, without contemplating the fulfilment of these natural processes.

Therefore, the author wishes to propose some policies reversing this mechanism. If it is true that being more educated brings to greater consciousness towards family and working ambitions, these elements could be brought on the side of the coin, the one favouring parenthood. More precisely, a greater degree of culture and working stability should become elements supporting demographic growth.

Furthermore, civic education may also be fundamental for teaching students even themes as the one of environmental protection. Today, this issue has become particularly crucial due to the increasingly worsening conditions of our planet. Current younger generations are particularly concerned about this

²⁰⁰ Coleman, J., *Foundations of social theory*, 1990, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press

point since there are starting to experience the consequences of climate change and its related problems on their own skin. As we have observed in the analysis of the questionnaire results, this problem may, in the long run, also influence fertility intentions due to the uncertainty attributed to the future.

After the several domains analysed in this research, the author has come to the conclusion that the negative association in between adult life and parenthood may derive from a cultural, biased conception which could be reversed through its own triggering element: education. The reintroduction of civic education in Italian schools in 2019²⁰¹ may represent – if used in a wise way – a powerful tool for growing aware citizens, whose idea of parenthood is more conscious and positive. In this vein, there are already some efforts to orient similar subjects towards this direction. As a matter of fact, Law 92/2019²⁰² reports that civic education is fundamental for a “*full and conscious participation to civic, cultural and social communitarian life, in compliance with rules, rights and duties*”²⁰³. However, this should be applied to all levels and ages ranges, from current workers to children, in order not to leave anyone behind.

5.3.1 Concrete formative projects for workers

As mentioned in the previous lines, the misconception of parenthood does not only come from potential parents, but also from the inadaptability of working structures to this natural condition. Fortunately, in the light of the increasing demographic decline and population ageing, some Italian firms are already starting to promote formative programmes to revert this conception. As an example, we may mention an initiative promoted by the Bank of Italy in the last months.

On March 21st, 2022, the institution launched a programme named *La ricchezza della nascita*²⁰⁴, which aims at eliminating the prejudices connected to parenthood by changing corporate conceptions. This initiative is conducted through webinars, interactive tools and roundtables. The aim of its

²⁰¹ Governo Italiano, “Legge 92/2019”, *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, 2019, available at: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2019/08/21/19G00105/sg>

²⁰² *Idem*

²⁰³ Amoia, A., “The teaching of civic education and “pathways for transversal skills and guidance”: an opportunity for teaching and special education”, *Pedagogia Oggi*, 2021, 19(2), p.127

²⁰⁴ Banca d'Italia, “Formazione - La ricchezza della nascita”, *Intranet Banca d'Italia*, 2022, available at: <https://intranetbi.bancaditalia.it/web/portale-formazione/genitorialita>

organisers is supporting all those who are either already, neo and potential parents in conciliating their working career with their private life in a more efficient and linear way.²⁰⁵

It is important for firms to incentivise their workers towards parenthood. Seeing the two conditions as antagonist has already caused great damages to our society, and we can no longer afford that. These incentives will push young workers to have children earlier, without fearing not to be able to conciliate the two aspects.

5.3.2 Concrete formative projects for students

Teaching new generations is fundamental for a prosperous future. The 2019 reintroduction of civic education in schools could be a great opportunity for our future society to be imbued towards new, modern sorts. The Italian school system should move towards more practical and concrete teachings, without disregarding the other subjects. It is quite obsolete to believe that the Gentile school reforms of 1923 could still be adequate for the actual scenario.²⁰⁶ There is an urgent need for greater concreteness and stimulation of young students, in order to really teach them how to face real life. In particular, inserting a focus on to parenthood to the civic education programme could help children to make their own idea of family life since the very young age. This could allow them to make more conscious choices, and to freely evaluate whether the State is doing enough for them or not.

Furthermore, this would generate several constructive outcomes, also in terms of sexual education and gender equality. For instance, the number of undesired pregnancies among youngsters may significantly decrease, and the division of familiar tasks in between partners could be taught to be perfectly reasonable and necessary even from the first school years.

Up to the last decades, Italy and its cultural features had always been largely shaped by the strong catholic influence. Family principles were mainly based on religious models, giving an overall life setting. In this research, we have observed that, currently, institutions such as marriage – either religious or civic one –, and other traditionally taught principles are no more considered to be an asset for family creation. Therefore, it is fundamental that both schools and working structures absolve this

²⁰⁵ *Idem*

²⁰⁶ Sciolla, L., “Il contributo delle scienze sociali allo sviluppo dell’educazione civica e alla cittadinanza a scuola” (doi: 10.12828/100688), *Scuola democratica* (ISSN 1129-731X), 2021, pp. 297-304

formative duty, supporting potential parents and incentivising them towards the idea childbearing and tasks redistributions among parents. If this teaching could be established and pursued all along one's education, youngsters could also make more conscious life choices for getting to parenthood in a stable and serene manner, without excessive difficulties or shocks.

5.4 Governmental support to families

In the previous chapter, we have seen how much governmental incentives are demanded by youngsters for laying the bases for their future work and family. In this section, we are going to analyse what have appeared to be the most requested aid categories which could be either improved or implemented by the government to support its future adults in favour of a more prosperous demographic future. The classifications will follow the various steps that youngsters may come through after the end of their academic formation, from the insertion in the working field to parenthood.

5.4.1 Transition to employment

As paragraph 3.2.1 described, studying and observing education trends may be really useful for the State administration to understand the tendencies of future potential workers²⁰⁷. In this vein, public administration should sustain the transition to adulthood through the establishment of solid links in between either schools or universities and the working sector. It is no more tolerable that graduated students are almost left alone after promotion, without finding effective ways of starting their working careers.

Working establishments provide services, and these are supplied by employees. Due to the renown Italian population ageing situation, these positions may need constant renovation of workforce. As witnessed by the PNRR analysis, it is common to have a great mismatch in between firms' needs and young workers' ones²⁰⁸. Therefore, this communication gap should be filled up by the government.

In this vein, career centres in both schools and universities should be upgraded. In the first case, those education careers which are more oriented towards practical working activities, such as *Istituti tecnici*, should be re-evaluated. Currently, these departments are usually considered as easier, less demanding

²⁰⁷ Porcu, M., & Attanasio, M., *op.cit.*, p. 8

²⁰⁸ Uno non basta, "Siamo il futuro. E siamo senza soldi", *Uno non basta*, 2021, available at: <https://www.unononbasta.it/>

schools, chosen by students that do not want to attend the mainstream *Liceo*. However, these structures could provide an innovative conception of education, by truly orienting its undergraduates towards the working field as soon as the education career ends. The so-called PCTO (Pathways for transversal skills and guidance)²⁰⁹ activities could be renewed for creating serious bridges in between students and employers. This would allow the former to have the possibility of experiencing several different domains during the last school years, with the aim of choosing one of those at the end of their education path. This would help adolescents in taking their instruction more seriously, projecting their future since the first high school years.

At the same time, students coming from *Liceo* could also take advantage from the PCTO experience, maybe in a way which could be oriented towards both university and working choices. The author herself was allowed to participate to really formative projects during her last high school years, which helped her consolidating her university choice.

In the second case – regarding university – career centres should be even more potentiated. Nowadays, it is still not so common for public universities to offer similar services in a reliable way. This prerogative is often more developed in private institutes, leaving the other students with absolutely no experience at least until the end of their academic career. However, as many other aspects analysed in this research, the existence of similar tools is not always synonym of their effective functioning. As a matter of fact, when present, career centres usually offer unpaid curricular internships to students, which are rarely turned into paid contracts after the initial months of practice. In this vein, it would be fundamental for the government to regulate these relationships and end the intolerable phenomenon of unremunerated traineeships.

Unpaid work is not dignifying for individuals and may lead to abuses from recruiters, who could use students for unburdening their overall workload – which would normally be distributed to regular employees – without “losing” in terms of economic resources. Of course, one should not deny that working experience is needed before obtaining a stable job position. However, it is no more allowable

²⁰⁹ MIUR, “Decreto Ministeriale 774”, *Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca*, 2019, available at: <https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/919804/2167214/decreto-ministeriale-774-del-4-settembre-2019-linee-guida-dei-percorsi-per-le-competenze-trasversali-e-per-l-orientamento-pcto.pdf/3b63fbda-04d2-257c-2ecd-e424360c2915?version=1.0&t=1571926975320>. *Alternanza scuola-lavoro*, translatable into school-work alternation (PCTO, pathways for transversal skills and guidance): it is initially introduced in 2003, and it is a didactic methodology that allows students to add a period of practical experience – either into a public institution or a private one – alongside their purely theoretical school training

to see master students working for free after decades of academic formation and investments from their families. Dedication and consciousness since young ages should be praised and appreciated, without creating insurmountable difficulties for the sake of old establishments and their unvaried maintenance.

5.4.2 Family aid through representative criteria

Once a stable working position is achieved, the salary may not completely satisfy the needs of an evolving household. Buying a property house or supporting expenses connected with parenthood may not be simple. This may happen to all kinds of workers, despite their career or occupation. Even those who may be considered wealthier may need support.

Consequently, it is important for the State to provide the means for its citizens to stabilise themselves in the first phases of their working career. As analysed in chapter III, the already existing financial supports appear not to be sufficient for families to achieve stability, and some of them are even excluded. Substituting ISEE with a more adequate allocation criteria would not only allow a more representative society, but it could also be useful in combating tax evasion. In this way, young couples and workers will be correctly entitled of financial aid that could support them in laying the basis of their future life and anticipating important life decisions, in particular parenthood.

A conceivable system could consist in prizing workers who were able to find a job position in the first months after graduation. Of course, would only be systematically achieved in presence of the academic and working fields connections mentioned in the above paragraph. This could incentivise new generation and make them feel responsible for their future since school or university years. Moreover, the institution of similar links and supports could help the State in better tracking employment rates, salaries and subsequent tax evasion and financial support allocation.

We may mention a concrete example of financial support to young couples by presenting a further strategy implemented in Japan after the outbreak of the pandemic. As hinted before, this country has a similar demographic situation to Italy. In addition to *Womenomics*, in 2020, the government instituted a 5.000 euros prize to young couples under 43 years of age having children. This initiative is financed by 2/3 by the central government, whereas the remaining 1/3 is provided by

municipalities.²¹⁰ If the Italian administration would approve a similar project, it could also serve as a population redistribution tool, solving the regional discrepancies discussed in section 3.1.1.

5.4.3 Strategic support to families

Despite the previously mentioned supports, which appear to be exclusively economic ones, we should not forget that even strategic provisions may be fundamental for achieving greater gender equality and making parenthood more attractive and affordable. By strategic support, the author indicates any means which could unload parents' burdens in conciliating working and family life, without disregarding none of the two. In this section, we will analyse in detail some of the strategies proposed in chapter IV, to see how they could be brought to action.

Initially, workplaces could be readapted into a more parent-friendly environment. Placing education and leisure facilities in the proximity or even inside job places could ease parents in conciliating their family role with the working one. In Italy, some institutions are already equipped with similar services. For instance, one could mention the World Food Programme case. Its headquarter, which is based in Rome, support its employees through kindergarten and grocery shops placed inside the structure. This allows WFP staff to work close to their children, and even helps them in usual house duties. Before going home, they could directly buy food and other products inside their work establishment, without needing extra time or transfer.

Additionally, external support from either family members or babysitters may have multiple advantages. On the one hand, they could provide assistance to parents in managing their daily tasks without significant logistic obstacles. On the other hand, in case of foreign caretakers, this could have a two-folded benefit. They could orient children towards a more multicultural approach, allowing them to meet new habits and knowledge since the first years of age. Furthermore, this could create new job positions, both in case of Italian and foreign babysitters.

As it may be observed, these strategic supports may incentivise workers to begin their parenthood experience. These policies would not bring them to renounce to their ambitions and desires. This could help our State in having more self-fulfilled, dynamic, and proactive citizens growing their children in a stimulating environment.

²¹⁰ Perego, L., “Giappone: 5.000 euro a chi si sposa e fa figli”, *Nostro Figlio*, 2020, available at: <https://www.nostrofiglio.it/concepimento/rimanere-incinta/giappone-5-000-euro-a-chi-si-sposa-e-fa-figli>

5.5 Increase of regular migration to support the reversal of ageing

Although this concept was not directly mentioned within the categories suggested by the responses to the questionnaire, the author wishes to pose the readers' attention on the importance of regular migration for the development of our country, in particular the demographic one. Immigration is a fundamental policy for affecting both population size and demographic trends²¹¹. Moreover, recent wars and natural disasters are creating an increasingly challenging environment for several populations, changing their life course and possibilities. In 2020, the United Nations reported that 42% of migrants worldwide is represented by women²¹². After the consciousness acquired by reading this research, we can understand how this condition is arduous for international and, in particular, Italian demography.

5.5.1 Immigration administration in Italy

In our country, immigration is based on truly complex, long, proceedings, which even worsened after the Salvini decree²¹³. The latter brought to a reduction of citizenship requests by 50%, within which more than 2/3 are currently rejected²¹⁴. Moreover, the proceedings for the obtainment of either Italian citizenship or VISA are truly long and complex, and they could last several months or even years.

For this reason, unfortunately, several people either renounce or resort to illegal immigration. Once unregistered migrants arrive in our country, they may be recruited by illicit organisations, becoming part of the so-called “*submerged economics*”²¹⁵. The latter is an entrenched reality of the Italian financial system, which severely damages national economic assets. It is sufficient to think that it

²¹¹ Dabbs Sciubba, J., *op.cit.*, p. 66

²¹² United Nations, 2020, “COVID-19 and People on the move”

²¹³ Governo Italiano, “Legge 113/2018”, *Gazzetta Ufficiale*, 2018, available at: <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2018/10/04/18G00140/sg>

²¹⁴ Vacca, A., *LUISS Thesis*, Immigrazione irregolare e mercato del lavoro: il caso dell'economia sommersa in agricoltura, 2021, available at: <http://tesi.luiss.it/30307/>, p. 12

²¹⁵ Treccani, “Economia Sommersa”, 1993, available at: [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/economia-sommersa_\(Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/economia-sommersa_(Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali)/)

accounts for nearly 22% of State GDP²¹⁶. Among this amount, in 2005, 19.6%²¹⁷ was concentrated in the Italian *Mezzogiorno*²¹⁸.

By putting this concept into an economic and demographic scale, the results are seriously worrying. This lifestyle is often practised by women, who aim at sending remittances to their families in the country of origin, forcing themselves to live a “life without life”²¹⁹. Going abroad is only a way for earning more money than what their original country would guarantee, for then sending the money back home, without totally installing in the hosting State. Moreover, non-regularised work may lead to exploitation, preventing immigrants – and especially women – to contribute to the Italian development both in demographic and economic terms.

5.5.2 Consequences in the light of the pandemic

As hinted earlier in this research, the COVID-19 even worsened this already precarious equilibrium. In the previous decades, the Italian demographic trends could count on a favourable childbearing compensation offered by immigrant families equalling 2.65 children per woman²²⁰. However, this proportion started to decline around 2015, touching a 1.93²²¹ fertility rate.

Successively, with the advent of the pandemic, immigration as a whole has drastically decreased in our country. Only within the first eight months of 2020, there has been a 17.4% reduction in the overall incoming population.²²² By projecting these data into a demographic scenario, these have also contributed to a further acceleration of the Italian demographic decline. In last two years, Italy has count more than 700.000 deaths, either related with COVID-19 or not. At the same time, births have reached a negative disparity of – 400.000. These negative turnouts had never been experienced in 161 years of national unity.²²³

²¹⁶ Vacca, *ivi*, 22

²¹⁷ Vacca, *ivi*, 27

²¹⁸ Mezzogiorno: Italian idiom to indicate the southern part of Italy

²¹⁹ Castagnone, E., Eve, M., Petrillo, R., Piperno, F., & Chaloff, J., “Madri migranti le migrazioni di cura dalla Romania e dall’Ucraina in Italia: Percorsi E Impatto Sui Paesi Di Origine”, 2007, *Programma MigraCtion*

²²⁰ Blangiardo, G. C., “Riflessioni e proposte per una demografia vitale”. *I Quaderni Di Scienza E Vita*, 2017, N.17, pp. 50, 51

²²¹ *Ibidem*

²²² Blangiardo, G. C., “Primi riscontri e riflessioni sul bilancio demografico nel 2020”, 2021, *Istat per il Paese*, p.4

²²³ Blangiardo, G. C., “Primi riscontri e riflessioni sul bilancio demografico nel 2020”, 2021, *Istat per il Paese*, p.1

The pandemic posed further obstacles to regular migration in our country, with additional consequences, especially in the demographic domain. It is essential for the Italian administration to grasp the potentials of immigration for giving supplementary aid to the national demographic setting. This would be a fundamental element fostering the reversal of the progressive population decline.

5.5.3 Potential turnouts

As we have observed, despite what many sceptics may think, either an improper insertion of migrants or their social exclusion may be severely costly in the long run. On the contrary, inclusion could pay everyone off.²²⁴

In this historical moment, Italy urgently needs the support of potential immigrants to sustain its demographic trends and preventing the ulterior worsening of the actual population ageing. For this reason, the author wishes to shed light even on policies favouring migration within her operational recommendations.

On the theme of migration, the United Nations have spread a significant sensibilisation approach in the last years among its adherent countries. One of the most important initiatives promoted by the international organisation has certainly been the *Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration* established in 2018 set through Resolution 73/195²²⁵. The document marked an important shift in the support of immigrants within UN member states. Among its 23 goals²²⁶, the *Global Compact* particularly deals with demographic issues in objective n°2²²⁷ and n°5²²⁸.

In the former, the Resolution aims at minimising the adverse drivers and structural factors compelling people to leave their country of origin²²⁹. However, in the occasion of installation in another states, the demographic growth should be sustained for keeping fertility trends stable.

²²⁴ United Nations, 2020, “COVID-19 and People on the move”, p. 4

²²⁵ United Nations, “Global Compact on Migration”, 2018, available at:

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/244/47/PDF/N1824447.pdf?OpenElement>, p.6

²²⁶ *Ibidem*

²²⁷ *Ivi*, p.9

²²⁸ *Ivi*, p.11

²²⁹ *Ivi*, p.8

In the latter, the document points at enhancing the availability and flexibility of pathways for regular migration²³⁰, allowing emigrants to settle in the welcoming country through legal, ad hoc procedures which could allow them to perfectly integrate in the hosting country. Needless to say, these preconditions would ease and support the demographic reality, without refraining foreign couples from keeping their fertility trends high.

In the light of the high degree of international awareness, the Italian administration should understand the great opportunities that favouring migration could generate in our country²³¹. Currently, new citizens are helping us in – at least – a three-folded way. Initially, a great percentage of agricultural work is in the hands of irregular migrants. Nonetheless, our agrarian production represents a fundamental element of our economic system, which is even exported worldwide. Normalising those contracts could protect workers from abuses and crisis. As a matter of fact, the pandemic tremendously hit this category. On the one hand, they were left in really precarious health and safety conditions. On the other hand, with the either partial or complete interruption of working activities during the strictest lockdown periods, these people had no longer access to their salary²³².

Secondly, due to the great percentage of elderlies present in Italy, caretaking tasks are highly requested. Even in this case, regularising foreigners' contracts in the sector would assure them a greater degree of safety and guarantees, combating fiscal evasion and dismantling the conviction that non-regularized work could be more profitable in economic terms. Occupational guarantees and contributions accumulations should become unmissable prerogatives of immigrant workers, allowing them to have stable contracts, protecting them in case of emergency and contributing to the Italian fiscal stabilisation.

Thirdly, our country should fight against the process of increasingly demographically “adapting” migration, by giving these people integration and means they deserve. We should accelerate acceptance procedures, preventing *submerged economy* to grow even further. We should be keen on welcoming foreign skills and cultures, since we urgently need them under several points of view, especially the demographic one.

²³⁰ United Nations, “Global Compact on Migration”, 2018, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/244/47/PDF/N1824447.pdf?OpenElement>, p.11

²³¹ Ambrosio, M., *op.cit.*, p.37

²³² Vacca, A., *op.cit.*, p. 21

Conclusion

This research is far from being noiseless. The author has always been characterised by her inexhaustible desire of making our country a more effective place. This feeling originated more than ten years ago, while attending a legality project on judges Falcone and Borsellino at middle school. Since then, she has always worked hard to collect as many elements as she could to reach her objective. The discovery of the demographic domain and the topics brought by Professor Giordano further armoured her motivation, which had partially been left aside due to the chaotic historical period we have been experiencing.

Demography and Social Challenges gathers fundamental issues characterising our modern society, and makes students understand that the only way for moving effective changes is not leaving any of these aspects behind. Demographic, social, economic, and political issues are all connected among them, and a wise administration should be totally aware of this. Of course, it would be easier to have the possibility of overlooking some of these elements but, as we have seen and proved in this research, things could not work like that.

Furthermore, this subject highlights the fact that huge and effective changes could not come overnight. In our modern and fast world, this concept may result particularly tedious. However, the author believes that a responsible administration should be far-sighted, and work hard, especially in the long term, to realise common goals.

Unfortunately, Italian politics has always been characterised by a strong reliance on personal interests, which has been able to repeatedly overcome the common good, often disregarding the true needs of the population. This is one of the main reasons why Italy always appears to be the smallest of the greatest powers and the last of the main nations in the world. Despite our inequitable culture, knowledge, academic tradition, climate, and history, we are not yet able of valorising our treasures. This is the main revolving concept around within this thesis.

Our younger population is in real danger. Their future is uncertain, their aspirations are precarious and menaced by both internal and external factors. It is fundamental that – at least – their country of origin supports and encourages them in the fulfilment of their goals. This moral duty weights significantly on both their prospects and the ones of the nation.

This research aims at guiding readers into an awareness journey. The author did not want to limit to simple facts. Rather, she wished to explain the Italian demographic and social contexts, their strengths, and weaknesses. This could give people a conscious and complete framework of these phenomena, understanding their real magnitude and importance.

For these reasons, the research has touched historical, statistical, administrative, and current events. This thesis aims at being concrete and operational. All the critiques moved by the author have been motivated and explained. Afterwards, they have been supported by active recommendations, which could possibly become reality in the next future.

By analysing the historical background, readers could become aware of the deeply entrenched causes of the Italian demographic problem. This would pose the attention on the long-term effects that administrative policies could have. Additionally, it could allow us to understand even the reversal of these mechanisms presupposes durable intervals of time to become effective.

The examination of the Italian age distribution aims at giving a detailed overview of the consequences that this situation carries. This is particularly crucial, since it points the attention on the fact that we are all involved, and nobody neither could nor should disregard similar issues. The sum of progressive ageing, insufficient intergenerational turnover and poor youth policies could bring our country to an inexorably negative future. Not investing in younger generations would bring to the ruin of our country. Even though our governments have tried to fill these huge gaps in the past decades, they are not yet sufficient. Moreover, in the last two years, the health emergency posed further burdens to an already precarious situation, making the need for change almost imperative. As restlessly repeated in the research, the existence of supportive policies and tools alone is not sufficient to bring the necessary transformations. These strategies need committed people to be completed. They also need long-term evaluations to become effective and mindful about both present and future generations. For this awareness to come about, it is fundamental to hear from the real protagonists of our contemporary time: youngsters.

The questionnaire inserted in the research demonstrated how more than two hundred people felt modern burdens and uncertainties. It proved that our country is not doing enough for its future. The survey aimed at bringing concrete opinions and thoughts through active reasoning and proposals. The author was acutely amazed by the brilliant suggestions emerging from the study. All these people together allowed her to deepen the research, bringing concrete proposals in favour of her generation.

Consequently, the suggested policy recommendations do not originate from a sterile critique. Rather, they represent the loud voice of a promising portion of the Italian population, wishing to work for change. Even in this case, the author tried to touch several different domains to demonstrate once again that demographic issues need a 360-degree perception to be fixed. Immediate, short-term policies have never been enough, and they will not even be in the future.

Demographic critics often claim that we have no control on this subject and that it will not influence our destiny. However, similar assumptions deny the intrinsic power of demography. Population changes carry several consequences, that we are already experiencing, and we cannot ignore.²³³ In the light of an increasingly uncertain global context, it is fundamental for international relation students to be increasingly taught to be more than open-minded and far-sighted. The world is full of unforeseen possibilities, and potential future leaders must be aware of that and work restlessly to become conscious and proactive citizens.

*Rome was not built in a day*²³⁴, and neither demographic changing policies can be thought to be immediately well designed and effective. Their application needs time and dedication from motivated and conscious people. Therefore, the sooner we start, the better would result for the future of our country.

²³³ Goldstone, J., *op.cit.*, p. 276

²³⁴ Tobler, A., “Li Proverbe au Vilain”, 1895

Annex (survey script)

1) How old are you?

- 20-23
- 24-29
- 30-35

2) Gender:

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

3) Current occupation:

- Student
- Paid Trainee
- Unpaid Trainee
- Full-time worker
- Part-time worker

4) Do you have children?

- Yes
- No

5) If not, would you like to have children?

- Yes
- No

6) If you answered “yes” to the previous question, how many children would you like to have?

- (Digit number)

7) Do you feel that marriage is a prerogative for having a baby in Italy?

- Yes
- No

8) Please, explain your answer either if you selected “yes” or “no”

- (Digit answer)

9) After which life event would you like to have children?

- After graduating from university
- After getting my first job
- After marriage
- After obtaining a stable financial situation
- After getting a permanent job contract
- As soon as possible
- After the end of the COVID-19 pandemic

10) On a scale from 1 to 5, how much did COVID-19 influence your desire of having a baby?

- 1 = not at all
- 5 = a lot

11) Please, tell us some of the reasons behind your previous response:

- (Digit answer)

12) What are (among the followings) the elements that would give you more incentives to have children?

- Work stability
- Economic stability
- Marriage
- Kindergarten and other education facilities inside my job place
- Governmental incentives (e.g. bonus and refunds)
- Baby-sitters
- Maternal/paternal leave guarantee

13) Do you have other suggestions to add to the previous list? Please type in the space below.

- (Digit answer)

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Thesis summary

This thesis aims at illustrating the Italian demographic decline through the lens of ageing, by stressing its inevitable consequences, currently affecting mostly Italian youngsters. In doing so, the author wishes to create an interactive research that could both instruct the readers and generate stimulant operational recommendations for the future. A meaningful investigation comes from the union of knowledge and reflection, which could bring concrete answers to the initial research question. In our case, the latter corresponds to how the Italian demographic decline could be reversed through the support of youngsters' necessities.

The author hopes to open readers' minds on the serious risks that our country is going through due to the lack of the correct intergenerational turnover. For this research to be fully understood, it is fundamental to begin by recalling the meaning of potential demography²³⁵. This concept is grounded in the theoretical assumption that the future is similar to an economic good. Therefore, a population that owns more future – thus, young people – will be wealthier.²³⁶ Furthermore, this thesis is based on the assumption that – despite what sceptics may think – demographic processes are deeply entrenched in multiple fields, and they constantly influence our lives and reactions.

In particular, the Italian case is based on several factors that have evolved throughout the last decades. Among these, we may mention its cultural traditions, which appear to be less and less fitting in the modern evolutionary panorama; and the incapability of creating long-lasting, time-projected, people-oriented policies instead of self-referred ones. For this reason, couples in Italy are more and more unable to foresee and project their future. Additionally, within the last two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the previously existing issues, creating supplementary obstacles for the process of Italian ageing to reverse.

How the Italian demographic decline affects both national growth and young generations

Main elements reinforcing the Italian demographic decline

²³⁵ Hersch, L., *op.cit.*

²³⁶ Blangiardo, G.C.; Rimoldi, S., "The potential demography: a tool for evaluating differences among countries in the European Union". *Genus*, 2012, Vol. 68, No. 3, pp. 63-81

Even in the light of the conspicuous amount of money injected by the European Union through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan²³⁷, things seem destined to be kept as they are. The attention given to the demographic situation is worryingly scarce, and so are the resources devoted to the issue. This is particularly alarming since it once again appears to come from a political leading class that repeatedly underestimates the role of future generations and denies them the tools to create a more responsive country.

The research is divided in five different chapters, each one dealing with specific issues related to our research question. These sections allow readers to create their personal knowledge on the topic, presenting several perspectives and theories, leading towards the final recommendations.

The study begins with the presentation of the overall Italian demographic situation. The author illustrates the national family model and the social conditions that constantly push youngsters to postpone their desire to have children. In this way, the fertility age is halved, and so is the number of potential children every woman could have. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic generated even greater uncertainty by remodelling family schemes, pushing people to reinvent their jobs and daily routines, and further delaying crucial life choices such as marriage and parenthood. Despite what one may believe, being home more regularly does not automatically entail a greater number of pregnancies. Instead, it creates more instability and uncertainty, which led several couples to postpone their intention to have a baby.

At the same time, although Italy relies a lot on migrant demographic compensation, these last ones are – little by little – “adapting” to our scheme. Better said, even if they used to have more children in their country of origin, settling in Italy often seems to push them to have less babies, due to the cultural and work uncertainties they come to face, as Italian people do. Then, the lack of adequate social inclusion and cohesion may also generate other forms of precarity, which ultimately culminate in a lower number of pregnancies.

Introducing the research question and the main themes framing the topic, from past history to current facts

Current Italy at a glance. National disparities and the impact of education on demographic preferences

²³⁷ Bilancio dello Stato, *op.cit.*, The National Recovery and Resilience Plan illustrates the allocation and destination criteria for resources arriving from Europe for post-COVID recovery. Italy sent the national recovery plan to Brussels on April 30th, 2021. The European Commission has already expressed a favourable opinion, approving a first tranche of 13% of the total amount, equal to about 25 billion euros

The second chapter illustrates the demographic indicator chosen by the author to explain the research question: ageing. In fact, she believes that this embodies one of the main cues to elucidate the Italian phenomenon. Currently, 22% of the Italian population is over the age of 65, and only 13.5% is under the age of 15²³⁸. Similar data mean that our country is rapidly ageing and that our intergenerational turnover is not sufficient to compensate for the phenomenon.

Getting into the demographic indicator of ageing. How it affects Italian population, society, resource distribution, and why it is important to progressively reverse this trend

A mature country owns a different population distribution. This presupposes a diverse utilisation of its economic resources and a consequently dissimilar allocation of necessities. Pensions, healthcare, and research are some of the most necessary sectors in which the Italian administration has to invest. This subsequently generates less attention to future generations and their necessity to be supported. The author presents the projections of various scholars²³⁹ on the Italian future scenarios and the problems that this could either create or emphasize. By comparing the Italian population pyramids of 1960, 2022 and 2050²⁴⁰, the readers could immediately spot the almost irreversible changes that insufficient intergenerational turnovers may create. The Italian population structure has drastically changed in the last sixty years, and – has hinted in the previous lines – this has been reflected in economic, political, and social terms. Only by fully understanding the repercussions of the phenomenon it can be assessed whether it is worth reversing this process for the future of the country. In this section, readers are able to understand the magnitude of ageing and start building their own idea.

In the following chapter, which is divided in two main parts, the author presents the most debated Italian social and economic policies. The first section elucidates the major issues originating from social gaps. Among these, we may mention regional disparities, with a deep focus on the *Mezzogiorno*, education inequalities and the weak mechanisms for the transition to adulthood and the insertion into the working field. In this first

²³⁸ World Population Review, “Italy Population Live 2022”, February 2022, available at: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/italy-population>

²³⁹ Felice, E., & Vecchi, G., *op.cit.*; Giordano, A., “Quale spazio per l’Italia nella geografia del mondo globalizzato? Una riflessione su popolazione, investimenti e sostenibilità intergenerazionale”, *L’Italia e i processi di globalizzazione*, Ediculusano-Edizioni Nuova Cultura, Roma, 2014, pp. 117–152; Goldstone, J., *op.cit.*

²⁴⁰ World Population Prospects, *op.cit.*

fragment, the author mainly relies on the knowledge acquired through the analysis of studies conducted by Grilli, Mencarini, Tanturri and Testa.²⁴¹ In particular, concerning territorial diversities, some constituencies appear to be less accessible both for cultural and economic reasons, presenting incredibly low population and demographic records. All these elements have been further worsened in the last months also due to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

The second half of the chapter moves the focus towards economic policies and practices. Initially, the author analyses maternity and paternity leaves, their adequacy in the modern context, the need for further gender equalization and the strive for the prevalence of the dual earner model on the male breadwinner one. Then, the chapter focuses on the National Recovery and Resilience Plan²⁴² conceived in the light of the retrieval from the COVID-19 pandemic and its subsequent economic crisis. Finally, the author analyses one of the most recent state policies aiming at supporting families and childbearing: the so-called *Assegno Unico e Universale*²⁴³. The latter presents several incongruences with the real needs of citizens, especially in its enjoyability criteria. Through this overall policy analysis, multiple imperfections are highlighted²⁴⁴, opening the way for the case study presented in the next section.

Main current social policies involving the demographic domain: can they effectively contribute to a reversal of progressive ageing?

The fourth chapter leaves space to the real protagonists of this research: young people. During the past months, the author has been investigating on their needs and demographic preferences by creating an online questionnaire²⁴⁵. The latter was submitted to nearly 230 people through social networks. The complete script and results

Case study giving voice to youngsters' necessities

²⁴¹ Tanturri, M., & Mencarini, L., *op.cit.*; Testa, M.R., & Grilli, L., "The Influence of Childbearing Regional Contexts on Ideal Family Size in Europe", *Population Volume 61*, 2006, Issue 1-2, pp. 99-127

²⁴² Bilancio dello Stato, *op.cit.*, The National Recovery and Resilience Plan illustrates the allocation and destination criteria for resources arriving from Europe for post-Covid recovery. Italy sent the national recovery plan to Brussels on April 30th, 2021. The European Commission has already expressed a favourable opinion, approving a first tranche of 13% of the total amount, equal to about 25 billion euros

²⁴³ INPS, *INPS*, 2021, available at: <https://www.inps.it/news/assegno-unico-e-universale-le-istruzioni>. The single and universal allowance is an economic support to families awarded for each dependent minor child and up to the age of majority and, under certain conditions, up to the age of 21. The single allowance is also recognized for each dependent child with disabilities without age limits

²⁴⁴ INPS, *INPS*, 2021, available at: <https://www.inps.it/news/assegno-unico-e-universale-le-istruzioni>; Uno non basta, *Siamo il futuro. E siamo senza soldi*, Uno non basta, 2021, available at: <https://www.unononbasta.it/>

²⁴⁵ See <https://forms.gle/23bzFij55v7Rfm3n9>

may be found in the Annexes (page 78). The survey was addressed to people in between 20 and 35 years of age, inviting them to express their opinion on the actual demographic scenario and what prevents them from having children. The study was composed of thirteen questions, each one analysing a specific aspect of potential fertility intentions and youngsters' necessities in the field. Through participants' reactions, the author was able to connect the economic, managerial and demographic domains of our country and demonstrate that juvenile policies are lacking. Therefore, the chapter describes the construction of the survey and the results thereby composed through graphs and tables, reporting the detailed findings in an engaging manner. Through the analysis of the collected answers, the author paves the way for the last chapter, illustrating the possible opportunities and recommendations for the reoutlining of the Italian demographic system by basing on the direct witness of the participating portion of Italian young adults.

The fifth chapter exposes the strategic proposals on which the author hopes to give the cues for posing the basis of a future political orientation that will be more youngsters oriented. They have been constructed by merging the results of the questionnaire with the knowledge acquired through the bibliography. The section highlights some specific domains, gathering the main themes analysed throughout the research. More specifically, these are represented by governmental strategies, gender equality issues, civic education reinforcement and the stabilisation of processes of legal immigration.

Initially, the author remarks once again the necessity for governmental stabilisation in favour of long projected and efficient policies. As hinted several times, demographic policies presuppose a far-sighted perspective, which should be kept constant throughout the succession of different governments and legislatures for them to result effective.²⁴⁶ Even in the light of alternating executives, there ought to be some key issues that should never be forgotten. Demographic development and the difficulties connected to an increasingly ageing world should surely be two of these fixed topics, especially in our country.

Final policy suggestions

Possible governmental policies to create a more effective and representative strategies

²⁴⁶ Blangiardo, G. C., "Riflessioni e proposte per una demografia vitale", *I Quaderni Di Scienza E Vita*, 2017, N.17, p. 56

Successively, she focuses the theme of gender equality. Surprisingly, in the light of the redistribution of family tasks, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have significantly posed the basis for a re-organisational shift. Research published in 2020 by Aloè, Corsi, De Rose and Zannella witnesses these changes through graphical representations and the explanation of the behavioural changes brought by the pandemic.²⁴⁷ In particular, their study has highlighted a greater amount of time devoted to children by parents. This was possible mainly due to the flexibility given by the institution of smart working. This issue has resulted particularly crucial in letting young women conciliating the desire of motherhood with the one of a self-fulfilling career. In this vein, the writer brings an innovative policy example operated in Japan. There, the government implemented a more inclusive working environment to enhance female occupation, with the ultimate goal of reversing negative demographic trends. The latter is named *Womenomics*²⁴⁸, and it comes, of course, from the union of women and economics.

Reinforcing gender equality as an incentive tool for demography

Furthermore, this last chapter also focuses on other possible transversal State interventions favouring a friendlier environment for childbearing. The insertion of civic education initiatives both in schools and workplaces could (re)construct a different conception of parenthood, without considering only negative burdens and commitments. In this way, citizens could be guided throughout their formation towards a positive and stimulating idea of childbearing, reshaping their current demographic intentions. Here, the author brings some examples by mentioning a concrete initiative promoted by the Bank of Italy, named *La Ricchezza della Nascita*²⁴⁹. The latter was launched on March 21st, 2022, and aims at transforming the working field into a more family-oriented one. Inserting a parenthood focus within the civic education programme could help children to start building their own idea of family life since the very young age. This could allow them to make more conscious choices and to freely evaluate whether the State is doing enough for them or not. Especially at the school level, this would generate several constructive outcomes, also in terms of sexual education and gender equality.

Civic education as a means to increase demographic awareness both in schools and job places

²⁴⁷ Zannella, M., Aloè, E., Corsi, M., & De Rose, A., “Un'occasione per i padri”, *Ingenere*, available at: <https://www.ingenere.it/articoli/occasione-per-padri>

²⁴⁸ Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, *op.cit.*

²⁴⁹ Banca d'Italia, *op.cit.*

For instance, the number of undesired pregnancies among youngsters may significantly decrease, and the division of familiar tasks in between partners could be taught to be totally natural even from the first school years. The State should also support new families with efficient tools, which could be fairly allocated among the population both economically and strategically. Among these, the author mentions both economic and strategic provisions. Concerning the latter, she brings the example of some working structures holding kindergartens and grocery stores inside their headquarters. These logistic arrangements allow parents to ease some parental tasks and be constantly close to their children, through simple, tactical decisions.

Strategic and organisational support to families

Conclusively, but not less importantly, the author focuses once more on the importance of regular migration for reversing the current negative demographic trends. By analysing the latest reports on the issue²⁵⁰, she tries to demonstrate the multiple enriching factors that a more effective inclusion process could generate for both immigrants and nationals.

The crucial role of regular immigration for reversing the actual negative demographic trend

She recalls the importance of social inclusion and the necessity of taking these potential workers far from the recruiting mechanisms of the so-called *submerged economy*²⁵¹. Additionally, she remarks the importance of caretaking workers in our country, especially due to the high percentage of elderlies. These people are often forced to live a “*life without life*”²⁵², caused by the impossibility of totally fitting with the hosting country. In this way, these workers may guarantee several remittances to their families abroad, but they do not equally contribute to the Italian economic system, generating a two-folded problem. Therefore, social inclusion appears to be fundamental under several viewpoints.

The final considerations aim at resuming the fundamental concepts of the research, with a hopeful auspice for the future. As hinted in the previous lines, this research is far from

Final considerations

²⁵⁰ Ambrosio, M., *op.cit.*, p. 37; Blangiardo, G. C., “Primi riscontri e riflessioni sul bilancio demografico nel 2020”, 2021, *Istat per il Paese*; United Nations Global Compact on Migration, 2018, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/244/47/PDF/N1824447.pdf?OpenElement>

²⁵¹ Treccani, “Economia Sommersa”, 1993, available at: [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/economia-sommersa_\(Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/economia-sommersa_(Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali)/)

²⁵² Castagnone, E., Eve, M., Petrillo, R., Piperno, F., & Chaloff, J., *op.cit.*, p.29

being noiseless. The author brings her critiques through solid explanations. Her intent is not at all destructive, but rather it aims at bringing concrete and constructive cues for the future.

Demographic critics often claim that we have no control on this subject and that it will not influence our destiny. However, similar assumptions deny the intrinsic power of demography. After demonstrating the multidisciplinary power of demographic issues, the author proves how population changes carry several consequences, that we are already experiencing, and we cannot ignore.²⁵³ In the light of an increasingly uncertain global context, it is fundamental for international relation students to be increasingly taught to be more than open-minded and far-sighted. The world is full of unforeseen possibilities, and potential future leaders must be aware of that and work restlessly to become conscious and proactive citizens.

²⁵³ Goldstone, J., *op.cit*, p. 276